

Social Protection in Europe

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Statistics in focus

POPULATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

THEME 3 – 1/2002

POPULATION AND LIVING CONDITIONS

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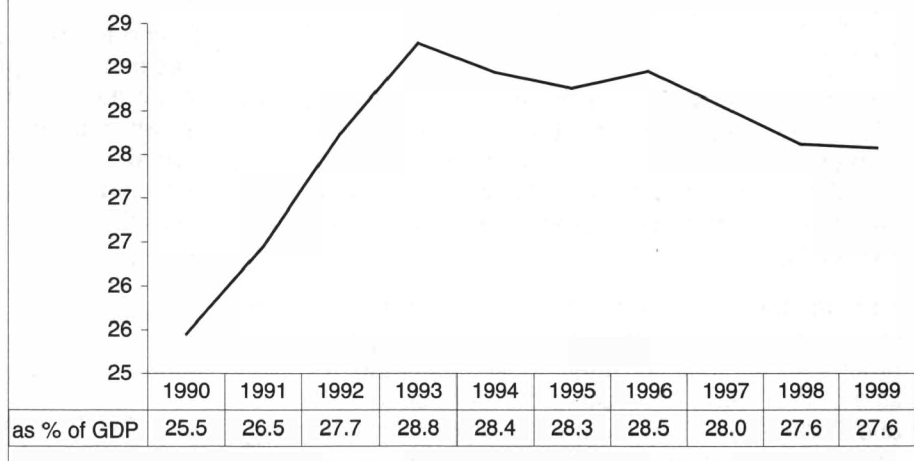
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Expenditure on social protection in the European Union remained stable in 1999 at 27.6% of GDP. While Ireland spent 14.7% of its GDP on social protection, Sweden spent 32.9%. In real terms, the growth in this expenditure accelerated per capita in 1999.

Expenditure on the "old age" and "survivors" functions continued to dominate social benefits in EU-15. Expenditure connected with the family, housing and social exclusion has for many years been gaining ground over expenditure on health, disability and unemployment.

Different countries have markedly different systems for financing social protection, depending on whether they favour social contributions (paid by protected persons and employers) or general government contributions. In recent years the two main components of social-protection resources have been rebalanced, with the share of general government contributions rising and that of social contributions falling.

Figure 1: Expenditure on social protection in EU-15 (as % of GDP)



Source : Eurostat-ESSPROS.

In 1999, social-protection expenditure as a percentage of GDP in EU-15 (Figure 1) remained stable at the 1998 level of 27.6%.

The trend in this ratio was irregular in the period 1990-1999.

Substantial growth was registered between 1990 and 1993, the ratio increasing by 3.3 percentage points to a peak of 28.8% in 1993 (EU-15), primarily as a result of a slowdown in the growth of GDP and a rise in unemployment benefits.

This growth was particularly marked in Finland (from 25.1% of GDP in 1990 to 34.6% in 1993), since the country was in recession during the period concerned (Table 1).

Between 1993 and 1996, expenditure on social protection as a percentage of GDP showed a slight downward trend, due partly to an upturn in GDP and partly to a slowdown in the growth of social-protection expenditure (largely a result of a drop in unemployment benefits).

**Table 1: Expenditure on social protection
(as % of GDP)**

	1990	1993	1996	1997	1998	1999
EU-15	25.5	28.8	28.5	28.0	27.6	27.6
EUR-12	25.5	28.3	28.2	27.8	27.5	27.5
B	26.4	29.5	28.7	28.1	28.2	28.2
DK	28.7	31.9	31.4	30.4	29.9	29.4
D	25.4	28.4	30.0	29.5	29.3	29.6
EL	22.9	22.0	22.9	23.3	24.3	25.5
E	19.9	24.0	21.8	21.1	20.6	20.0
F	27.9	30.7	31.0	30.8	30.5	30.3
IRL	18.4	20.2	17.8	16.7	15.5	14.7
I	24.7	26.4	24.8	25.5	25.0	25.3
L	22.1	23.9	24.0	22.9	22.4	21.9
NL	32.5	33.6	30.1	29.4	28.5	28.1
A	26.7	28.9	29.6	28.8	28.3	28.6
P	15.2	20.7	21.3	21.6	22.4	22.9
FIN	25.1	34.6	31.6	29.3	27.3	26.7
S	33.1	38.6	34.5	33.6	33.2	32.9
UK	23.0	29.1	28.3	27.7	27.2	26.9
IS	16.9	18.8	18.8	18.5	18.6	19.1
NO	26.3	28.4	26.2	25.6	27.5	27.9
EEA	25.5	28.8	28.4	28.0	27.6	27.6
CH	19.9	24.8	26.9	28.0	28.0	28.3
SK	:	:	21.7	21.4	21.5	21.2
SI	:	:	26.0	26.5	26.5	26.5

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS.

These trends continued during the period 1996-1999, when the expenditure/GDP ratio in EU-15 fell by 0.9 points. The expenditure began to increase again in 1999, however.

The fall in the share of expenditure in GDP between 1996 and 1999 was most obvious in Finland (-4.9 points) and Ireland (-3.1 points). In Ireland, the strong growth in GDP in recent years largely explains the fall in the ratio. Denmark registered a similarly sharp drop (-2.0 points).

Although the fall-off in the ratio was fairly general, some countries recorded increases in the recent period. One group of countries included those spending relatively little of their GDP on social protection, such as Greece and Portugal (+2.6 points and +1.6 points respectively). At the other end of the scale, although the ratio in Norway and Switzerland was already high, it increased again between 1996 and 1999 to a level above the European average.

Growth in per capita expenditure in real terms accelerates in 1999

Per capita expenditure on social protection in EU-15 increased in the period 1990-1993 by approximately 4.1% per year in real terms (Table 2). The growth was particularly marked in Portugal (12.8% per year) and the United Kingdom (8.9% per year).

Table 2: Expenditure on social protection per capita at constant prices (Index 1990=100)

	1993	1996	1997	1998	1999
EU-15	113	118	119	121	124
EUR-12	111	116	117	119	122
B	115	117	118	122	125
DK	113	122	121	122	123
D	104	114	112	114	117
EL	96	104	111	120	130
E	124	122	123	125	127
F	110	114	115	118	120
IRL	119	130	137	142	150
I	108	108	113	113	116
L	120	135	138	141	149
NL	104	102	103	103	105
A	110	118	118	120	125
P	144	163	174	189	201
FIN	116	122	120	120	120
S	108	106	106	110	113
UK	129	136	136	136	139
IS	104	113	118	127	135
NO	112	119	122	130	137
EEA	113	118	119	121	124
CH	117	125	131	135	136
SK	:	:	:	:	:
SI	:	:	:	:	:

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS.

Greece is the only country in which per capita expenditure fell in real terms during the period.

During the period 1993-1996, however, average growth was only 1.6% per year at EU-15 level.

In Portugal and the United Kingdom, the real rate of growth thus fell sharply from the level of the previous period (by 4.3% and 1.6% respectively per year between 1993 and 1996). This was due mainly to a reduction in benefits linked to sickness and unemployment.

In Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands, per capita expenditure actually fell in real terms.

Only Germany, Greece and Iceland saw a strong upturn in the real rate of growth.

The rate of growth in EU-15 between 1996 and 1999 was similar, at 1.5% per year. Rates increased in all countries except Finland, where expenditure fell in real terms.

Greece and Portugal recorded strong increases, however.

In 1999, expenditure accelerated its growth in all countries (the rate of increase in per capita expenditure in real terms was 2.4% in 1999 in EU-15) except Finland, where per capita spending remained stable in real terms.

In Austria, for example, the increase (+4.3%) was due in part to an extension of eligibility for unemployment benefits and a rise in the level of family benefits.

Expenditure on social-protection: major differences between countries

The average figure for expenditure on social protection in EU-15 as a percentage of GDP (27.6% in 1999) conceals wide disparities between Member States.

Sweden (32.9%), France (30.3%) and Germany (29.6%) have the highest ratios and Ireland the lowest (14.7%).

Outside EU-15, Iceland (19.1%) and Norway (27.9%) are at the two ends of the spectrum.

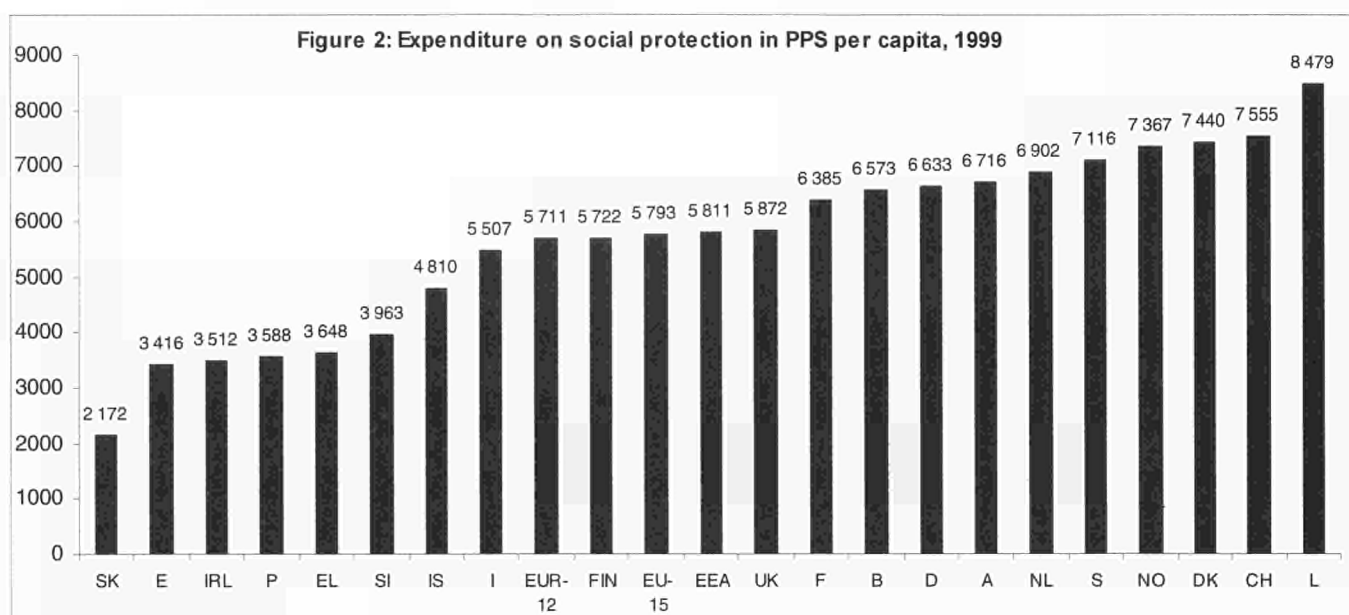
When this expenditure is expressed in per capita PPS (purchasing-power standards), the differences between countries are wider still and the rank order changes (Figure 2).

In EU-15, Luxembourg spends most (8 479 PPS per capita), followed by Denmark (7 440 PPS per capita).

Spain, Greece, Ireland and Portugal record a low level of social redistribution, at less than 4 000 PPS per capita.

The ratio between the countries that spend most and least within EU-15 was thus 2.5 in 1999 (compared with 3.6 in 1990) ⁽¹⁾.

The gaps between countries are generally related to disparate levels of wealth and reflect differences in social-protection systems, demographic change, the unemployment rate and other social, institutional and economic factors.



Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS.

Purchasing power standards (PPS)

To compare expenditure on social protection between countries, we must first express that expenditure in the same currency. It would seem obvious to use the euro.

This gives, for example, a 1999 figure for social protection expenditure of EUR 4 856 per capita in Italy and EUR 9 152 per capita in Denmark (88 % more than Italy).

But this difference is "nominal", since it takes no account of the general level of prices (of goods and services), which in 1999 was 39% higher in Denmark than in Italy.

The difference in real terms (i.e. in terms of purchasing power) was thus only +35% ($188 / 139 = 1.35$).

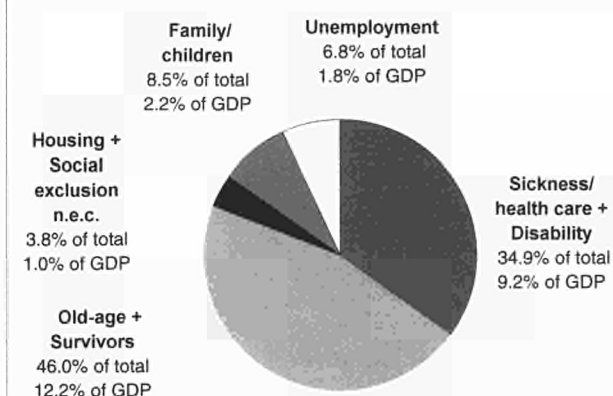
To allow the user to make direct, real-terms comparisons between countries, statisticians show expenditure in "purchasing power standards" (PPS):

- Italy: 5 507 PPS per capita in 1999
- Denmark: 7 440 PPS per capita in 1999 (35% higher than Italy)

⁽¹⁾ If all countries (within or outside EU-15) are taken into consideration, the ratio between the country that spends most (Luxembourg: 8 479 PPS) and the country that pays least (Slovakia: 2 172 PPS) is 3.9.

Total benefits dominated by the "old age" and "survivors" functions

Figure 3: Social benefits by group of functions in EU-15, 1999 (as % of total benefits and as % of GDP)



Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS.

In most Member States, the highest proportions of social-protection benefits in 1999 were linked to the old age and survivors functions, which accounted for 46.0% of total benefits in EU-15, or 12.2% of GDP (Figure 3).

This feature is particularly marked in Italy, where more than 60% of total benefits were devoted to these functions (Table 3). The contributory factors include the high percentage of the population aged 65 or over (17.7%, as against an average of 16.1% in EU-15).

In Ireland, however, less than 30% of benefits come under the "old age" and "survivors" headings. The population of Ireland is the "youngest" in Europe: 31.4% of the population was aged under 20 in 1999 (against an EU-15 average of 23.1%), and only 11.3% were aged over 65.

The sickness/health care and disability functions account for nearly 35% of all social benefits, exceeding expenditure on the old age and survivors functions in Portugal, Ireland and Finland. Outside EU-15, Iceland, Norway and Slovakia are in a similar position.

The family/children function accounts for 8.5% of total benefits in EU-15, or for 2.2% of GDP.

Table 3: Social benefits by group of functions 1999 (as % of total social benefits)

	Old-age + survivors	Sickness/Health care + Disability	Family/children	Unemployment	Housing + Social exclusion n.e.c.
EU-15	46.0	34.9	8.5	6.8	3.8
EUR-12	46.5	34.9	8.2	7.4	2.9
B	43.0	33.6	9.1	12.1	2.2
DK	38.0	31.7	13.0	11.2	6.1
D	42.1	36.0	10.5	8.8	2.6
EL	50.7	31.0	7.6	5.7	5.0
E	46.2	37.0	2.1	12.9	1.9
F	44.2	34.0	9.8	7.4	4.6
IRL	25.2	45.3	13.0	11.1	5.4
I	64.0	30.0	3.7	2.2	0.2
L	41.4	39.5	15.5	2.5	1.1
NL	41.5	40.7	4.3	6.2	7.4
A	47.4	35.4	10.3	5.4	1.6
P	43.7	45.6	5.2	3.7	1.8
FIN	35.1	37.2	12.8	11.3	3.7
S	39.5	36.9	10.5	8.1	4.9
UK	46.1	34.8	8.8	3.2	7.0
IS	31.2	51.8	12.1	1.8	3.0
NO	31.2	49.7	13.2	2.5	3.3
EEA	45.8	35.2	8.6	6.8	3.7
CH	50.7	36.4	5.2	4.0	3.7
SK	36.5	40.6	11.1	5.7	6.1
SI	45.4	39.6	8.7	4.7	1.6

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS.

At least 13% of all benefits in Luxembourg, Denmark and Ireland, and also in Norway, come under this heading.

In Spain, Italy and the Netherlands, however, expenditure on this function accounts for less than 5% of all social benefits paid.

There are wide gaps between Member States in the weight of benefits linked to unemployment: compared with an average of 6.8% in EU-15, more than 11% of all benefits in Spain and Finland are linked to this function, but less than 3% in Italy, Luxembourg, Iceland and Norway.

The amount of benefit paid under the "unemployment" heading is not always related to the level of unemployment in the country concerned: there are substantial differences in the coverage and amount of unemployment benefit.

THE FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

Sickness/health care: includes, inter alia, paid sick leave, medical care and the supply of pharmaceutical products.

Disability: includes, inter alia, disability pensions and the provision of goods and services (other than medical care) to the disabled.

Old age: includes, inter alia, old-age pensions and the provision of goods and services (other than medical care) to the elderly.

Survivors: income support and support in connection with the death of a family member (e.g. survivors' pensions).

Family/children: includes support (other than medical care) in connection with pregnancy, childbirth, maternity and the care of children and other dependent family members.

Unemployment: includes, inter alia, unemployment benefits and vocational training financed by public agencies.

Housing includes interventions by public authorities to help households meet the cost of housing.

Social exclusion not elsewhere classified (n.e.c.): includes income-support benefits, rehabilitation of alcoholics and drug addicts, and various other benefits (other than medical care).

The structure of social benefits changes over time

Between 1990 and 1999, the structure of social benefits changed in line with the different growth rates in the various functions (Table 5). The variations observed arise both from changing needs and from amendments to social protection legislation.

Table 4: Social benefits per capita at constant prices in EU-15 (Index 1990=100)

	1993	1996	1997	1998	1999
Old-age + survivors	109	118	120	122	125
Sickness/Health care + Disability	111	115	114	117	120
Family/children	111	126	129	130	135
Unemployment	148	130	123	119	119
Housing + Social exclusion n.e.c.	121	144	142	146	146
Total benefits	113	119	120	121	124

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS.

Per capita expenditure under the old age and survivors functions rose by 25% in real terms between 1990 and 1999 in EU-15 (Table 4). The increase was regular over the period and was reflected in a slight increase in the weight of these functions in total expenditure.

In Italy, the weight of this expenditure in total benefits increased by some 6 points between 1990 and 1999. In parallel, per capita expenditure on these functions in real terms was up by some 3.0% per year during the period, against an EU-15 average of 2.5% per year.

In Portugal, a higher growth rate (8.5% per year) was accompanied by an increase of only 1.8 points in the share of total benefits.

Faced with the ageing of their populations (the percentage of the population aged 65 or over rose from 14.5% in 1990 to 16.1% in 1999), several countries are reforming their retirement systems; the effects of these reforms will make themselves felt in due course.

The sickness/health care and disability functions together showed a more moderate growth rate than the average increase of 24% in total per capita benefits in real terms, so that the weight of these functions fell by 1.2 points in EU-15 between 1990 and 1999.

This reflects, *inter alia*, the efforts made by Member States to cope with the costs incurred in these domains. Per capita expenditure in real terms on these functions diminished in the Netherlands and remained stable in Italy.

Expenditure on the family/children function as a percentage of total benefits in EU-15 went up from 7.7% in 1990 to 8.5% in 1999, however. This growth (+35% in

real terms between 1990 and 1999) was more marked in 1996, when Germany introduced reforms and extended the family benefit system.

Luxembourg and Ireland recorded a growth rate which was well above average during the period, as did Norway.

Only the Netherlands and Italy saw their per capita expenditure linked to the family fall in real terms.

Table 5: Social benefits by group of functions in EU-15 (as % of total social benefits)

	1990	1993	1996	1997	1998	1999
Old-age + survivors	45.9	43.9	45.0	45.9	45.8	46.0
Sickness/Health care + Disability	36.1	35.3	34.8	34.4	34.9	34.9
Family/children	7.7	7.7	8.3	8.4	8.4	8.5
Unemployment	7.3	9.7	8.1	7.5	7.1	6.8
Housing + Social exclusion n.e.c.	3.0	3.4	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS.

Expenditure on the unemployment function rose by 19% in real terms in EU-15 between 1990 and 1999.

The increase was particularly obvious in Finland (a growth rate of some 9% per year in real terms), where unemployment rose more sharply than elsewhere. In Switzerland these benefits also saw a substantial upturn between 1990 and 1999.

In EU-15, however, the trend was irregular during the period, since the total level of these benefits generally depends on the trend in unemployment.

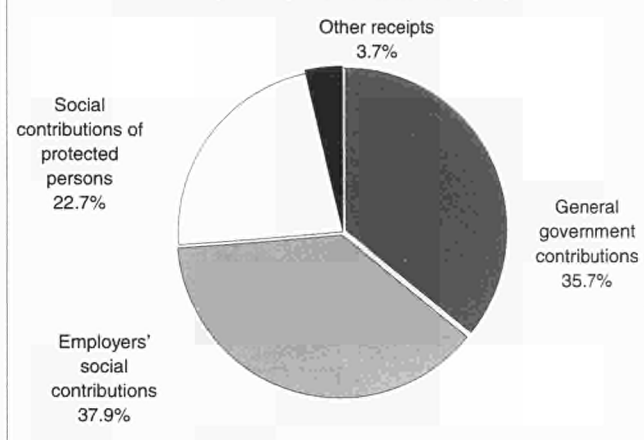
Between 1990 and 1993 these benefits rose very rapidly in EU-15, and their share of total social benefits increased from 7.3% in 1990 to 9.7% in 1993.

Per capita benefits at constant prices linked to unemployment fell from 1993, and their share of total benefits declined in EU-15 (from 9.7% in 1993 to 6.8% in 1999). This fall-off was determined in part by a gradual improvement in the economic situation and in part by reforms in the compensation system in some countries, limiting the duration of payment of benefits and changing the conditions of eligibility for such benefits.

The fall was most marked in Spain, Denmark, Ireland and Norway. Greece, where the share of these benefits rose during the period, was an exception.

Systems for funding social protection differ widely between countries

Figure 4: Receipts of social protection by type in EU-15, 1999 (as % of total receipts)



Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS.

In 1999 the main sources of funding of social protection at EU-15 level were social contributions (paid by protected persons and employers), representing 60.6% of all receipts, and general government contributions derived from taxes (35.7%). Social contributions are

broken down into contributions by protected persons (employees, self-employed persons, retired persons and others) and employers' contributions (Figure 4).

The European average irons out substantial differences between countries in the structure of social-protection financing (Table 7). The share of funding derived from social contributions is highest in Belgium, Spain, France, the Netherlands and Germany, where this mode of financing accounts for 65% of all receipts. This is also true in Slovenia.

Conversely, Denmark and Ireland (and also Norway) finance their social-protection systems largely from taxes, whose relative weight in total receipts is over 59%.

The United Kingdom, Luxembourg and Sweden (and Iceland) also rely heavily on general government contributions.

This divergence is the fruit of history and the institutional reasoning behind social-protection systems. As financing from taxes gains ground in countries where it used to be less important, the gaps are gradually narrowing.

General government contributions are taking over from social contributions

During the economic slowdown of 1990 to 1993, per capita general government contributions increased in real terms in EU-15 more rapidly (+24%) than other sources of finance (+13% for total receipts and +4% for social contributions) (Table 6).

Between 1993 and 1996, a period of economic revival and constraints on public expenditure, the increase in general government contributions slowed by 1.5% per year on average, while the rise in social contributions by protected persons accelerated (by 3.1% per year on average).

Between 1996 and 1999, social contributions paid by protected persons fell by 1.2% per year on average. This downturn was due *inter alia* to measures for combating unemployment introduced by several countries, which also explained the slowdown in employers' contributions (exemption from contributions as an incentive to recruit staff, for example).

This downturn was counterbalanced by a sharp rise in general government contributions (4.1% per year on average in EU-15), affecting France and Italy in particular.

The steep increase in this source of funds in France came as a result of the expansion in 1997 and 1998 of the *contribution sociale généralisée* or generalised social contribution, classed as tax revenue. This tax largely replaced the sickness insurance contributions paid by protected persons.

Table 6: Receipts of social protection per capita at constant prices in EU-15 (index 1990=100)

	1993	1996	1997	1998	1999
General government contributions	124	130	131	143	149
Social contributions	104	110	112	110	112
- of employers	103	106	107	108	111
- of protected persons ⁽¹⁾	107	118	119	112	114
Other receipts	103	107	106	106	110
Total receipts	113	119	120	121	124

⁽¹⁾ Employees, self-employed, pensioners and others.

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS.

Between 1990 and 1999, the overall share of general government contributions in total receipts increased in EU-15 by 6.9 points (Table 7).

Although general government contributions increased faster in France and Italy than in Europe on average, their share of total receipts fell sharply in Denmark and the Netherlands as a result of the growth in social contributions. It dropped considerably in Iceland for the same reasons.

The share of employers' social contributions fell in EU-15 by 4.6 points between 1990 and 1999. It fell in all countries except the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark, even though Denmark remained the country in which these contributions are least significant.

The decline was particularly steep in Italy, Portugal and Finland.

The share of social contributions paid by protected persons also fell between 1990 and 1999, from 24.6% to 22.7% for EU-15.

Although most countries experienced this downturn, the weight of these contributions rose in Denmark by over 10 points. A new contribution known as the "labour market contribution" was introduced there in 1994 in order to finance sickness and unemployment insurance and vocational training.

Table 7: Receipts of social protection by type (as % of total receipts)

	General government contributions		Social contributions						Other receipts	
			total		employers		protected persons ⁽¹⁾			
	1990	1999	1990	1999	1990	1999	1990	1999	1990	1999
EU-15	28.8	35.7	67.1	60.6	42.5	37.9	24.6	22.7	4.1	3.7
EUR-12	24.8	31.9	70.9	64.0	46.1	40.9	24.8	23.1	4.3	4.2
B	23.8	25.7	67.0	71.8	41.5	49.4	25.5	22.4	9.2	2.5
DK	80.1	65.2	13.1	28.5	7.8	9.2	5.3	19.2	6.8	6.4
D	25.2	32.8	72.1	65.0	43.7	36.9	28.4	28.1	2.7	2.3
EL	33.0	28.6	59.0	61.1	39.4	37.7	19.6	23.4	8.0	10.3
E	26.2	26.8	71.3	69.2	54.4	52.2	16.9	17.0	2.5	4.0
F	17.0	30.4	79.5	66.8	51.0	46.5	28.5	20.3	3.5	2.8
IRL	58.9	59.8	40.0	39.0	24.5	24.2	15.6	14.8	1.0	1.2
I	27.2	38.9	70.3	58.0	54.9	43.6	15.5	14.4	2.5	3.1
L	41.5	46.9	50.5	49.1	29.5	24.7	21.0	24.4	8.1	4.0
NL	25.0	15.3	59.0	65.8	20.0	28.4	39.1	37.4	15.9	18.9
A	35.9	35.0	63.1	64.3	38.1	37.4	25.1	26.9	0.9	0.7
P	33.8	40.9	57.0	44.4	36.9	27.6	20.1	16.8	9.2	14.7
FIN	40.6	43.4	52.1	50.0	44.1	37.2	8.0	12.8	7.3	6.6
S	:	48.9	:	45.9	:	36.3	:	9.6	:	5.2
UK	42.6	47.3	55.0	51.8	28.1	27.7	26.9	24.0	2.4	0.9
IS	67.8	50.2	32.2	49.8	24.9	41.3	7.3	8.5	0.0	0.0
NO	63.1	59.8	36.4	38.8	24.0	24.6	12.5	14.2	0.5	1.4
EEA	29.4	36.1	66.6	60.2	42.2	37.6	24.4	22.5	4.0	3.7
CH	19.3	21.0	64.1	58.7	32.6	28.4	31.6	30.3	16.5	20.3
SK	:	30.1	:	64.5	:	46.7	:	17.8	:	5.4
SI	:	32.3	:	66.8	:	28.4	:	38.4	:	0.9

(¹) Employees, self-employed, pensioners and others.

Source : Eurostat-ESSPROS.

Methods and concepts

The data on social protection expenditure and receipts have been calculated in accordance with the revised methodology for the European System of integrated Social PROtection Statistics (ESSPROS), the "ESSPROS Manual 1996".

Expenditure includes social benefits, administration costs and other expenditure by social protection schemes.

Social benefits are classified in the ESSPROS Manual 1996 in the following eight functions: Sickness/health care, Disability, Old age, Survivors, Family/children, Unemployment, Housing, Social exclusion not elsewhere classified (n.e.c).

Social benefits are recorded without any deduction of taxes or other compulsory levies payable on them by beneficiaries. "Tax benefits" (tax reductions granted to households for social protection purposes) are generally excluded.

Abbreviations

The euro zone (EUR-12) comprises Belgium (B), Germany (D), Greece (EL), Spain (E), France (F), Ireland (IRL), Italy (I), Luxembourg (L), the Netherlands (NL), Austria (A), Portugal (P) and Finland (FIN).

The European Union (EU-15) comprises the euro zone countries plus Denmark (DK), Sweden (S) and the United Kingdom (UK).

The European Economic Area (EEA) comprises the countries of the European Union plus Iceland (IS), Norway (NO) and Liechtenstein. No data are available for Liechtenstein. CH = Switzerland, SK = Slovakia, SI = Slovenia.

Notes on the data

Data on benefits and receipts are not available for Sweden for the period 1990-1992. As a consequence Eurostat has estimated the corresponding values for EU-15 and EEA.

France, Ireland and Portugal record disability pensions paid to persons of retirement age as benefits under the disability function (instead of the old-age function).

For B, DK, D (as from 1991), EL, E (as from 1995), F, IRL, I, L (as from 1995), NL (as from 1994), FIN, S (as from 1993), UK, ISL, NO, SK and SI figures are calculated according to the new national accounts methodology ESA95; the rest of countries' figures are still calculated according to ESA79.

The 1999 data are provisional for B, D, EL, E, F, I, NL, P, FIN, S, UK and SK.

Eurostat reference publications

Methodology: "ESSPROS Manual 1996", 1996.

Data: "European Social Statistics: Social protection 1980-1999".

Further information:

➤ Reference publications

Title European Social Statistics Social Protection 1980-1999
Catalogue No KS-41-01-600-EN-C Price EUR 45

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