



ECDC Weekly Policy Brief – 11 February 2021

Not for publication

# COVID-19 in EU/EEA

Reporting period: 1 - 7 February 2021

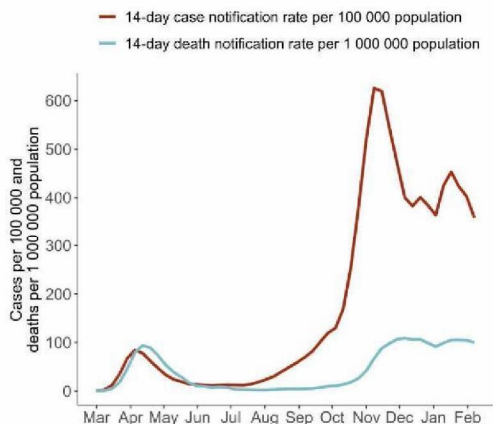
## Epidemiological summary

- During the reporting week, the **epidemiological situation was of serious concern in all EU/EEA countries except Finland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway (stable)**, with high or increasing case notification rates among older age groups and/or high or increasing death rates. Rates of hospital and ICU admissions, as well as the number of patients per capita in hospital and ICU due to COVID-19, remain very high, although recent stable or decreasing trends for these indicators continue to be observed in several countries.
- Among the 26 countries with an epidemiological situation of serious concern, **increasing trends of cases were reported in eight countries (Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg and Slovakia)**, compared to seven countries in the previous report. **Stable or decreasing trends** of reported cases were observed in **18 countries**, compared to 21 countries in the last report.
- **Increasing case rates among older age groups or increasing death rates** were reported in **three countries** (Greece, Slovakia and Spain) during the reporting week. **Two countries** (Belgium and Greece) with available data observed **increases in hospital or ICU admissions and/or occupancy** due to COVID-19.
- Absolute values of these **indicators remain high**, even where they are stable or decreasing, suggesting that transmission remains widespread.
- **There is no indication that public health and physical distancing measures can be relaxed, even in countries with decreasing trends.**

## Key COVID-19 trends in Europe

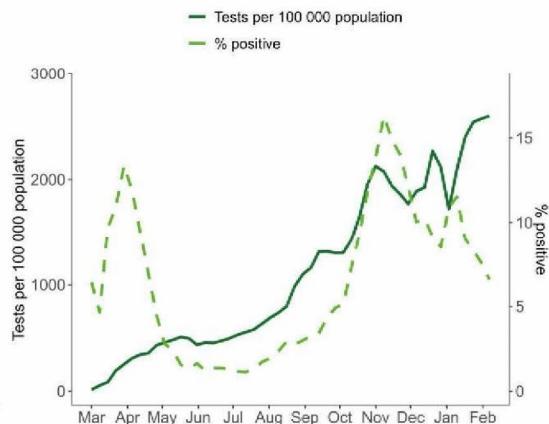
### 1 March to 7 February: 14-day COVID-19 case and death notification rates, testing rate and test positivity trends

EU/EEA: 14-day COVID-19 case and death notification rates, 1 March 2020 to 7 February 2021



Source: ECDC Epidemic Intelligence

EU/EEA: testing rate and test positivity (%), 1 March 2020 to 7 February 2021

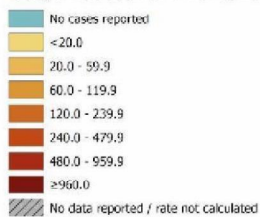


Source: TESSy and public websites. Data shown for countries submitting data up to 7 February 2021

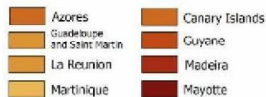
### 7 February: current 14-day COVID-19 case notification rate per 100 000 population



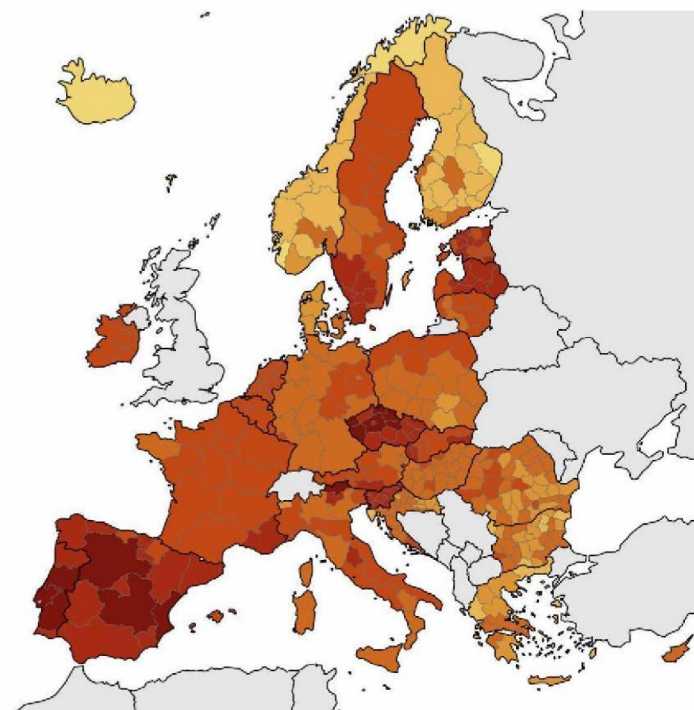
14-day COVID-19 case notification rate per 100 000 2021-w04 to 2021-w05



Regions not visible in the main map extent

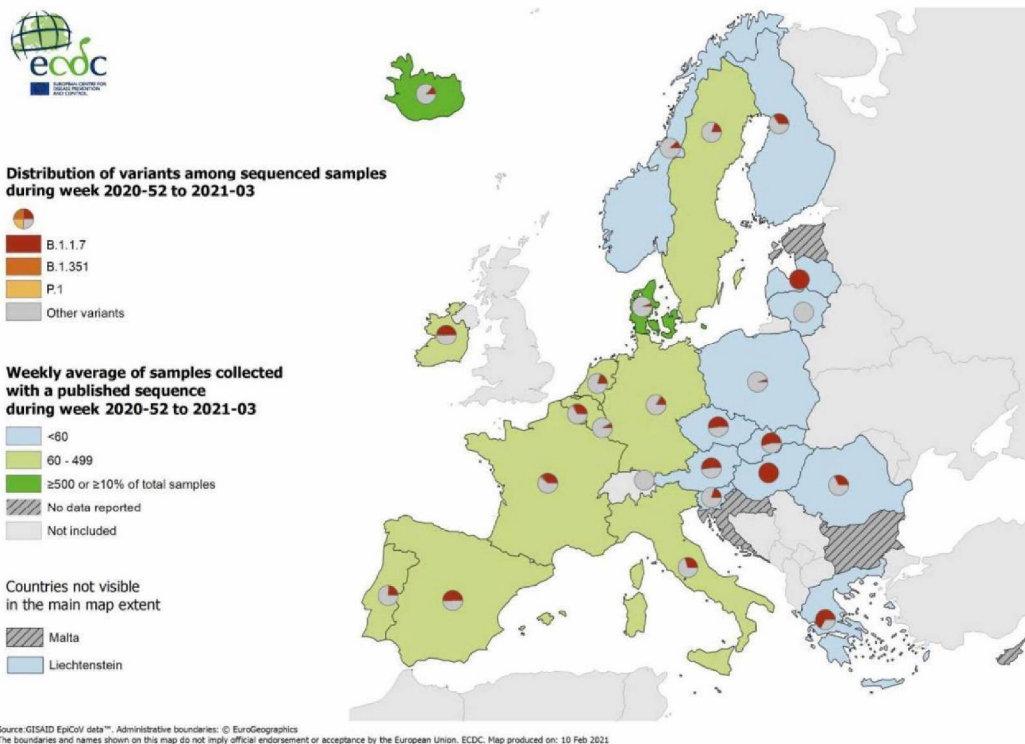


Countries not visible in the main map extent



Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © U4-PAC © Turstat, Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2020. © Kartverket © Instituto Nacional de Estatística - Statistic Portugal. The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the European Union. ECDC. Map produced on: 16 Feb 2021

**Detection of SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern, in all sequenced samples in EU/EEA, 21 December 2020 to 24 January 2021, as reported to GISAID EpiCoV by 9 February**





## Epidemiological overview

- By 7 February 2021, the 14-day case notification rate for the EU/EEA was **359** (country range: 8–1 190) per 100 000 population, compared to 402 in the last report. The rate has been **decreasing for three weeks**. Six countries (Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain) had notification rates higher than 500 per 100 000 population during the week of reporting, compared to seven in the previous report.
- The 14-day COVID-19 death notification rate for the EU/EEA was **100.3** (country range: 0.0–334.4) per million population and remained stable compared to **103.9** in the previous report. Death notification rates above 50 per 1 000 000 population were reported by 20 countries, compared to 23 in last week's report. Of these, 10 countries (Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain) had rates above 100 per 1 000 000 population.
- Testing rates in the EU/EEA as a whole continue to increase since the start of the year. Weekly testing rates for the reporting week were available for 28 countries and varied from 715 to 25 899 tests per 100 000 population. Cyprus had the highest testing rate for this week, followed by Denmark, Austria, Luxembourg and Slovenia.
- Among 21 countries in which weekly test positivity was high (at least 3%), four countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia and Poland) observed an increase in test positivity compared with the previous week. Test positivity remained stable or had decreased in 17 countries (Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden).
- Pooled ICU occupancy data from 19 countries show that there were 1.5 patients per 100 000 population in ICU due to COVID-19, compared to 1.6 in the previous report. Pooled weekly ICU admissions based on data from 13 countries were 2.4 new admissions per 100 000 population, compared to 2.5 in the previous report.
- Pooled hospital occupancy data from 24 countries show that there were 9.7 patients per 100 000 population in hospital due to COVID-19. Pooled weekly hospital admissions based on data from 21 countries were 9.1 new admissions per 100 000.
- During the reporting week, all countries except Finland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway had an epidemiological situation of serious concern. Among these countries, stable or decreasing trends in reported cases were observed in 18 countries, compared to 21 in the last report. Increases were present in eight countries (Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg and Slovakia), up from seven in last week's report.
- Sequencing capacity varies greatly across the EU/EEA; the rate of SARS-CoV-2-positive cases sequenced and reported to GISAID EpiCoV by 9 February for the period of 21 December 2020 to 24 January 2021 was lower than the recommended level of 10% in all but two EU/EEA countries (Denmark and Iceland). Ten countries sequenced and reported between 60 and 499 samples to GISAID EpiCoV during the same time period while 17 countries sequenced and reported <60 samples or did not report data.
- Transmission remains high in most countries, despite stable or decreasing trends in many indicators. The epidemiological situation appears to be improving in the majority of countries, while a few other countries continue to see or have started to observe new increases in numbers of cases, hospitalisations, ICU admissions and deaths. This serves as a reminder of the importance of **maintaining public health and physical distancing measures and that these measures should not be relaxed, even in countries with decreasing trends**.

A full table with all indicators and the assessment for each country is available in the annex.

The new ECDC map on detection of variants of concern in sequenced samples is included above under key trends.

## Hot topics

### Further spread of SARS CoV-2 variants of concern

The proportion of cases that are caused by the variant of concern initially identified in the UK, currently known as **VOC 202012/01 or B.1.1.7**, has risen in recent weeks and is now high in some EU/EEA countries. Recent numbers available to ECDC indicate the following proportions of B.1.1.7 among all cases sequenced in recent weeks: Denmark 20%, The Netherlands 50%, France 14%, Portugal 45%, Germany 6%, Ireland 70%, Spain 0.4-54% (depending on the region). It is highly likely that community transmission is ongoing in most countries in the EU/EEA and this variant is projected to become the dominant one in most of the EU/EEA in the coming weeks.

In regards to the **B.1.351** variant first reported in South Africa, most cases detected in the EU/EEA are linked to travel, however, some community transmission and outbreaks have been reported as well, including an outbreak in the Tyrol region of Austria, which has been covered in the media.

ECDC is preparing a risk assessment which includes an update on the new variants of concern. The expected date of publication is 15 February.

### Efficacy and effectiveness of COVID vaccines against B.1.351 variant first detected in South Africa

Reduced efficacy is observed in interim efficacy results for several COVID-19 vaccines against the SARS-CoV-2 variant identified in South Africa.

Early data from a small non-peer reviewed phase 2/3 trial reported to media suggest the AstraZeneca/Oxford COVID-19 vaccine has limited efficacy, as low as 10%, against mild/moderate disease caused primarily by B.1.351. It is not yet known if the vaccine protects against severe disease as only young study participants not prone to severe disease were included. South African health officials announced on 7 February that they are pausing the country's rollout of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine. AstraZeneca reports to have started adapting the vaccine against B.1.351, possibly to be ready by autumn.

COVID-19 vaccines made by Johnson & Johnson (J&J) and Novavax have also been shown to offer weaker protection against B.1.351 than against other variants. The vaccines' efficacy in clinical trials conducted in South Africa against mild disease was 57% for J&J and 49% for Novavax—lower than in any other country they were tested. Both vaccine developers have announced work on updating their COVID-19 vaccines to work better against the new variants.

## In focus

### **Latest update of ECDC IPC Guidance in healthcare settings considers vaccination and variants of concern**

The sixth update of the infection prevention and control (IPC) guidance in healthcare was published on 9 February, including a new section on IPC aspects related to vaccination (IPC when delivering vaccines, vaccination in long-term care facilities and IPC measures for vaccinated healthcare workers) as well as a new section on IPC aspects related to SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern (strengthened IPC measures, enhanced testing of healthcare workers and quarantine and isolation of healthcare workers).

### **Upcoming ECDC Rapid Risk Assessment update: SARS-CoV-2 in the EU/EEA in the context of increased circulation of variants of concern and vaccine rollout**

ECDC will publish a risk assessment on the overall situation of SARS-CoV-2, with a focus on variants of concern as well as specific issues related to the roll out of vaccines.

The risk assessment will present the current epidemiological situation in the EU/EEA regarding the increased circulation of more transmissible variants, and will call for immediate, strong and decisive public health interventions in order to control transmission and safeguard healthcare capacity. This will involve immediate attention in all EU/EEA countries to the proactive strengthening and maintaining of layered non-pharmaceutical interventions in the coming months in order to reduce SARS-CoV-2 incidence to the lowest levels possible, and as well as a rapid and effective rollout of vaccination to the populations most at-risk for high morbidity and mortality for COVID-19. In time, targeted and robust vaccination programmes will enable the easing of NPIs.

The expected date of publication is 15 February 2021.

### **Weekly COVID-19 vaccine roll-out overview to be launched**

ECDC is preparing to launch the first weekly COVID-19 vaccine roll-out report. It provides an overview of the progress in the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines across EU/EEA Member States. For all approved vaccines, it presents the number of vaccine doses distributed to each Member State and the number of the first, second or unspecified doses administered to adult individuals overall, by age group and other selected target groups including healthcare workers and residents in long-term care facilities, as reported to the ECDC by the Member States.

This report is based on data reported by EU/EEA Member States to ECDC, and provides data reported as of 7 February. Differences in reporting practices and the time ECDC needs to process the data may occasionally lead to discrepancies between national figures and the figures published by ECDC or those published by third party sources.

The latest updates and corrections to the data are made as soon as possible, and are available via the **Vaccine Tracker** on ECDC website.

Work is ongoing to improve data quality and completeness. Some Member States report age groups in a simplified way (<60 and 60 years and above). Estimated vaccine uptake among healthcare workers and among residents in long-term care facilities will be calculated when denominator data are reported.

Preliminary data from the draft report show that, as of 7 February, the estimated median uptake of first vaccine dose among adults aged 18 years and above in EU/EEA is 3.5% (median among 29 countries reporting, range: 0.31%-7.6%), with the total of over 17 million doses administered as first or second doses. Among those over 80 years of age, the estimated uptake of the second vaccine dose is 2% (median among 19 countries reporting, range: 0%-18%), as of 7 February.



### Updates on non-pharmaceutical interventions in Member States

ECDC collects information on non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) implemented in EU/EEA countries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The database is updated every second week.

As of 9 February 2021, the following mobility restrictions are recorded and active:

- Seven nationally enforced "stay-at-home" orders (legally enforced) in Austria, Cyprus, Czechia, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania and Portugal. Regional and local enforced "stay-at-home" orders in Italy.
- Two national "stay-at-home" recommendations (not legally enforced) are currently active in Norway and the Netherlands. Regional "stay-at-home" recommendations are active in Spain.
- Curfews ("partial" stay-at-home orders) are currently active in Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.

As of 9 February 2021, the following closures of educational institutions have been recorded and remain active according to our database:

- At the national level, day-cares and nurseries are fully closed in Portugal, and partially closed in Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands. Regional and local day-cares closures in Italy.
- At the national level, primary schools are fully closed in Czechia, Ireland, Lithuania and Portugal. Primary schools are partially closed at the national level in Latvia, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, and, at the regional or local level, in Germany, Greece and Italy. Primary schools have recently re-opened in Austria, Cyprus, the Netherlands and Romania.
- Secondary schools are fully closed, at the national level, in Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden. Secondary schools are partially closed at the national level in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Romania and Slovakia. Secondary schools are also closed at the regional or local level in Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy and Norway.
- At the national level, higher education institutions remain fully or partially closed in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. At the regional level, higher education institutions remain fully or partially closed in Finland, Norway and Spain.

Workplaces have been strongly urged, or forced to transition, to teleworking at the national level in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

Visualisations of all active NPIs from 1 September 2020 for each EU/EEA country: [Weekly COVID-19 Country Overview](#)

## Recent and upcoming ECDC publications on COVID-19

- Update, EU/EEA deployment and vaccination plans for COVID-19 vaccines, 1 February
- Integrated COVID-19 response in the vaccination era, 1 February
- Stress-test on logistical aspects of COVID-19 vaccination deployment plans, 3 February
- COVID-19 and supply of substances of human origin in the EU/EEA – minor update, 9 February
- Launch of weekly overview reports on COVID-19 vaccines roll-out, 11 February
- Behavioural insights research to support the response to COVID-19: a survey of implementation in the EU/EEA, 15 February
- Update of ECDC guidance on using face masks in the community, 15 February
- Rapid Risk Assessment, 14<sup>th</sup> update: SARS-CoV-2 in the EU/EEA in the context of increased circulation of variants of concern and vaccine rollout, 15 February
- Testing for detection and identification of SARS-CoV-2 variants (joint with WHO), 18 February
- Detection and characterisation capability and capacity for SARS-CoV-2 variants (laboratory survey report), February
- 1<sup>st</sup> update, Guidelines for COVID-19 Testing and quarantine, of air travellers, Addendum to the Aviation Health Safety Protocol, February

Publication dates for all upcoming ECDC reports are preliminary and subject to change.



## Annex:

### Criteria for epidemiological assessment

#### Epidemiological situation is 'concerning'

Countries with at least two of the following:

1. High ( $\geq 60/100\ 000$ ) or sustained increase<sup>1</sup> ( $\geq 1$  week) in 14-day case notification rates
2. High ( $\geq 3\%$ ) or sustained increase ( $\geq 1$  week) in test positivity
3. High ( $\geq 60/100\ 000$ ) or sustained increase ( $\geq 1$  week) in 14-day case notification rates in the older age groups (65+yr)
4. High ( $\geq 10/1\ 000\ 000$ ) or sustained increase ( $\geq 1$  week) in 14-day death notification rates

#### Epidemiological situation is 'of serious concern'

Countries whose epidemiological situation is 'concerning' and which meet at least one of criteria 3-4.

#### Epidemiological situation 'stable'

Countries not meeting the criteria described above for 'concerning'

*Additionally, data on ICU and hospital admissions or occupancy due to COVID-19 are considered but not formally used as part of the assessment. The following provisional thresholds have been used in the table below, but these are subject to change as they are undergoing internal review within ECDC:*

- *High ( $\geq 25\%$  of the peak value during the pandemic) or sustained increase ( $\geq 1$  week) in the rate of weekly hospital admissions due to COVID-19; and/or the 7-day mean hospital occupancy due to COVID-19*
- *High ( $\geq 25\%$  of the peak value during the pandemic) or sustained increase ( $\geq 1$  week) in the rate of weekly ICU admissions due to COVID-19; and/or the 7-day mean ICU occupancy due to COVID-19*

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions of increases for each indicator can be found in <https://covid19-country-overviews.ecdc.europa.eu/>

## Key indicators and weekly trends per country as of 7 February 2021, EU/EEA

Indicators shown: 14-day COVID-19 case notification rate per 100 000 population, 14-day COVID-19 death rate per 1 000 000 population, test positivity, testing rate per 100 000 population, age-specific case notification rate per 100 000 population for the age groups 65 years or older, weekly hospital and ICU admissions due to COVID-19 per 100 000 population, 7-day mean hospital and ICU occupancy due to COVID-19.

Notes: The Sparkline shows the evolution of the epidemic in each country in terms of the indicators shown since the beginning of March 2020. The colour of the entire Sparkline denotes the current trend in the indicator, based on a comparison of its most recent value with that seven days earlier.

- Red – sustained increasing trend;
- Grey – stable or decreasing trend;

Values in the column next to the Sparkline are the current value for the indicator. If no data are available for the current week then the value is left blank. Values that are considered high for the indicator, according to the criteria listed above, are shown in red.

Country	Assessment	Case rate		Death rate		Positivity (%)		Testing rate		65+yr	Hospital admissions		Hospital occupancy		ICU admissions		ICU occupancy		
		Value	Trends	Value	Trends	Value	Trends	Value	Trends		Value	Trends	Value	Trends	Value	Trends	Value	Trends	
Austria	Of serious concern	224.8		65.2		1.1		10,840		193.5				15.2				3.4	
Belgium	Of serious concern	277		52		4.4		3,027		238.7		7.8		15.3				2.7	
Bulgaria	Of serious concern	127.4		73		7.8		909						42.5				3.9	
Croatia	Of serious concern	157.5		83.2		50.4		1,019		471.3		15.8		29.6					
Cyprus	Of serious concern	198.9		29.7		0.4		25,899		119.8		6.1		13.4		0.7		2.9	
Czechia	Of serious concern	914.6		176.5		13.1		3,596		762.6		89.3		55.2		17.4		9.6	
Denmark	Of serious concern	108.9		35.5		0.3		13,814		82.7		4.3		7.7				1.5	
Estonia	Of serious concern	570		67.9		12.2		2,521		511.7		24.5		34.1		1.6		2.5	
France	Of serious concern	423		88.3		6.4		3,265				16.1		41.4		2.6		4.8	
Germany	Of serious concern	176.9		115.5		6		1,344		186		2.1						5.2	
Greece	Of serious concern	111.6		30.4		2.8		2,357		85.4						1			
Hungary	Of serious concern	176.4		115.7		8.6		1,069		212.7				37.4					
Ireland	Of serious concern	326.5		146		5.7		2,500		371.8		9.5		27		1.1		3.9	
Italy	Of serious concern	281.5		96.3		4.9		2,810		193.1		5		36.4				3.6	
Latvia	Of serious concern	577.1		122.9		8.5		3,600		516		33.5		55		8.1			
Lithuania	Of serious concern	353.3		104.1		8.2		1,814		336.4		12.4		42.5		3			
Luxembourg	Of serious concern	349.2		47.2		1.9		10,016		157.4				10.3				2.1	
Malta	Of serious concern	397.7		70.9		3.7		4,257		276.6		5.7							
Netherlands	Of serious concern	317.9		49.1		10.1		1,498		299.6		6.3		8.9		1		3.4	
Poland	Of serious concern	196.4		98.3		14.5		715		178.4		0.2		34.3					
Portugal	Of serious concern	1190.1		334.4		12.8		2,961		1125.2		4.3		63.4				8.5	
Romania	Of serious concern	175.5		57.7		9.5		902		209.2		13.9						5	
Slovakia	Of serious concern	496.4		220.7		20.2		1,286						62					
Slovenia	Of serious concern	762.2		149		6.7		5,424		564.8		23.9		47.7		3.5		7.9	
Spain	Of serious concern	843.1		129.7		10.7		3,300		459.8		4.8				0.2			
Sweden	Of serious concern	394.1		27.3		9.9		1,931		203.5				15.7		1		2.4	
Finland	Stable	97.7		8.3						24.4				2.4				0.4	
Iceland	Stable	8.4		0		0.2		1,975		0		0.6		4.4					
Liechtenstein	Stable	187.6		0															
Norway	Stable	69.3		6.4		1.4		2,452		18.6		0.6		1.7		0.1			