

European Sub-Sovereigns Outlook 2026

Balancing fiscal divergence, institutional strength and sovereign constraints

Jakob Suwalski

Executive Director, Sovereign and Public Sector
j.suwalski@scoperatings.com

Eiko Sievert

Executive Director, Sovereign and Public Sector
e.sievert@scoperatings.com

Brian Marly

Senior Analyst, Sovereign and Public Sector
b.marly@scoperatings.com

Alessandra Poli

Analyst, Sovereign and Public Sector
a.poli@scoperatings.com

Elena Klare

Analyst, Sovereign and Public Sector
e.klare@scoperatings.com

European Sub-Sovereigns: outlook balanced overall but credit trajectories diverge



Strengths: Strong institutional frameworks, predictable intergovernmental transfers, and continued sovereign support underpin fiscal discipline, revenue stability, and funding access. Easing inflation and interest-rate pressures support operating margins and debt affordability.

Challenges: Rising social and ageing-related spending, elevated infrastructure and climate-transition investment in addition to high debt burdens among weaker sub-sovereigns constrain fiscal flexibility, a problem compounded by limited reform capacity and weaker central coordination.

Positive

Spanish regions

- Upside support from the Spanish sovereign ([A/Positive](#)) underpins regional credit outlooks.
- A favourable macro-economic momentum – with strong growth and decelerating price pressures – supports strong revenue dynamics.
- Ongoing supportive funding flows, including EU-related resources, underpin investment capacity.
- The proposed debt relief programme will lead to improvements in debt ratios, while growing market issuances should result in greater funding autonomy.

Stable

German Länder

A strong institutional framework, conservative budgeting, and prudent debt management offset weak growth and pressures from energy transition, demographics.

Norwegian counties and cities

Comprehensive restructuring programmes and robust reserves, embedded in an integrated institutional framework, help to balance pressures from rising operating expenses, demographics and elevated investment needs.

Swiss Cantons

High revenue flexibility, resilient financial profiles and conservative financial policies sustain credit quality, even with rising investment and social spending needs.

Italian regions and municipalities

Italy's positive outlook ([BBB+/Positive](#)) supports local credit, but rigidity, limited autonomy, and consolidation pressures cap rating upside.

Negative

French regions

- Downside pressures from the French sovereign ([AA-/Negative](#)) and central government's consolidation strategy continue to weigh on regional budgetary metrics.
- Debt affordability metrics remain sound but set to weaken with lower operating surpluses and higher interest costs.

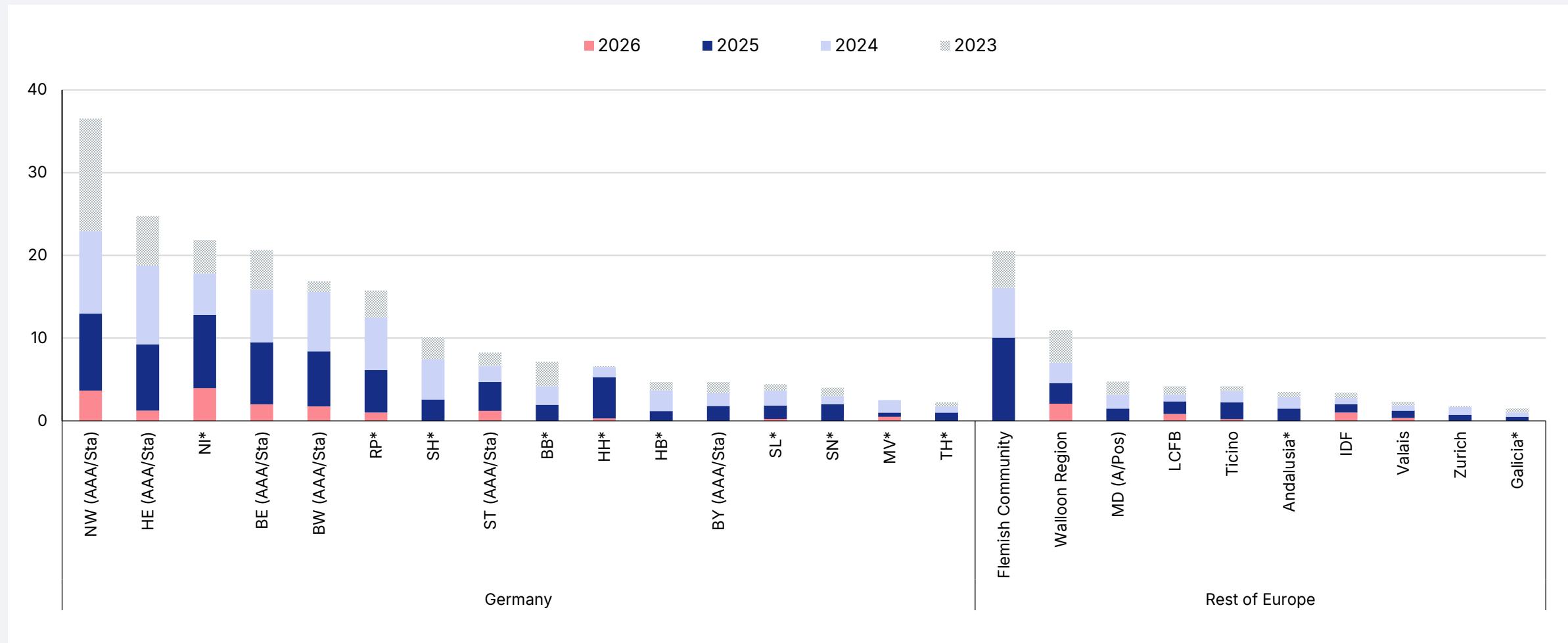
Belgian federated entities

- Budgetary metrics should improve gradually, albeit remaining under pressure due to significant spending pressures and moderate revenue growth
- Indebtedness is set to rise across the sector, though leverage metrics will continue to diverge significantly.
- Communities remain more vulnerable to shocks due to limited budgetary flexibility.

German, Belgian issuers continue to lead European sub-sovereign issuance



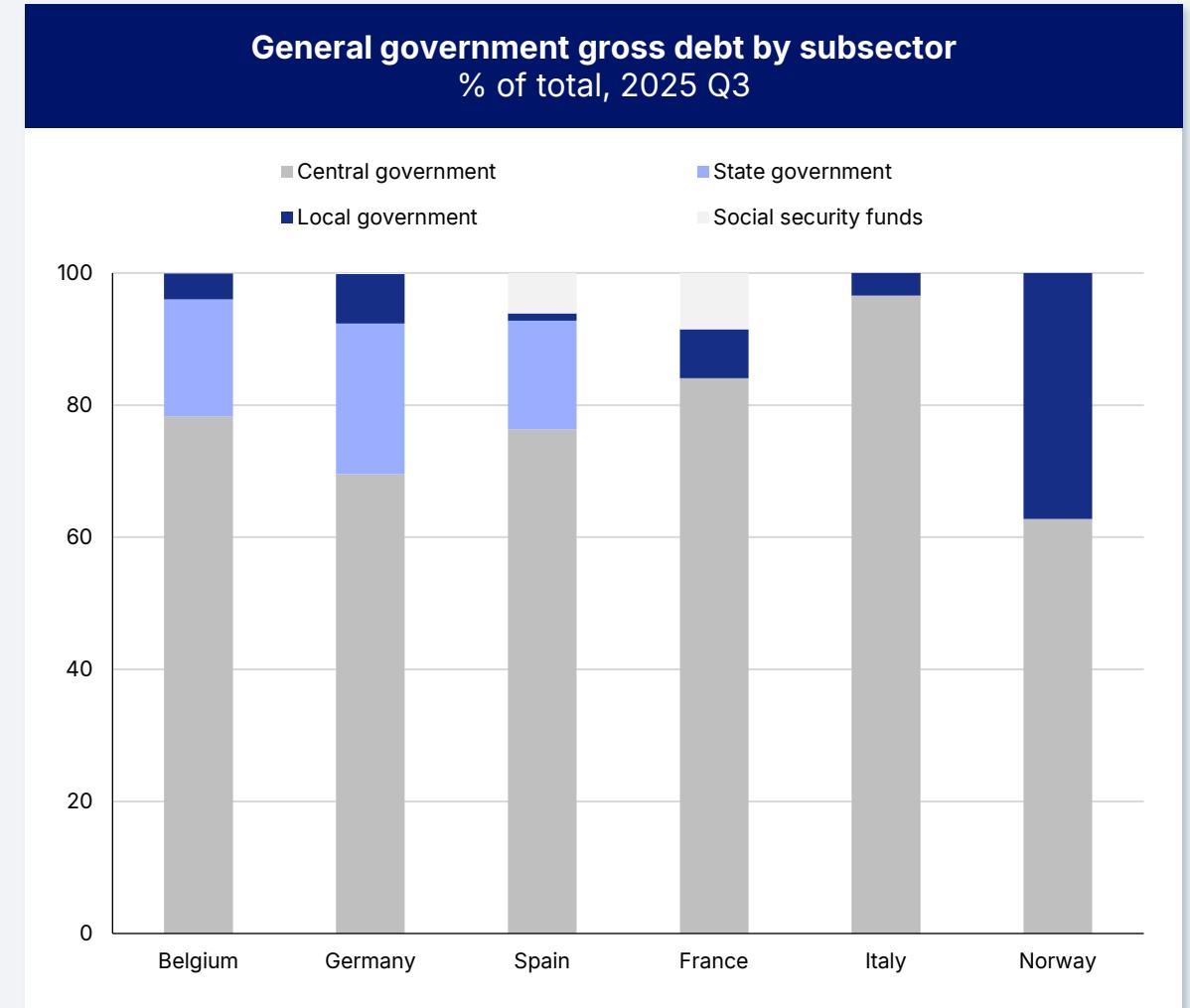
Leading sub-sovereign bond issuers in Europe, EUR bn



*Rated on subscription, accessible on ScopeOne. As of 30 January 2026. Source: Bloomberg Finance L.P., Scope Ratings

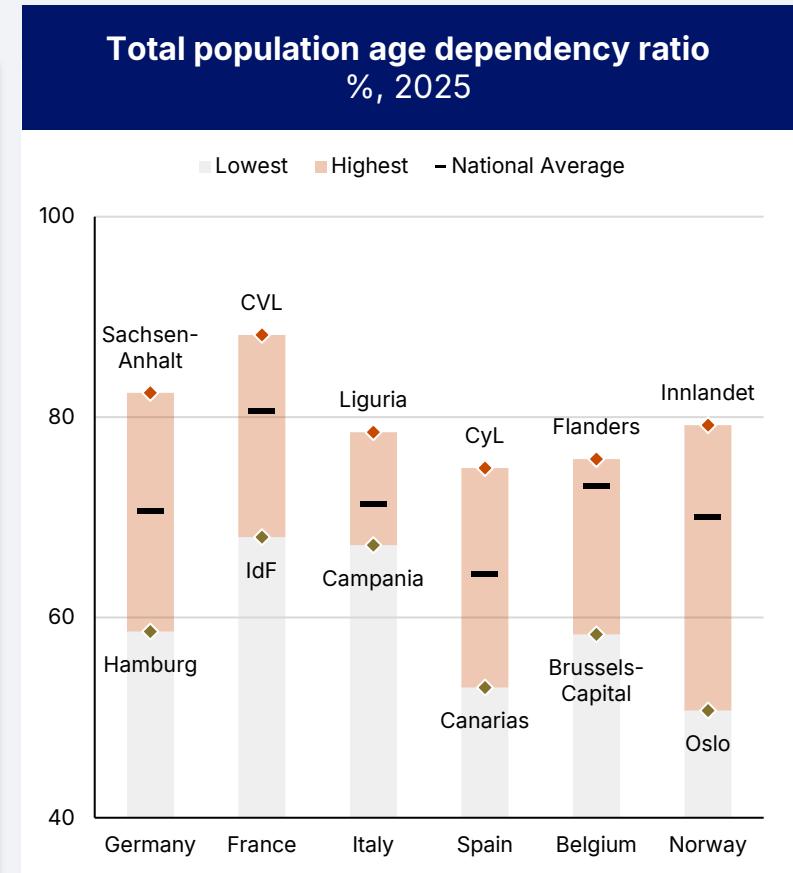
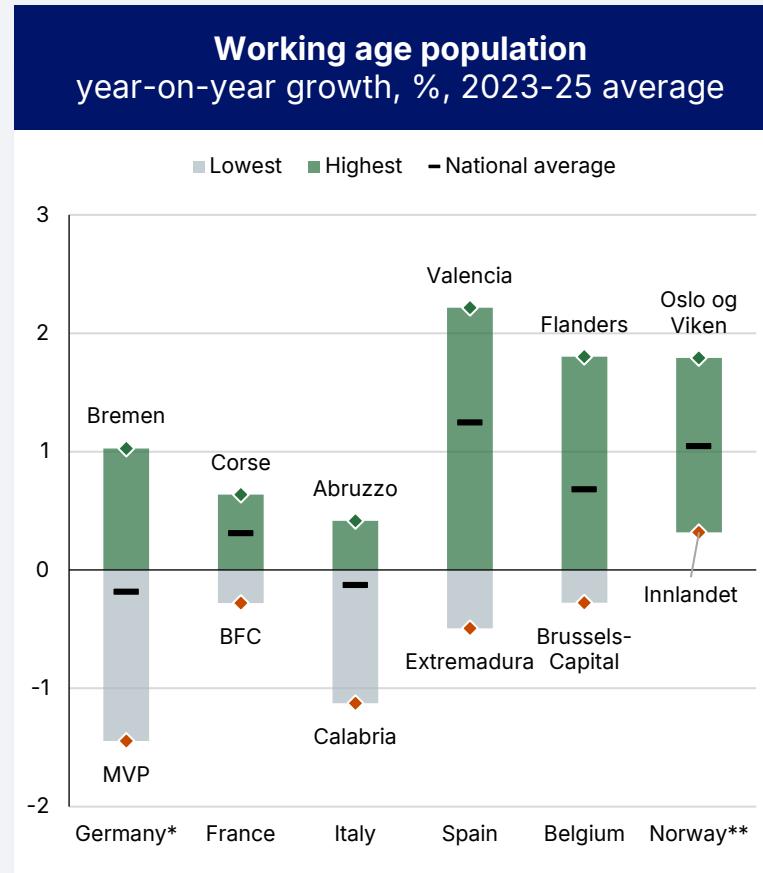
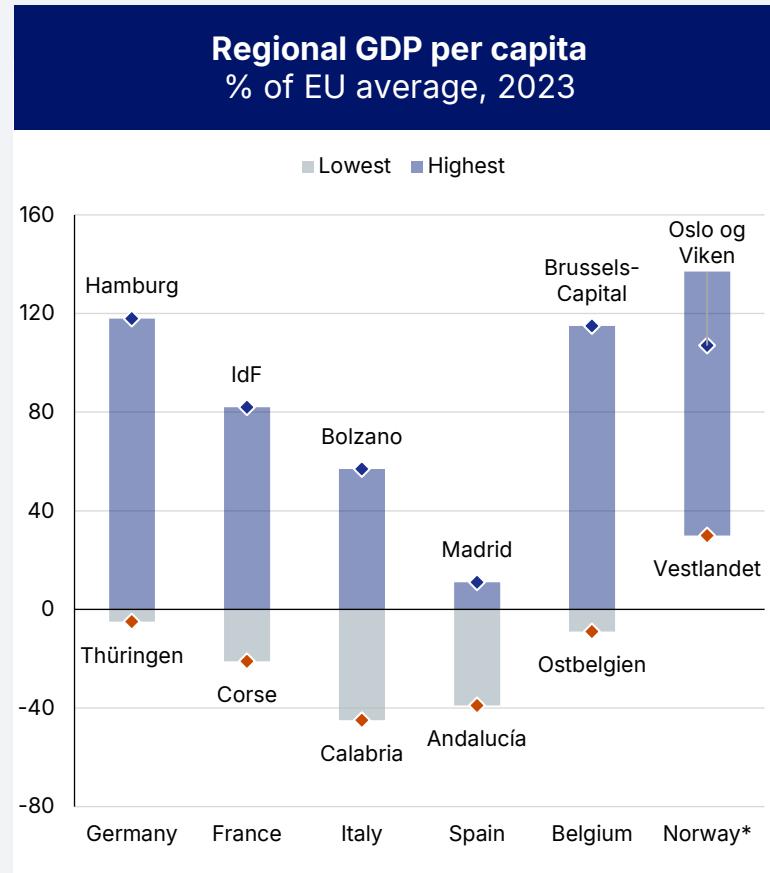
Shifts in policy, fiscal frameworks increase execution risk for sub-sovereigns

- The reformed EU fiscal framework **shifts focus from rule design to implementation credibility**, with country-specific adjustment paths raising execution risk, particularly where sub-sovereign debt is high.
- **NGEU / RRF funding continues to support EU sub-sovereigns**, but its 2026 expiry shifts focus to the effectiveness and quality of post-RRF spending.
- **Amendments to Germany's debt brake** allowing defence and off-budget investment signal greater fiscal flexibility, supporting growth but testing fiscal discipline.
- In **Spain**, reactivated fiscal rules support discipline and regional finance reform, but the lack of a national budget limits multi-year planning.
- In **Norway**, post-2024 county split adjustments have normalised, with minor equalisation changes affecting individual allocations of free revenue.



Regional disparities, structural trends drive divergence in sub-sovereign credit

- Structural gaps in economic fundamentals, demographic trends, climate exposure, and uneven administrative capacity continue to drive credit divergence.
- Wealthier metropolitan, industrial hubs show stronger fiscal resilience, while weaker regions face persistent budgetary pressure and higher reliance on transfers.
- Ageing populations erode revenue base in some regions, while fast-growing urban areas face elevated investment and public-service costs.



* Norway data at NUTS 2 level as of 2021. Source: Eurostat, Scope Ratings

*German data as of 2022-24. **Norway: data at NUTS 2 level
Source: Eurostat, Scope Ratings

Note: Age dependency ratio, 3rd variant (population 0 to 19 years and 65 years or over to population 20 to 64 years), NUTS 3 level data.
Source: Eurostat, Scope Ratings

Agenda

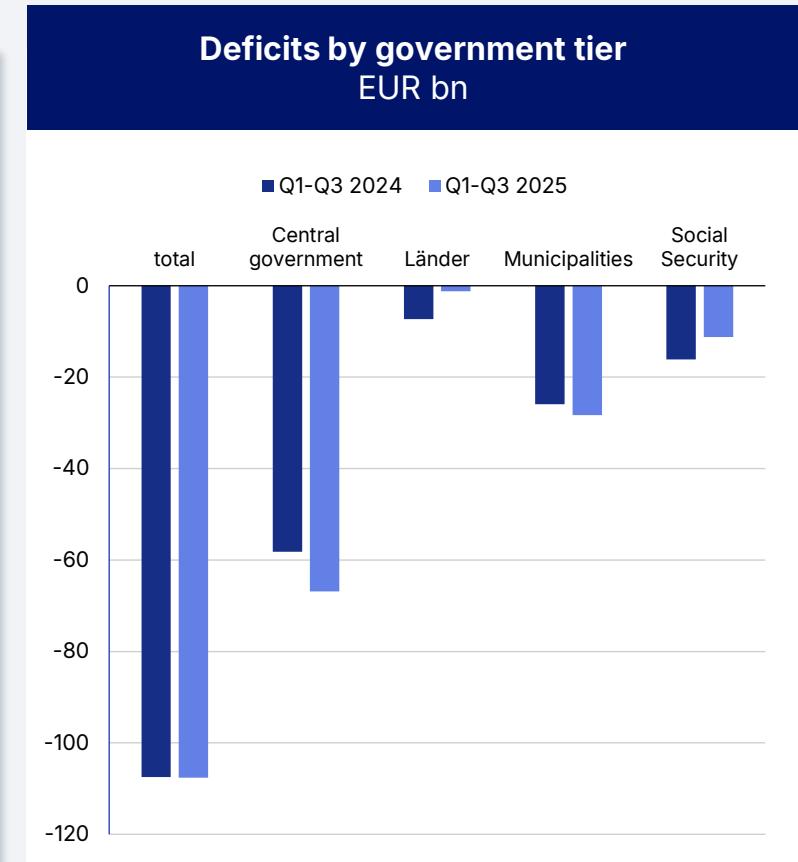
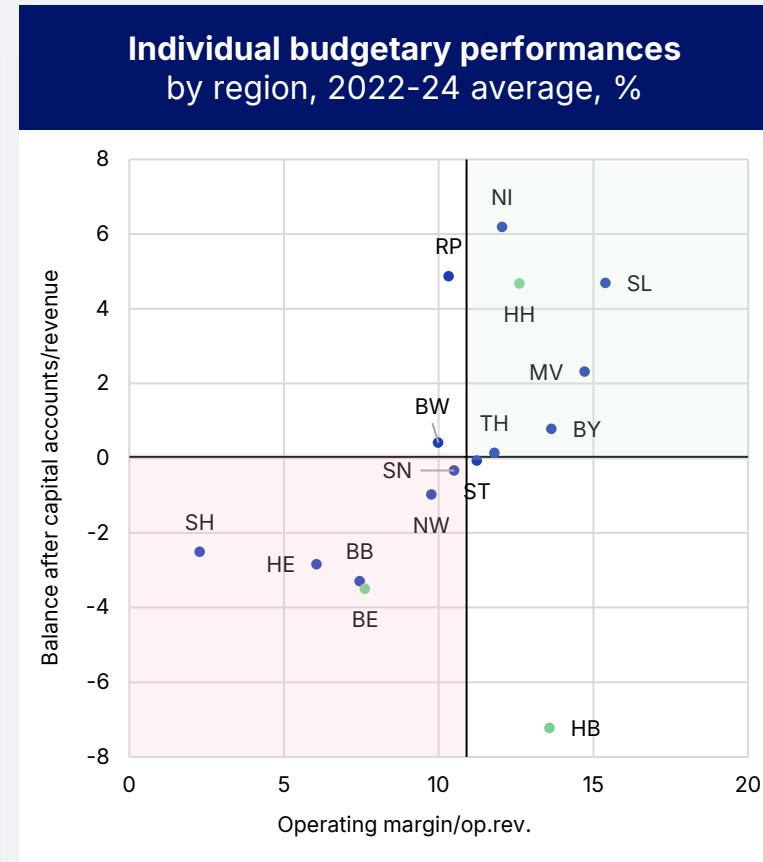
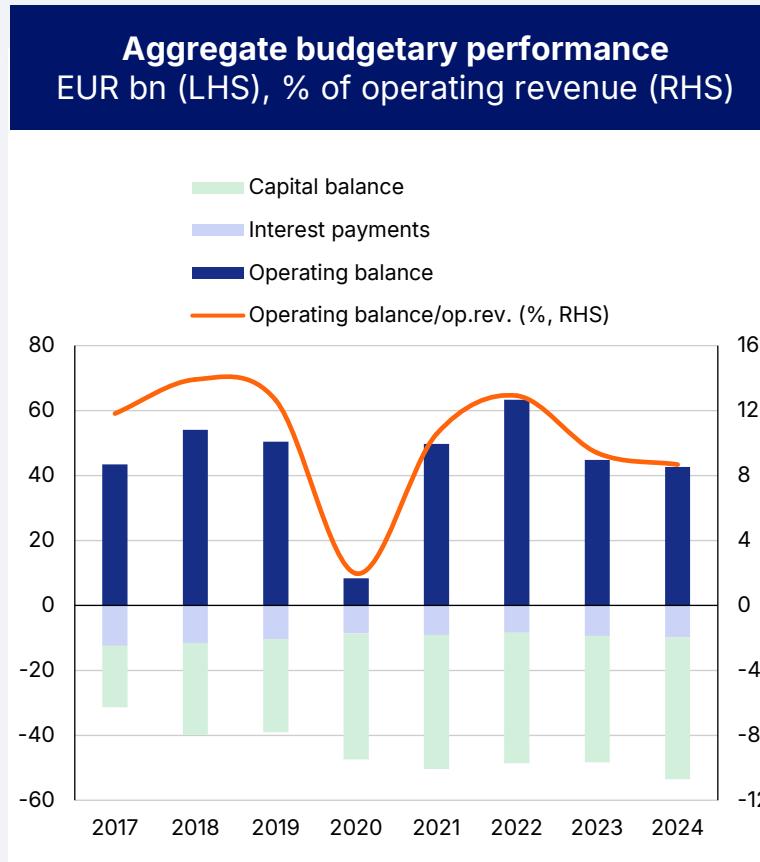
- German Länder
- Spanish regions
- French regions
- Belgian federated entities
- Italian regions & municipalities
- Norwegian counties & municipalities
- Swiss cantons



1. German Länder: Stable Outlook

Regional fiscal outlook is balanced medium term, despite more limited reserves

- Länder continue to face budgetary pressures, while reduced flexibility from reserves compared to previous years. Fiscal positions remain heterogeneous and some Länder likely to draw from their pension funds in the near term. State-funded investments will support Länder budget, though annual volumes will be relatively limited.
- Compared to other government tiers, Länder deficits remained relatively low, while municipalities saw record deficits being added on top of old debt requiring support from the Land (e.g., NRW will take over EUR 8.9bn in liquidity credits from its municipalities).



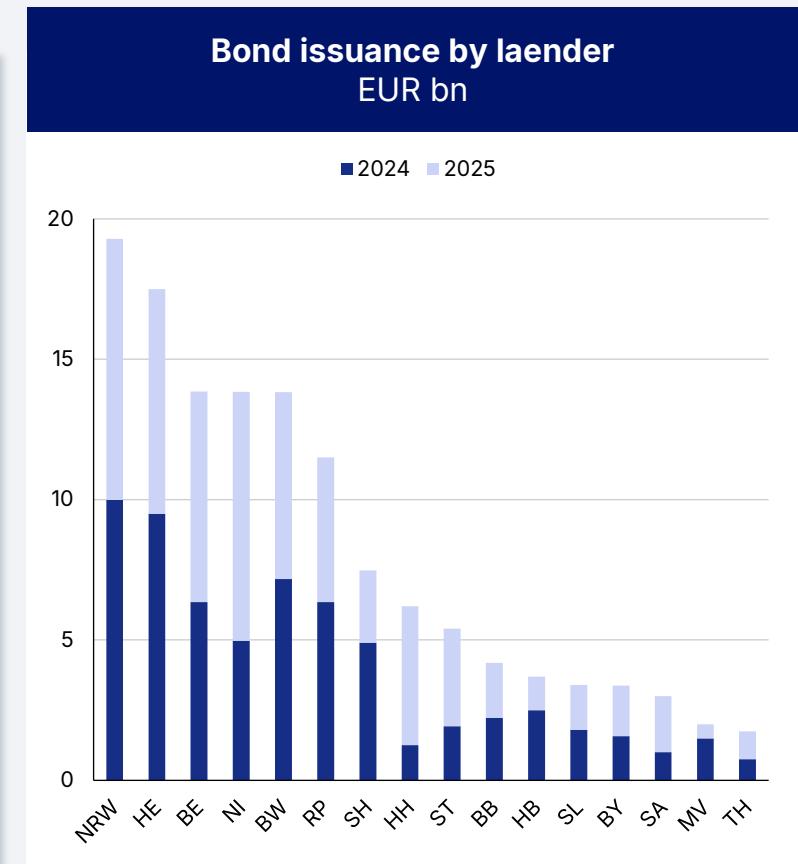
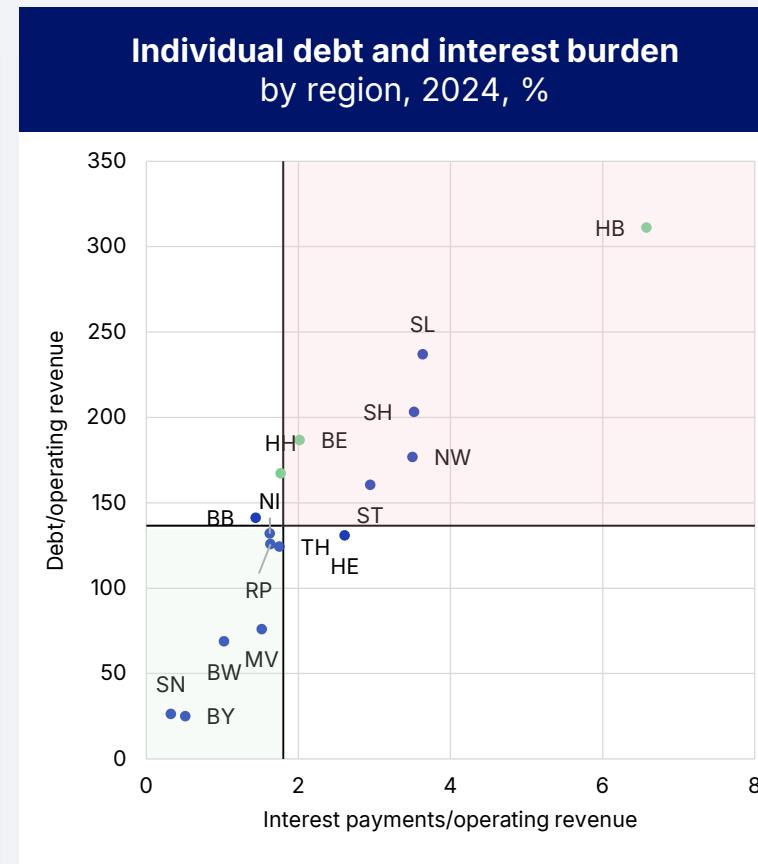
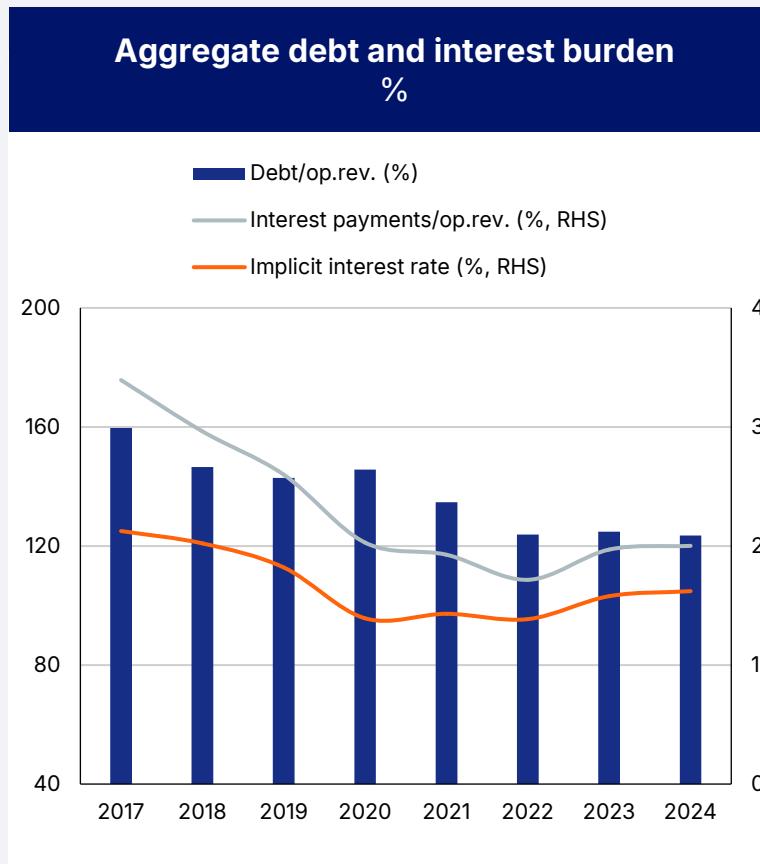
Source: Destatis, Scope Ratings

Note: Axes cross at the respective median. Source: Destatis, Scope Ratings

Source: Destatis, Scope Ratings

Regional debt ratios stabilise despite higher funding volumes

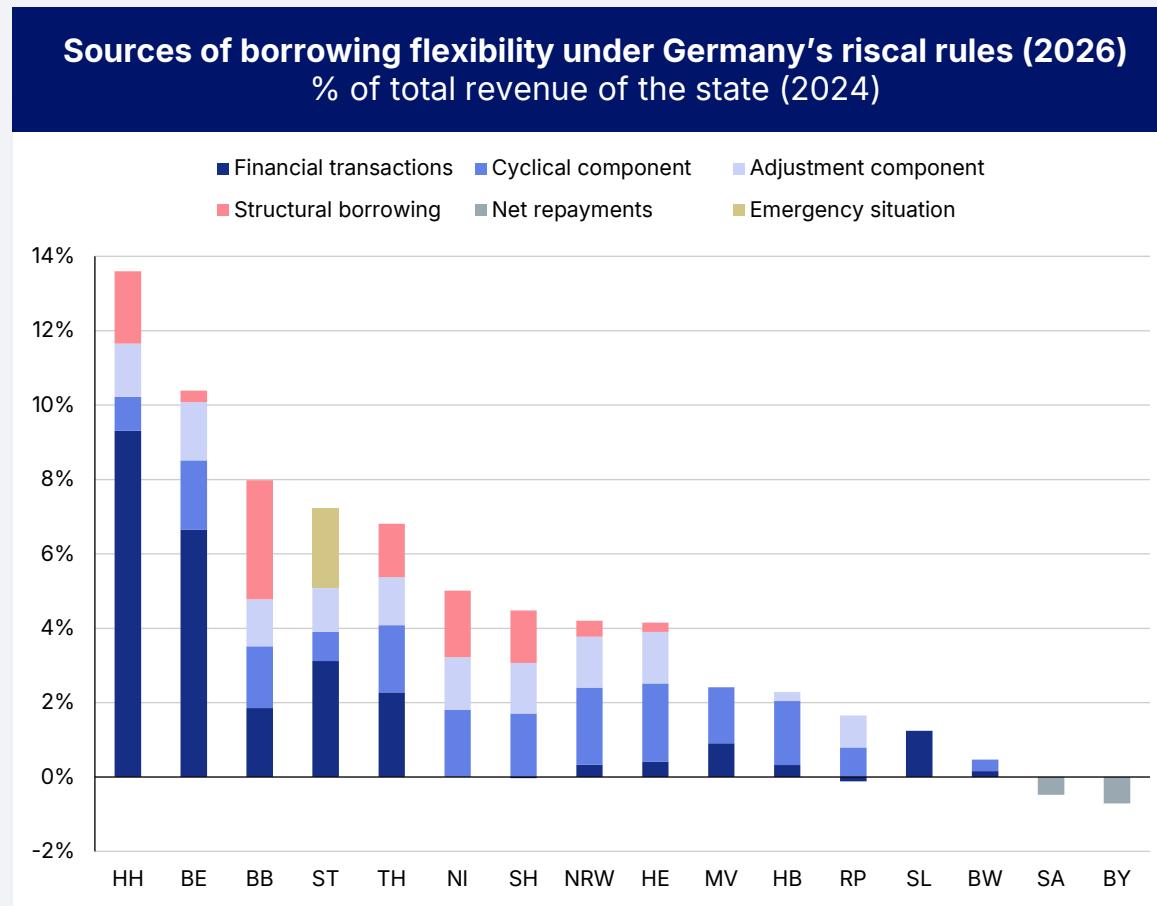
- Multi-year downward debt trajectory before 2020 has come to a halt with Länder making use of the flexibility of the debt brake even before the latest amendments to the rule (i.e., via financial transactions). Aggregate debt ratios are likely to stagnate, supported by increasing revenues as debt levels rise.
- Strong debt affordability across Länder despite substantial differences in debt levels. German Länder continue to represent the benchmark sub-sovereign segment, supported by strong market access and federal backing.



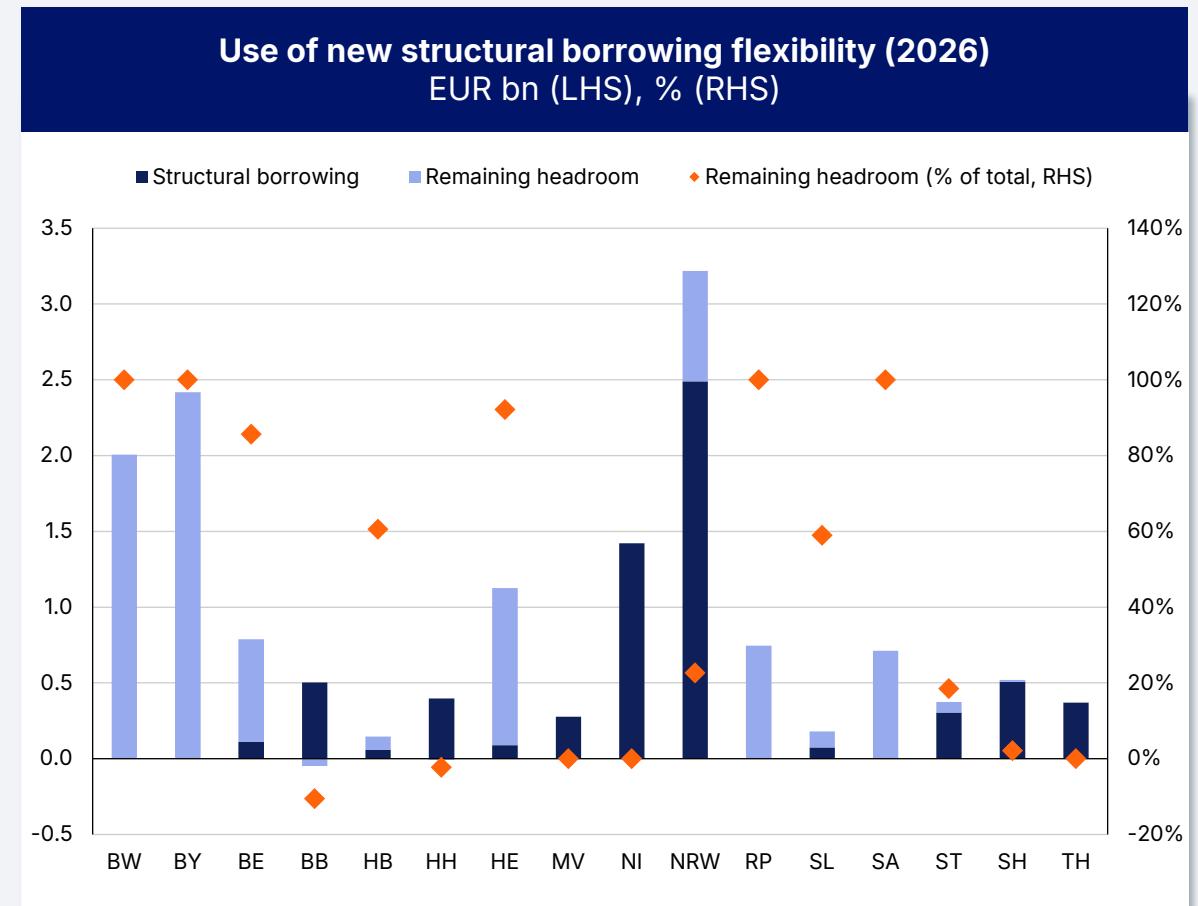
Source: Destatis, Scope Ratings

Policy shift: amendments to debt brake feed through to Länder finances

- Most Länder anticipate net borrowing in 2026 (with the exception of BY and SA), with different parts of the fiscal rules allowing some flexibility. Financial transactions (esp. HH and BE) remain a key instrument in addition to the cyclical component of the debt brake.
- Structural borrowing remains limited for most Länder. The Stability Council flags an anticipated breach of the limits for BB and HH in 2026.



Note: Chart shows how different fiscal rule components provide borrowing flexibility and how much is used, excluding redemptions for emergency funding. Negative net borrowing indicates overall net repayments. Source: Stability Council Dec 2025, Scope Ratings

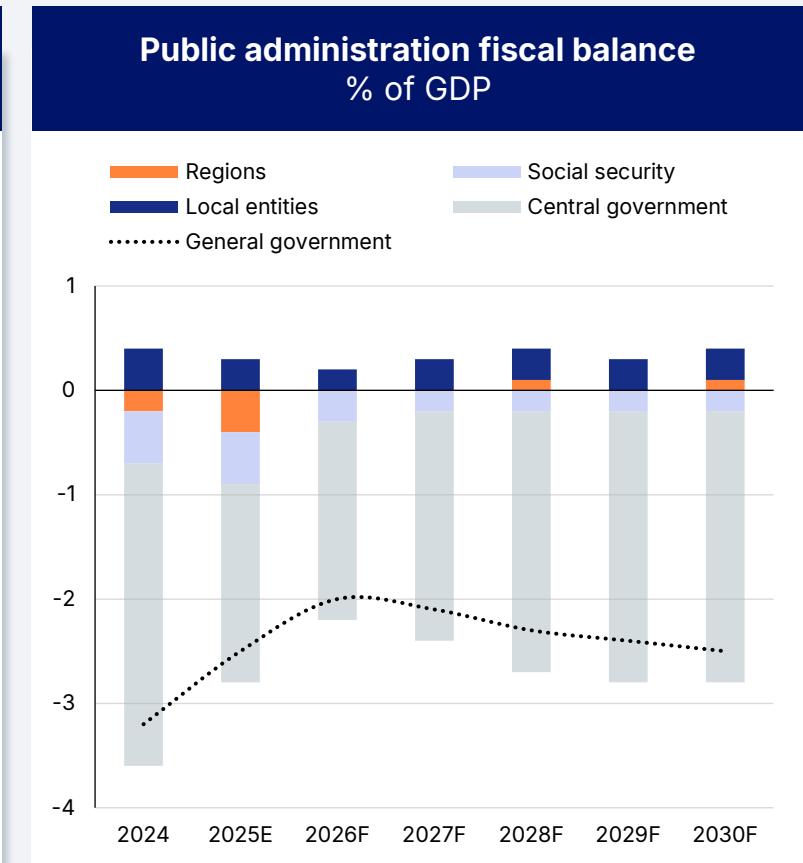
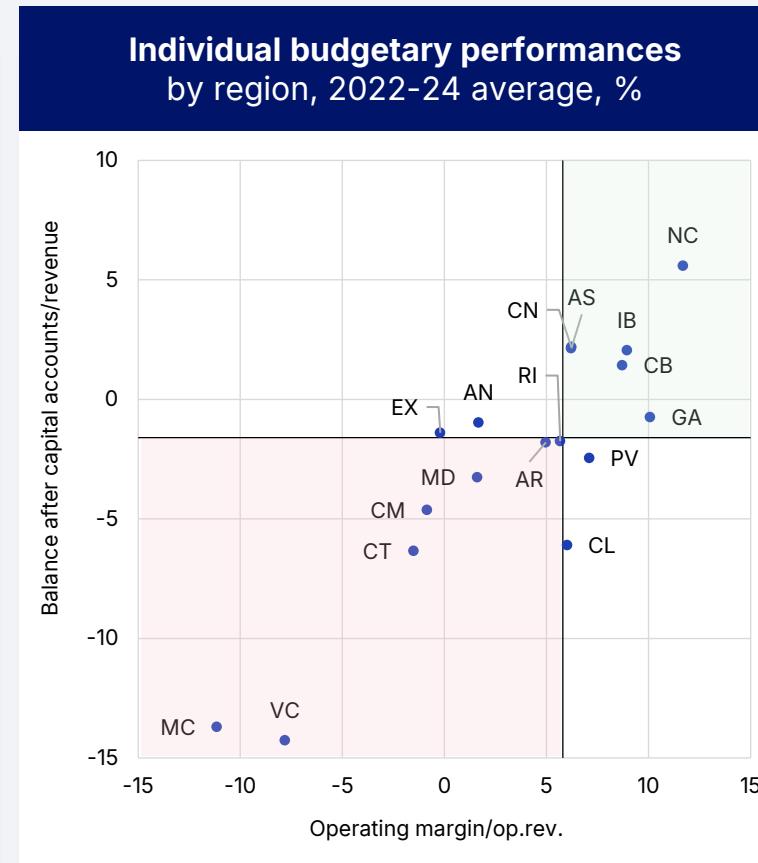
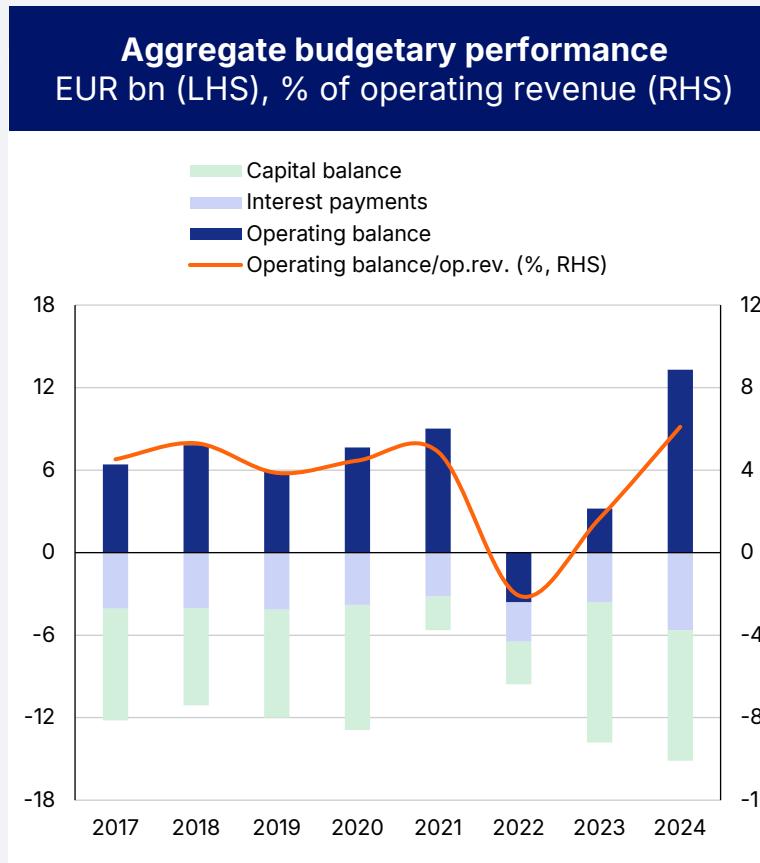


Source: Stability Council Dec 2025, Scope Ratings

2. Spanish regions: Positive Outlook

Regional fiscal outlook to improve despite residual pressures

- Strong economic growth has boosted regional revenues and fiscal performance. Most regions should maintain broadly balanced budgets or small surpluses in the medium term, although outcomes will remain constrained by financing system dynamics and ageing-related spending pressures.
- Budgetary performance among Spanish regions varies markedly reflecting differences in economic bases, fiscal discipline, revenue-raising capacity, population dynamics, and the fact that the current regional equalisation system does not fully capture these structural disparities.



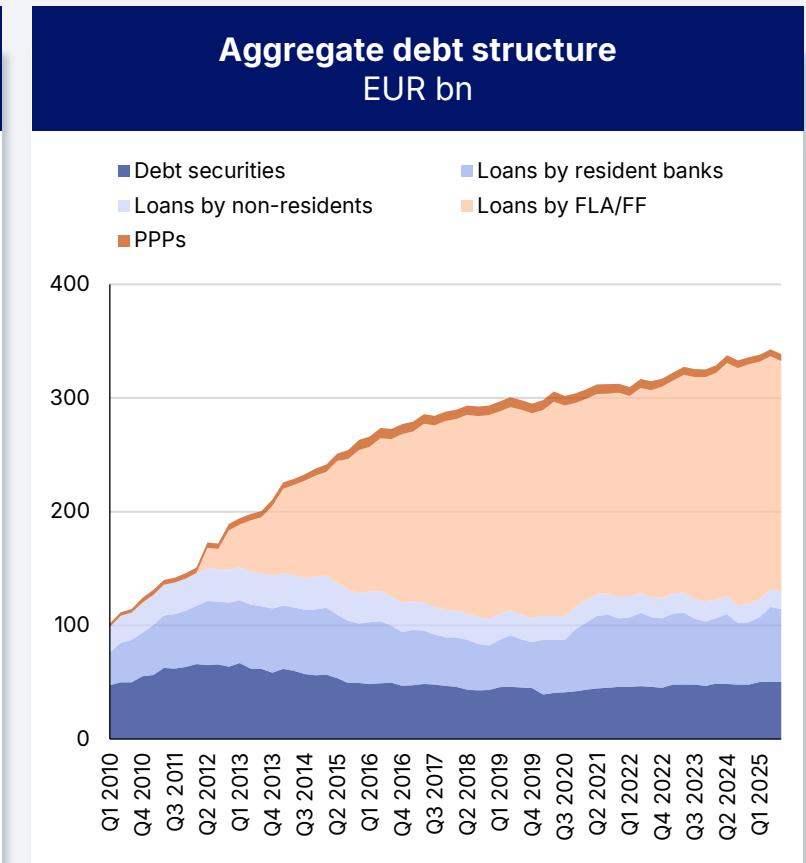
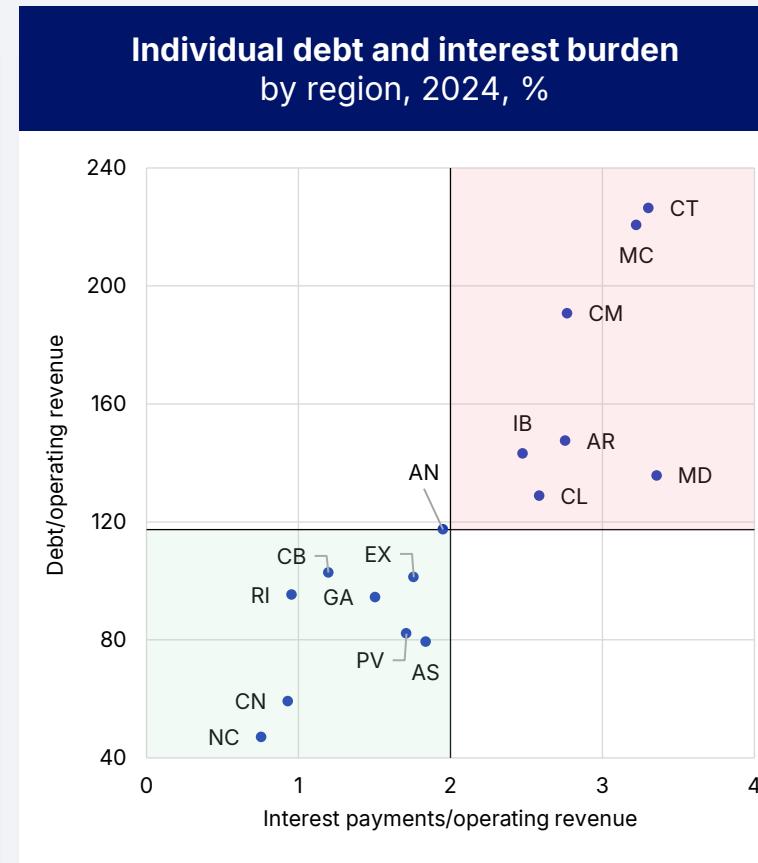
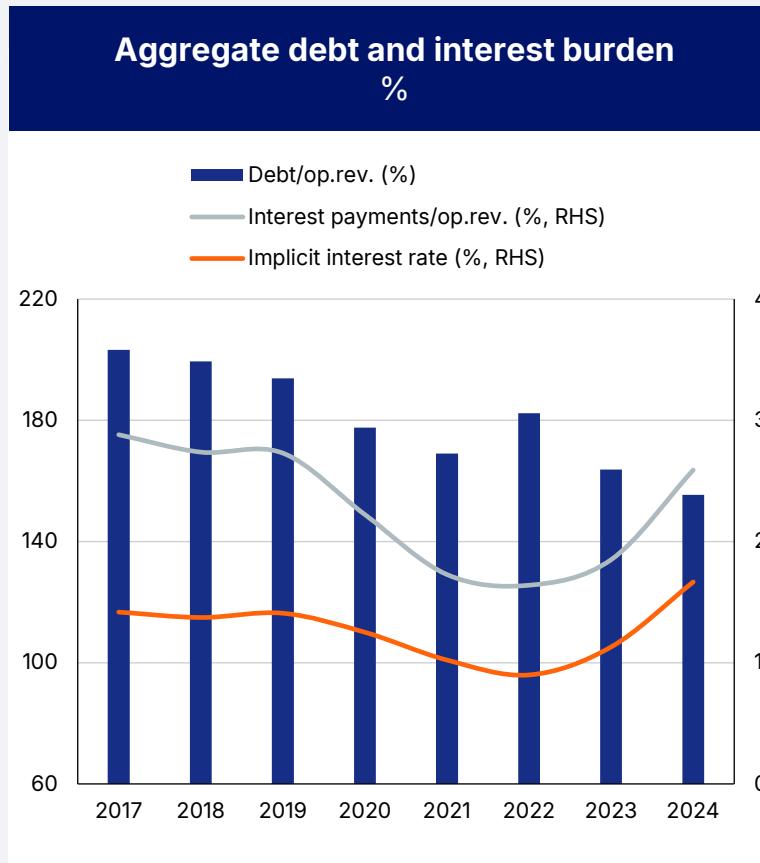
Source: Ministerio de Hacienda (MdH), Scope Ratings

Note: Axes cross at the respective median. Source: MdH, Scope Ratings

Source: AIReF forecasts, Scope Ratings

Regional debt remains high; reforms could improve market access

- Extraordinary state funding has stabilised regional liquidity, but also entrenched higher debt, with large cross-region dispersion. Despite very high debt levels in some regions, interest payment burdens remain relatively low, reflecting favourable financing conditions and sustained sovereign support in recent years.
- After fallen due to the post-Covid economic rebound and high inflation, debt ratios are likely to become more closely driven by underlying fiscal performance again. Reforms on debt relief, a revamped regional financing framework and a redefined state backstop could improve market access.



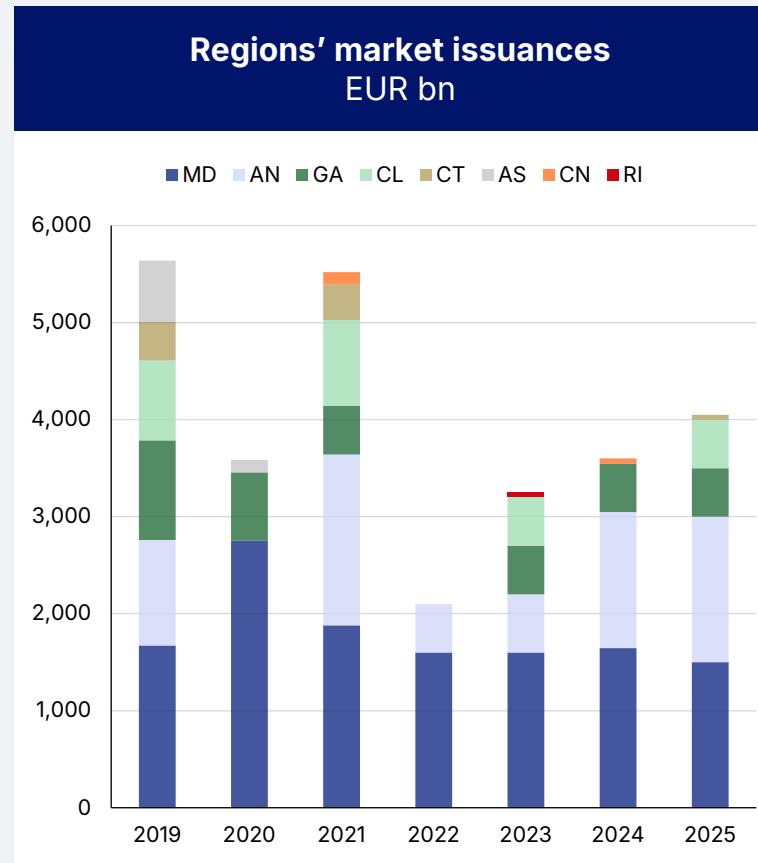
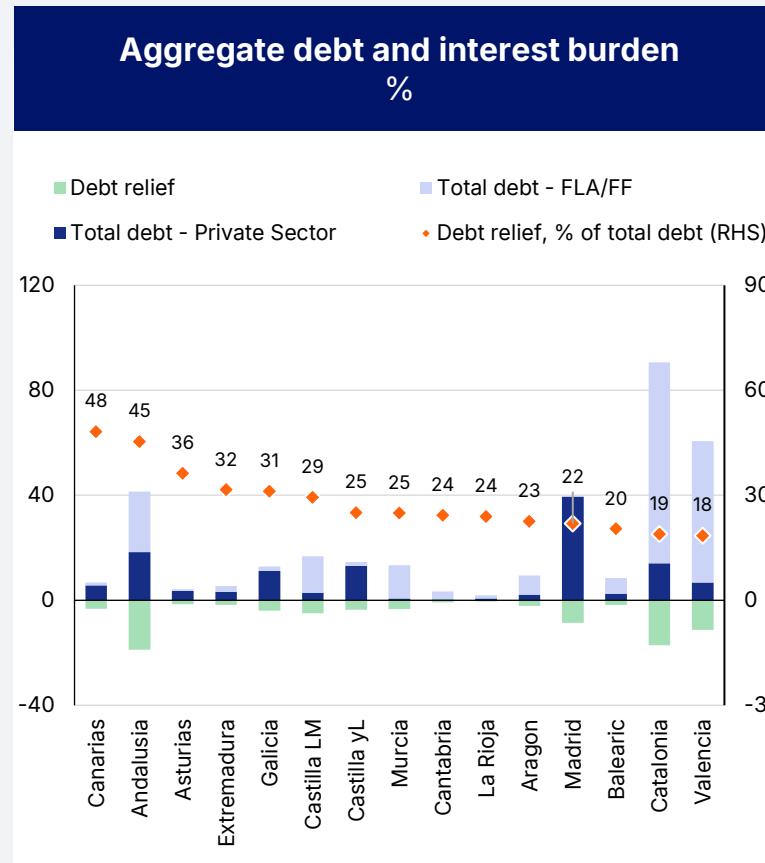
Source: MdH, Scope Ratings

Note: Axes cross at the respective median. Source: MdH, Scope Ratings

Source: Banco de España, Scope Ratings

Policy shift: debt relief on agenda; gradual return to market funding looks likely

- Debt relief is a key policy catalyst, but high implementation risk remains. Net effect: redistribution within the public sector, limited impact on structural credit risk.
- A gradual return to market funding from 2026, under a more flexible framework allowing regions to combine state loans and market borrowing during a transition period (2026–28), with the aim of restoring full market access thereafter. In 2026, Spanish regions have varying degrees of market access, ranging from full access with no restrictions (for example, Madrid) to limited or hybrid access frameworks that cap market funding at 10%–30% for regions.



Market access by region

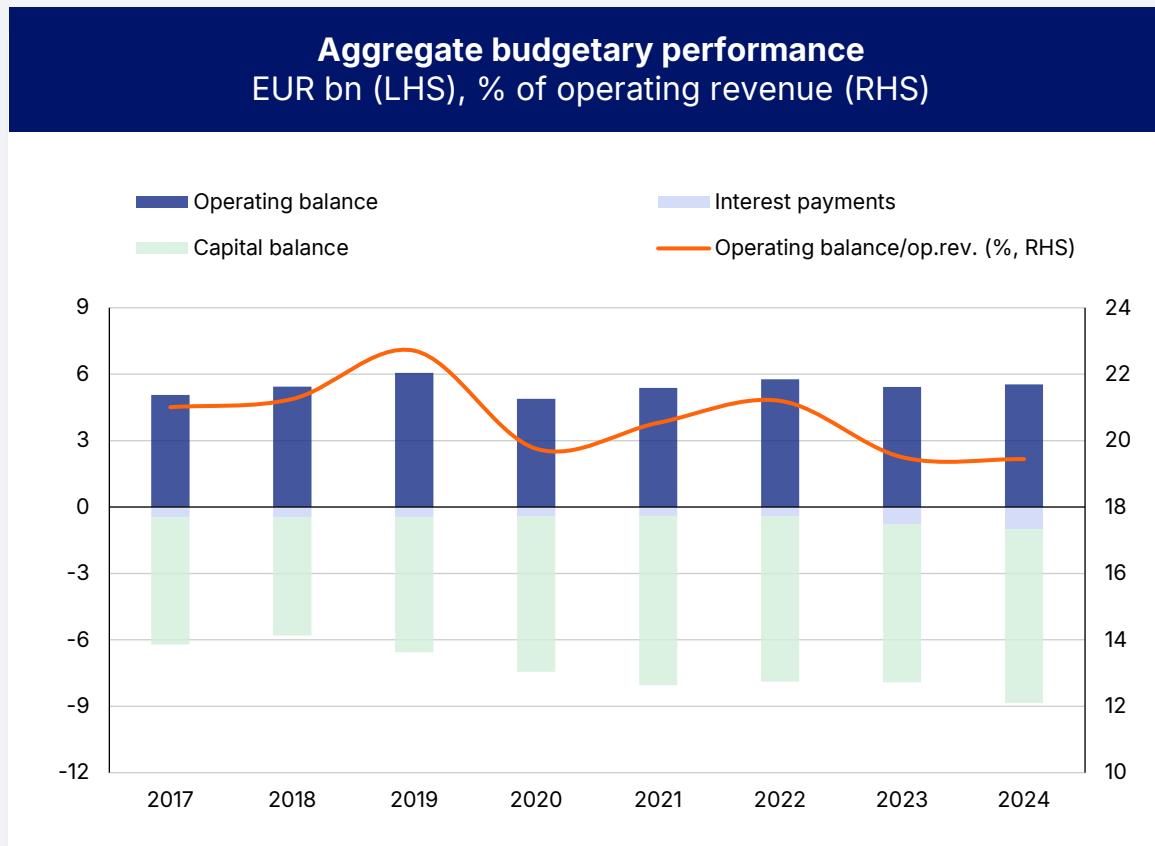
Access Type	Market funding allowed	Regions
Group 1	Full market access	Madrid, Andalucía, Navarre, Basque Country, Galicia, Asturias, Castilla y León, Canary Islands
Group 2	Up to 10% market funding (only Catalonia opts in for 2026)	Valencia, Catalonia, Murcia
Group 3	Around 30% market funding initially	Aragon, Balearics, Cantabria, Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura, La Rioja

Source: Scope Ratings

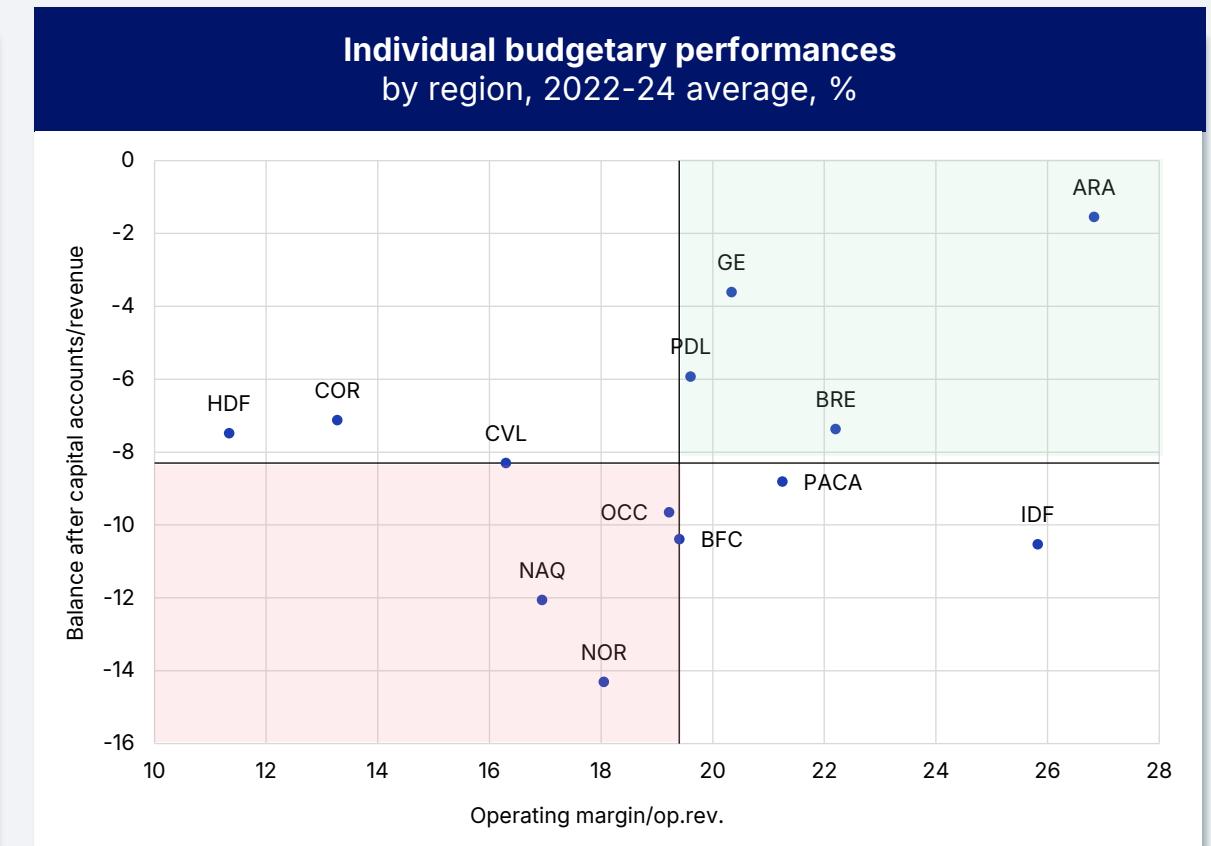
3. French regions: Negative Outlook

Regional fiscal outlook: pressures from central government policy persist

- Regions' budgetary metrics deteriorated in 2025, driven by operating pressures primarily stemming from the central government (CG) consolidation measures, including revenue deductions to fund a new countercyclical fund, frozen VAT transfers, and higher employer contribution rates
- The budgetary outlook remains negatively affected by the CG's consolidation strategy, with further cuts to regional revenue, and by a sluggish economic momentum which weighs on the dynamism of VAT receipts (around half of operating revenue)

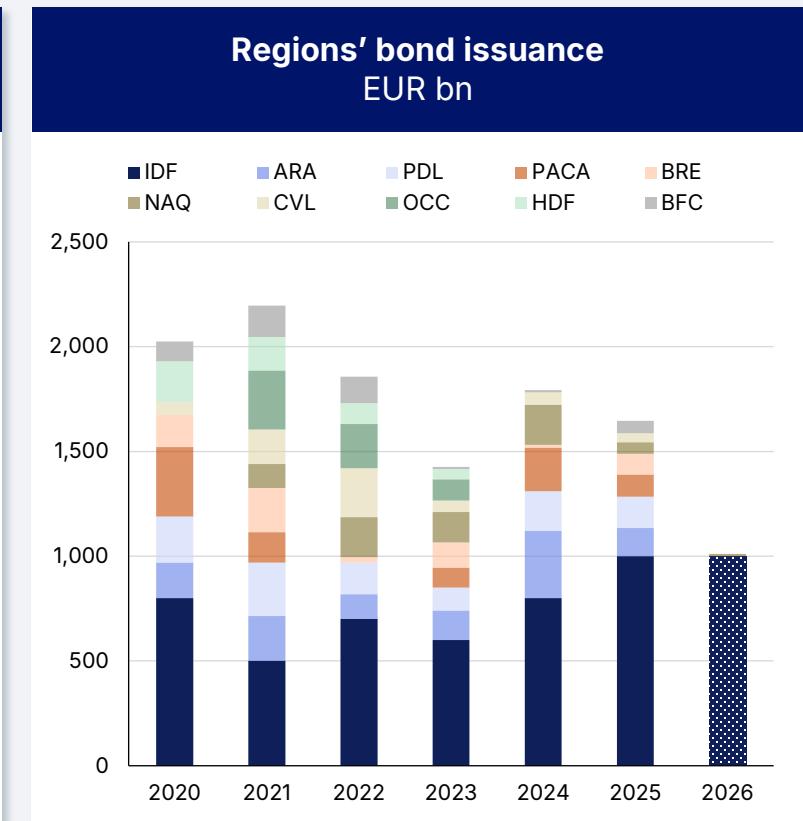
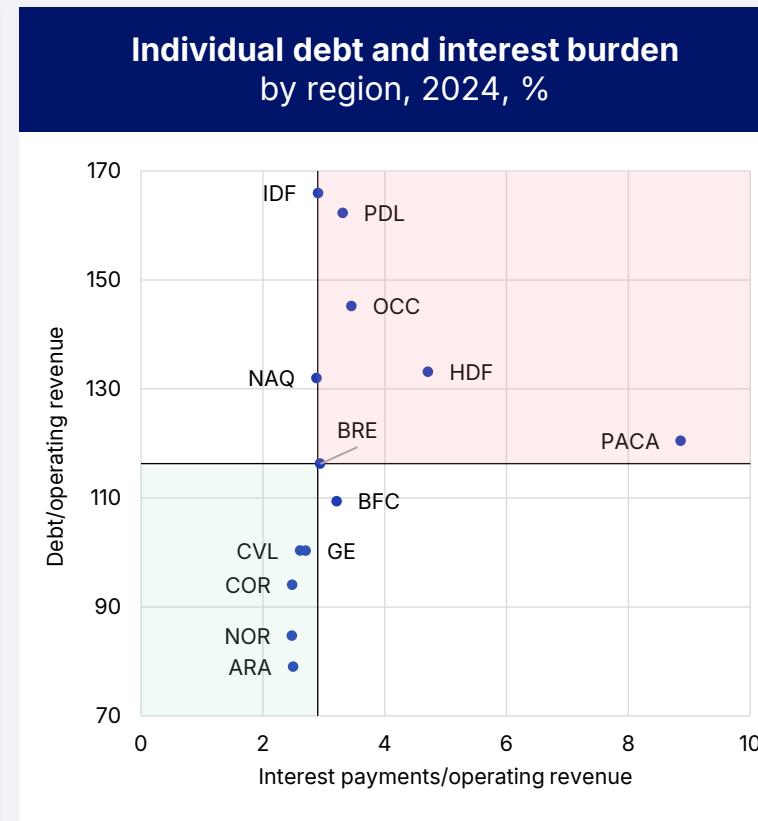
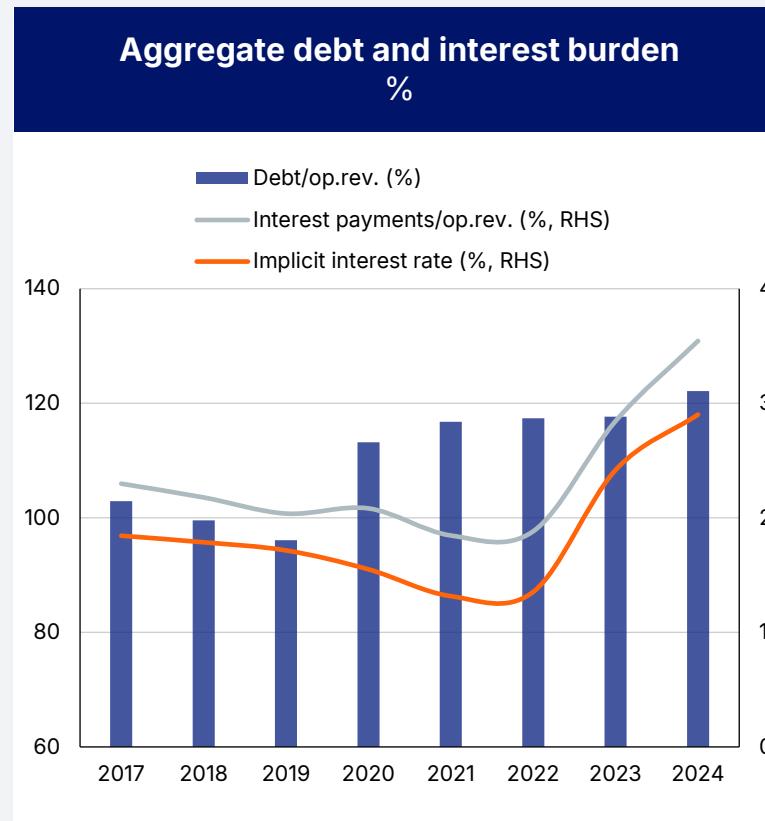


Source : Observatoire des finances et de la gestion publique locales (OFGL), Scope Ratings



Regional debt: leverage to increase steadily

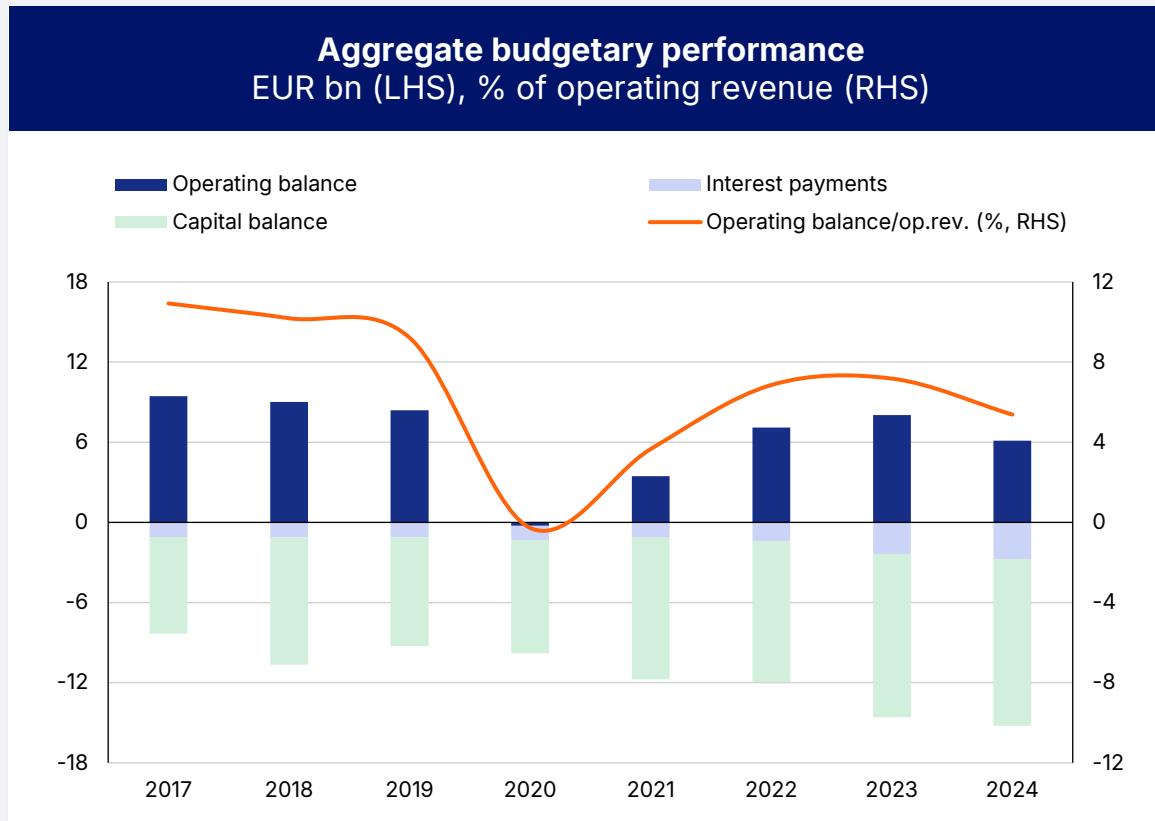
- Indebtedness is expected to continue rising in the coming years, driven by the execution of investment programmes (mainly in transport, education infrastructure) despite the scaling back of multi-year capital investment plans amid tighter budgetary margins
- Higher market rates and sustained borrowing will keep upward pressure on interest payments, which remain moderate but are set to gradually increase due to higher sovereign risk premia, the refinancing of legacy low-rate debt, and investment-related funding needs



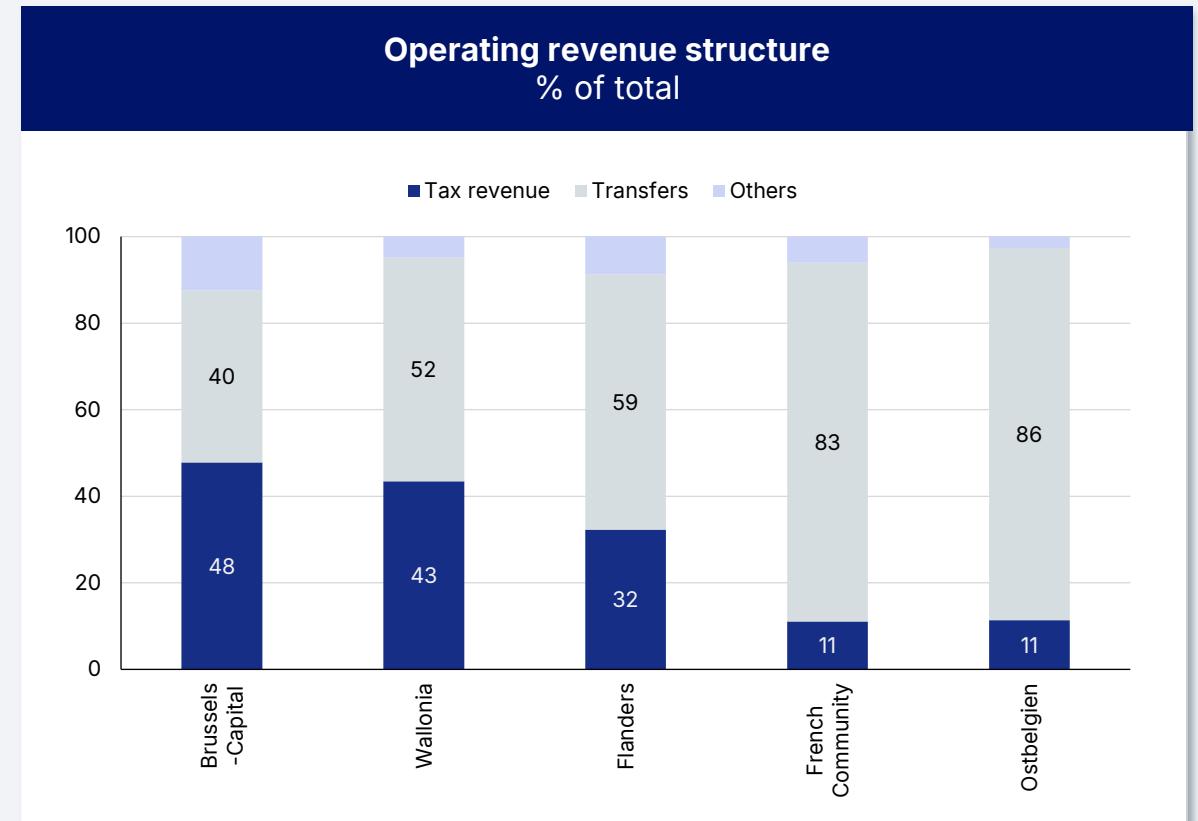
4. Belgian federated entities: Negative Outlook

Regional fiscal outlook marked by gradual, partial improvement

- Federated entities' budgetary performance deteriorated in 2024 due to weaker transfers, decelerating personal income tax revenue and persistent inflation. It is expected to remain broadly stable in 2025, as lower registration fee income in Flanders and Wallonia is largely offset by savings and easing cost pressures.
- From 2026 a gradual recovery is expected, though persistent spending pressures in education, healthcare, and interest costs, combined with muted revenue growth, will continue to weigh on budget metrics. The failure of government formation negotiations in Brussels add uncertainty to the budgetary outlook.
- Communities' budgetary flexibility remains far more constrained than regions, limiting their capacity to achieve significant adjustments and to absorb shocks.



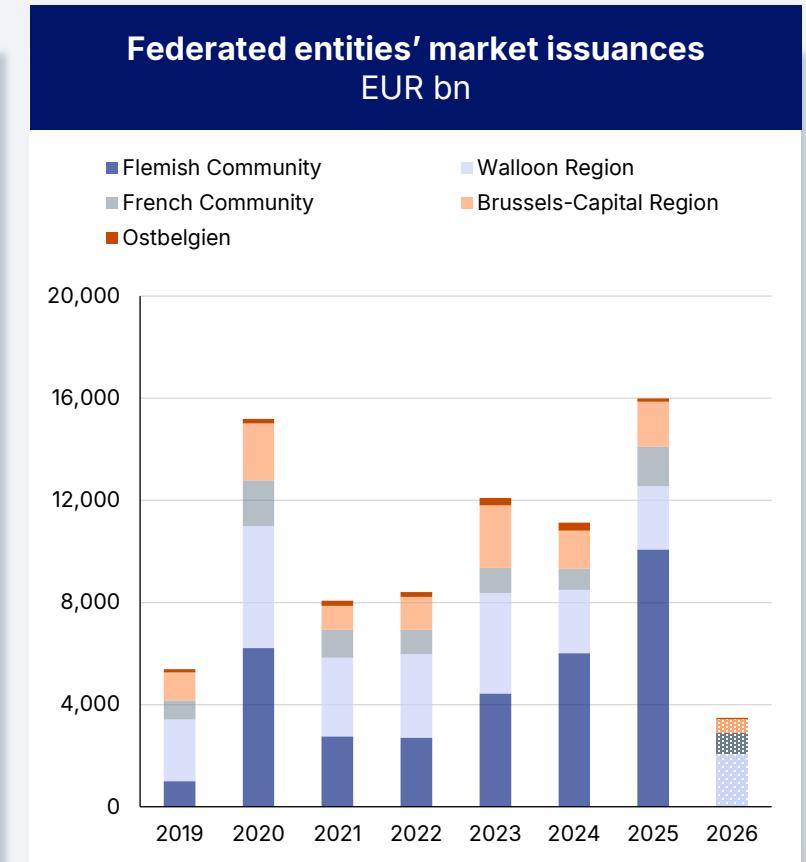
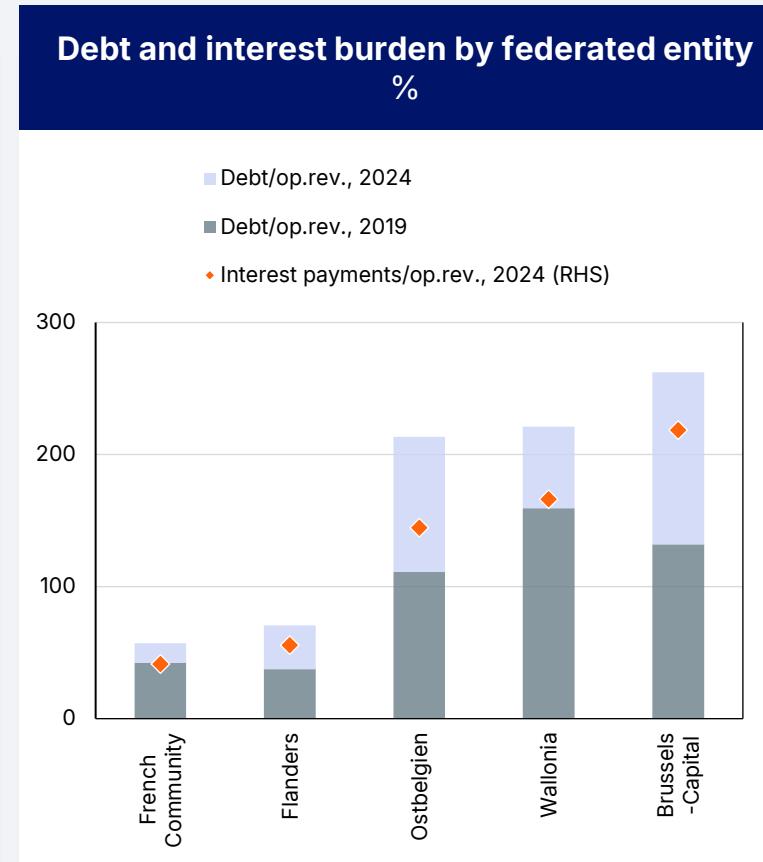
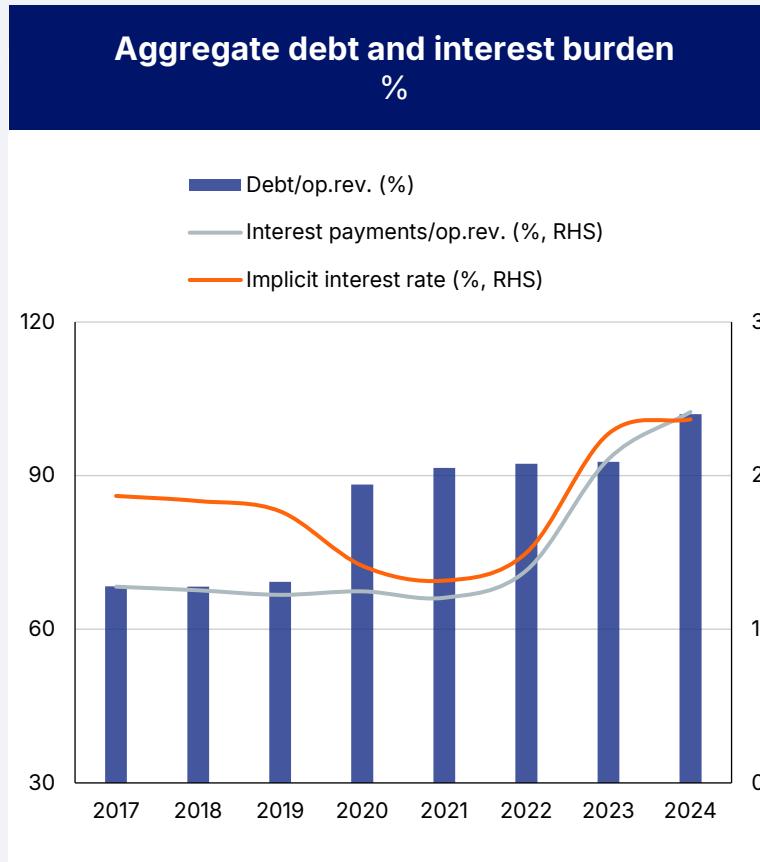
Source : National Bank of Belgium (NBB), Scope Ratings



Source: NBB, Scope Ratings

Regional debt to rise; continued credit divergence between regions

- Debt across federated entities has increased sharply in recent years and is expected to continue rising, reflecting sizeable investment programmes.
- Leverage will continue to diverge across entities: the Flemish Community's debt burden should stay comparatively low, while the Brussels-Capital and Walloon regions are expected to remain highly indebted. The French Community's debt is projected to rise significantly from a lower base, and the Ostbelgien's debt should continue to increase, albeit at a slowing pace, consistent with its ambitious consolidation plans.



Source: NBB, Scope Ratings

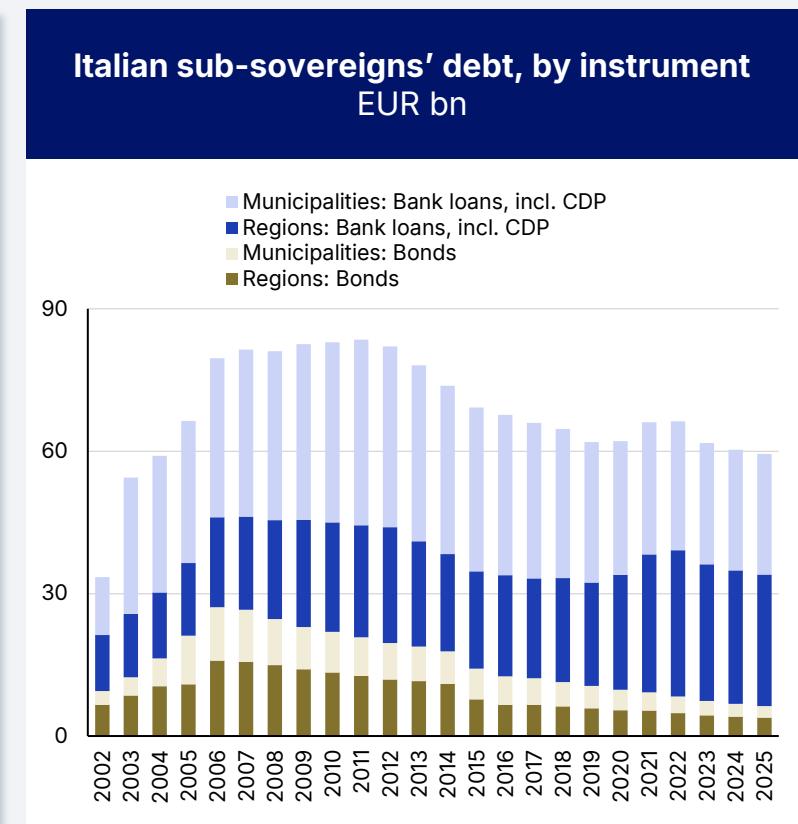
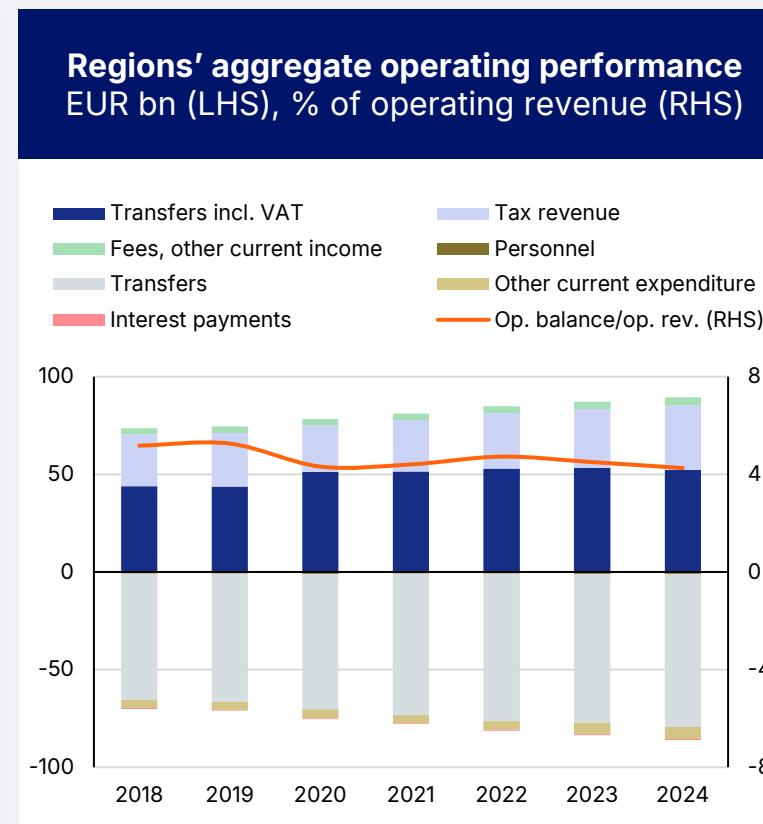
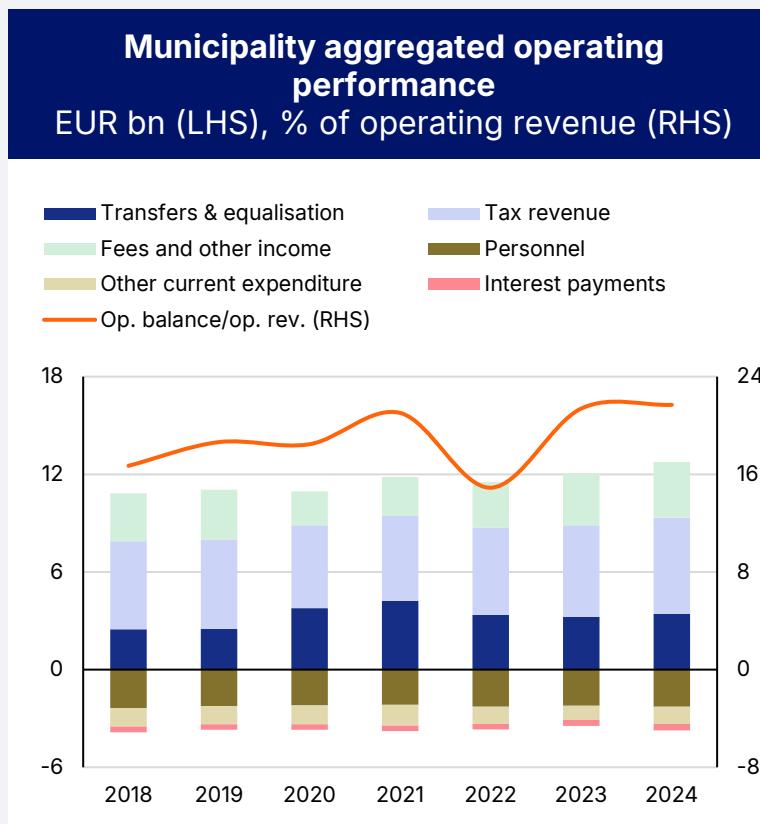
Source: NBB, Scope Ratings

Source: Bloomberg, Scope Ratings

5. Italian regions & municipalities: Stable Outlook

Fiscal outlook, debt: budgetary resilience improves as deleveraging continues

- Robust operating results are supported by fiscal discipline and relatively stable tax and transfers revenues. High operating costs, modest national growth and contribution to the national public finance consolidation weigh on budgetary margins and autonomous investment ability.
- The deleveraging process continues across Italian sub-sovereigns. Recourse to debt financing is expected to remain limited given the prudent national fiscal strategy, stringent borrowing regulations and ongoing spending of NGEU funds in 2026 and beyond, supporting investment financing.
- Ongoing efforts on the legal and regulatory framework for the activation of fiscal federalism, but implementation challenges persist.



Note: Sample of four large cities (Milan, Turin, Naples, Rome). Source : Ragioneria Generale dello Stato, Scope Ratings

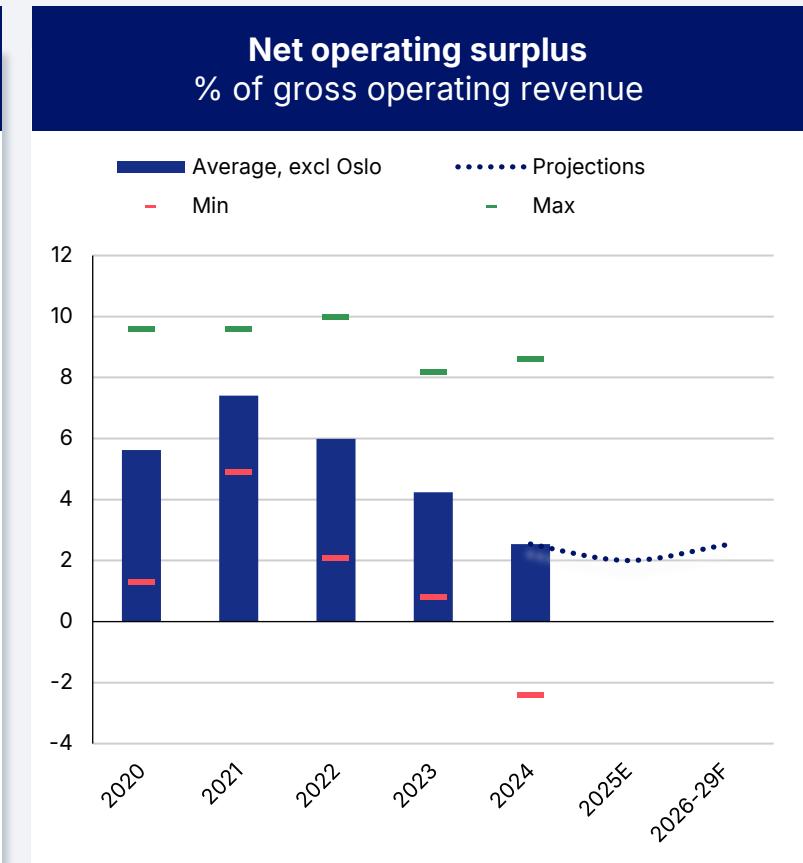
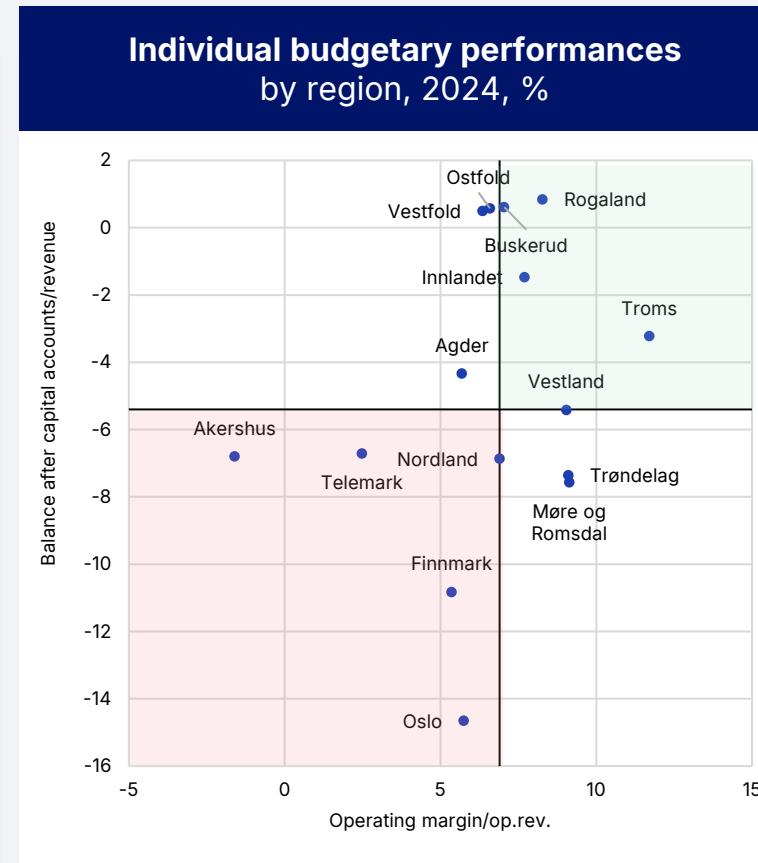
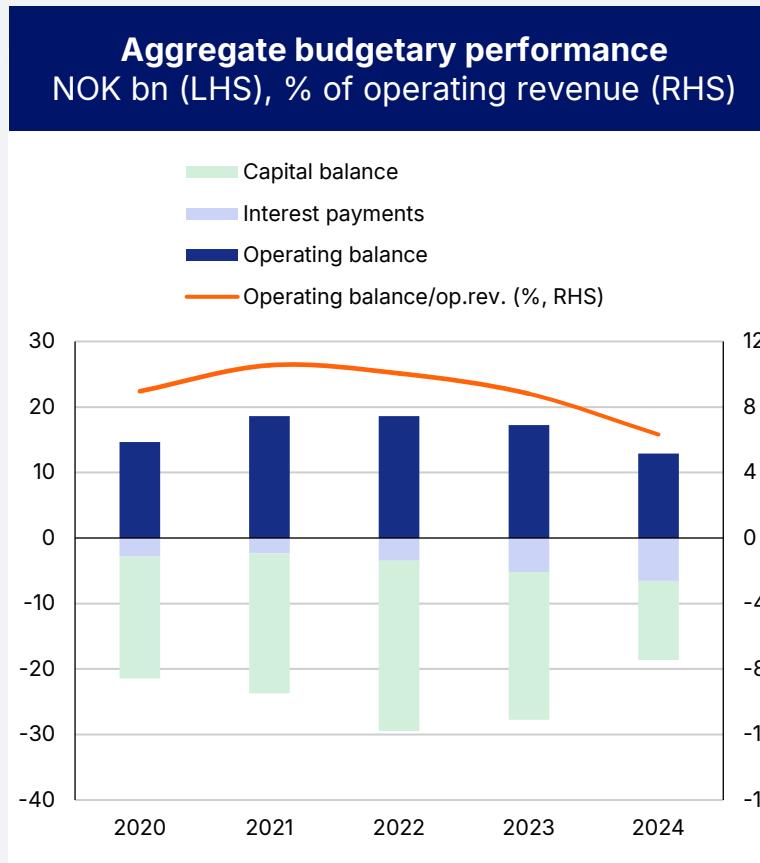
Note: sample of seven large regions across the country (Emilia-Romagna, Liguria, Lombardia, Piemonte, Puglia, Umbria, Veneto). Source: Ragioneria Generale dello Stato, Scope Ratings.

Source: Bank of Italy, Scope Ratings.

6. Norwegian local & regional governments: Stable Outlook

Counties' fiscal outlook: budgetary pressures require savings plans

- Norwegian counties continue to face high pressures from operating accounts as expenditure growth continues to outpace revenue growth alongside elevated investment needs related to education and transportation.
- While unpopular spending cuts might be necessary, restructuring programmes embedded in a supportive institutional framework are expected to enable counties to address these challenges. Net operating surpluses are expected to gradually recover, allowing self-financing of investments without overly relying on reserve funds.



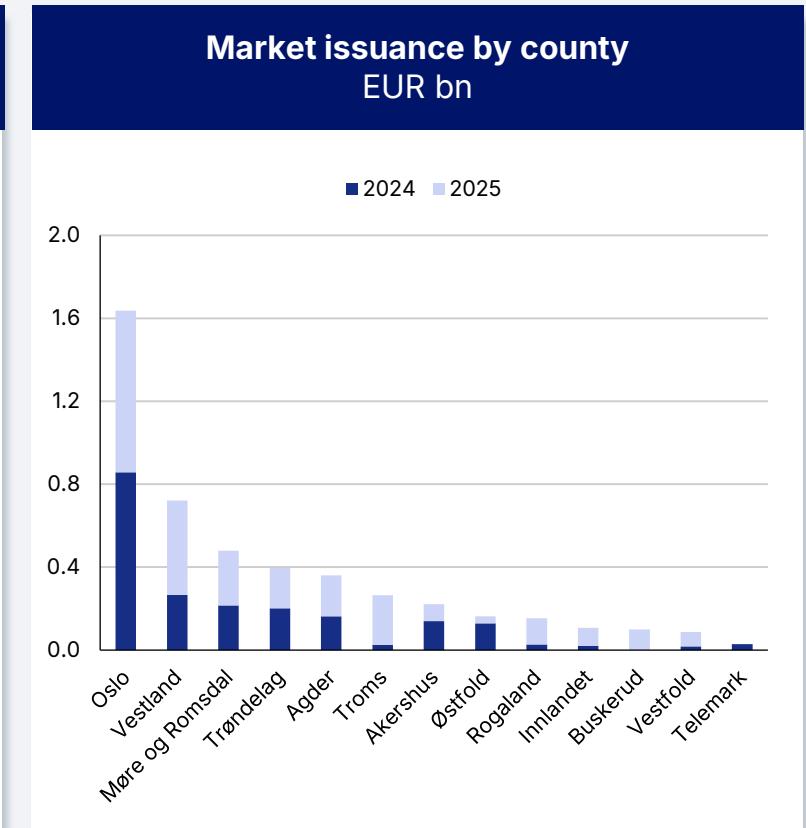
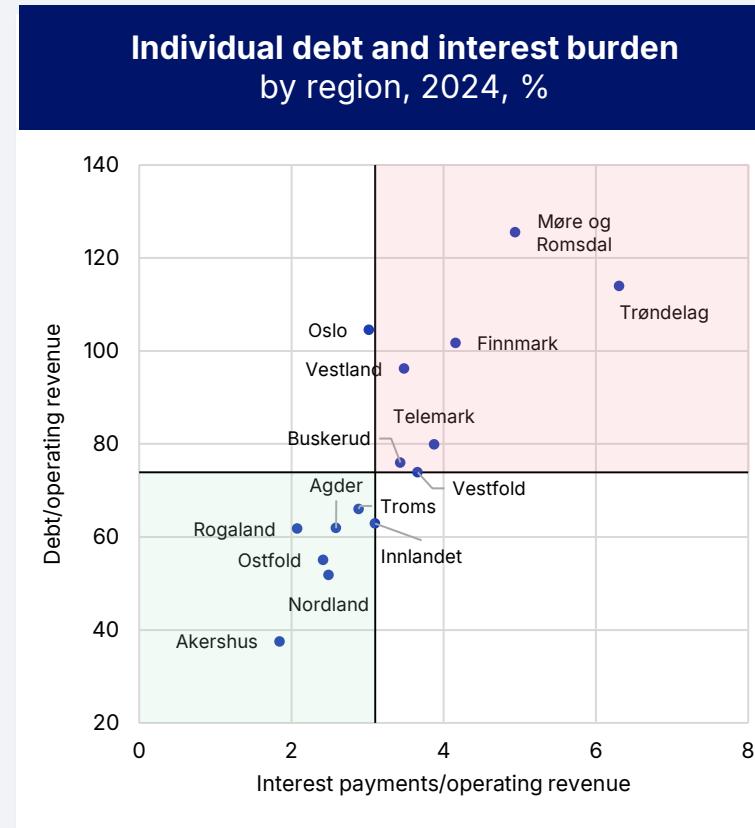
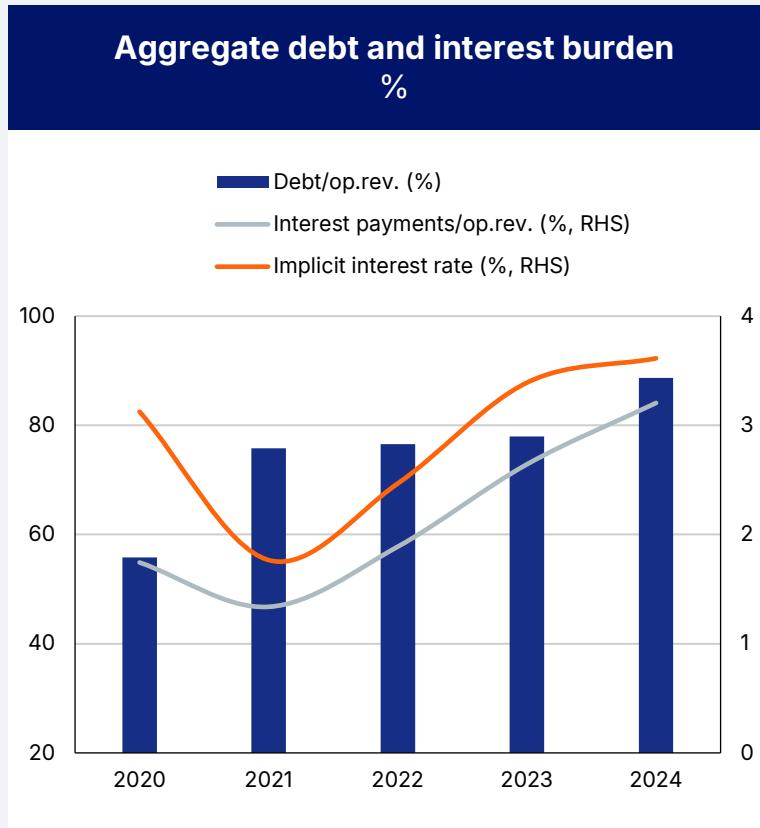
Source: KOSTRA, Scope Ratings

Note: Axes cross at the respective median. Source: KOSTRA, Scope Ratings

Note: shown is the average of the individual county ratios. Source: KOSTRA, county financial reports and plans, Scope Ratings

Regional debt increases amid high investment needs

- Rising debt levels are expected across most counties reflecting high investments and maintenance needs for schools and road infrastructure. With operating balances recovering only gradually and net operating surpluses likely to remain below the 4% target of gross operating revenue.
- Supported by access to KBN funding and markets, debt affordability is expected to remain robust despite increasing interest expenses and substantial differences in debt levels. Aggregate debt issuance increased to EUR 2.63bn in 2025, up EUR 0.54bn from 2024 (w/o Oslo: EUR 1.85bn in 2025 vs 1.23bn in 2024).



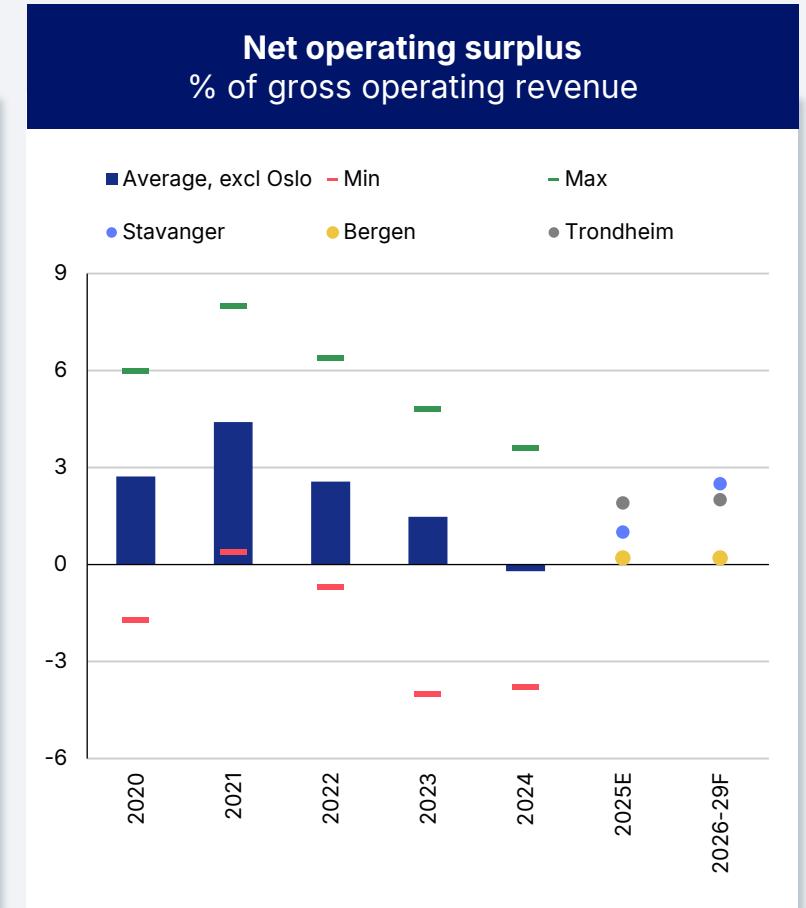
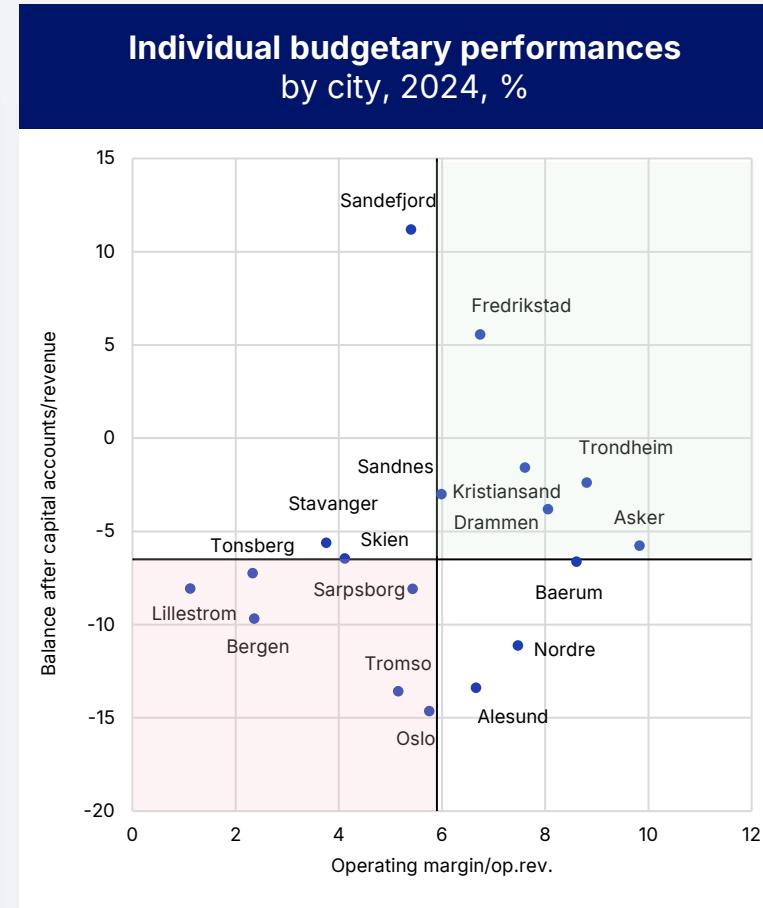
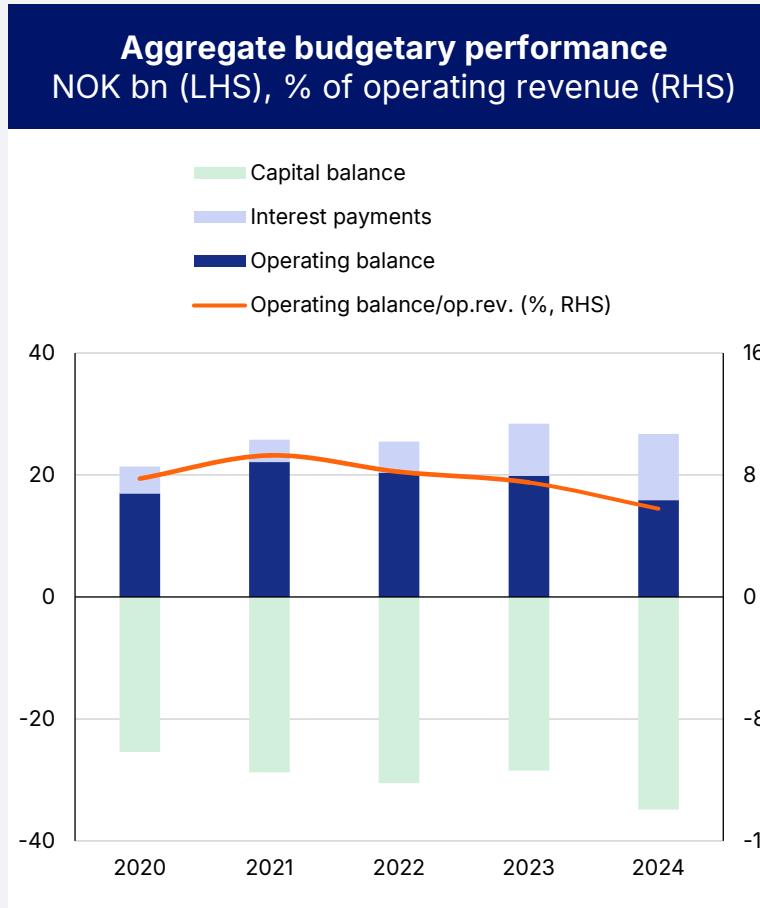
Source: KOSTRA, Scope Ratings

Note: Axes cross at the respective median. Source: KOSTRA, Scope Ratings

Source: Bloomberg, Scope Ratings

Municipalities' fiscal outlook: budgets will see gradual recovery

- Municipalities' budgetary space was eroded since the pandemic from operating expenditure growth outpacing growth in revenues, coupled with continuous high investment needs and rising financing costs.
- Reprioritization will be necessary but operating surpluses are expected to gradually recover, enabling municipalities to face growing investment levels.



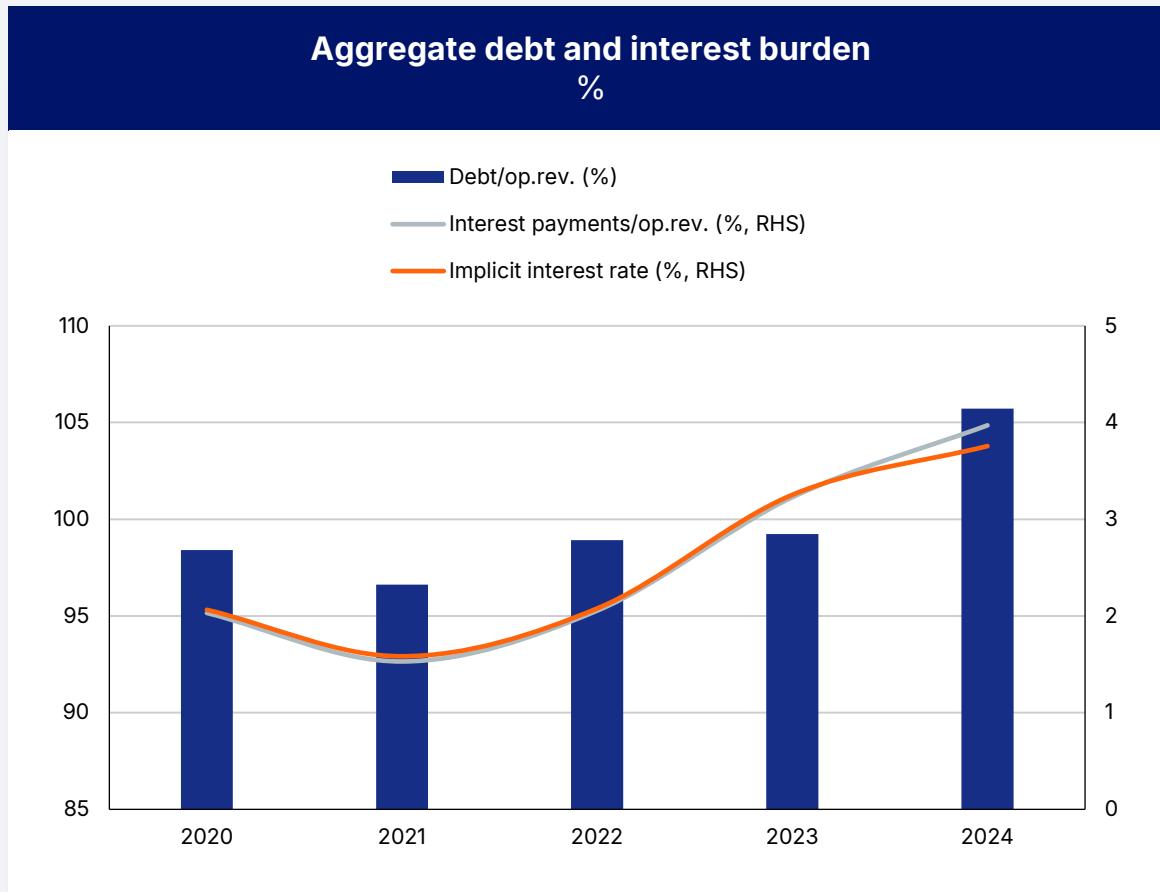
Note: Sample of 18 cities with 50k+ inhabitants. Source: KOSTRA, Scope Ratings

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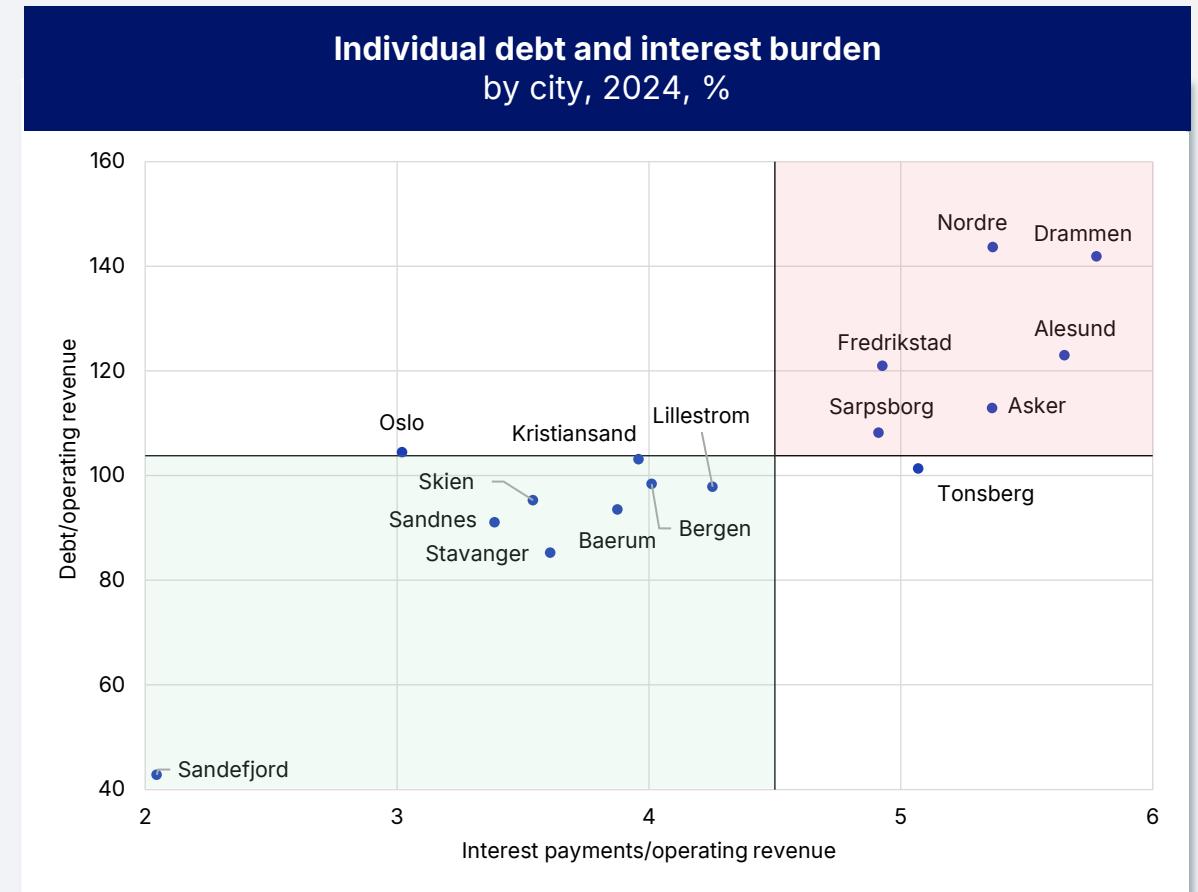
Note: Sample of 17 cities with 50k+ inhabitants, excluding Oslo. Shown is the average of the individual county ratios. Source: KOSTRA, municipal financial reports and plans, Scope Ratings

Municipal debt set to increase moderately

- As operating results came under pressure, municipalities needed to revert to a higher degree of debt-financing of investments. Depending on financing strategies, municipalities combine bond issuances and loan financing via private banks or KBN.
- Debt is expected to further increase, though with slowing speed. Debt affordability remains robust.



Note: Sample of 18 cities with 50k+ inhabitants. Source : KOSTRA, Scope Ratings

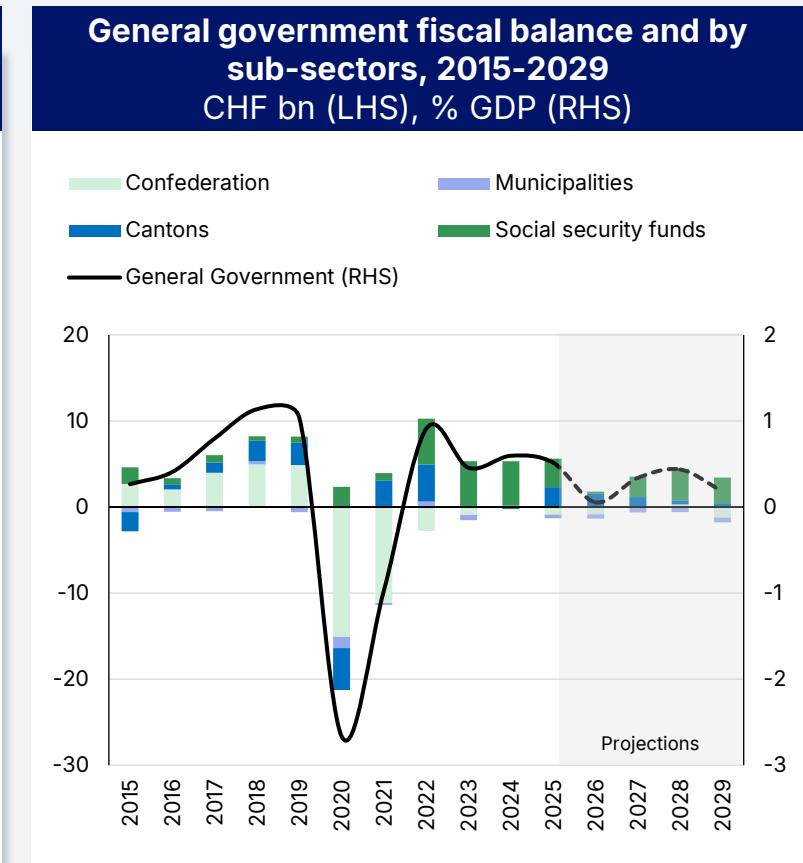
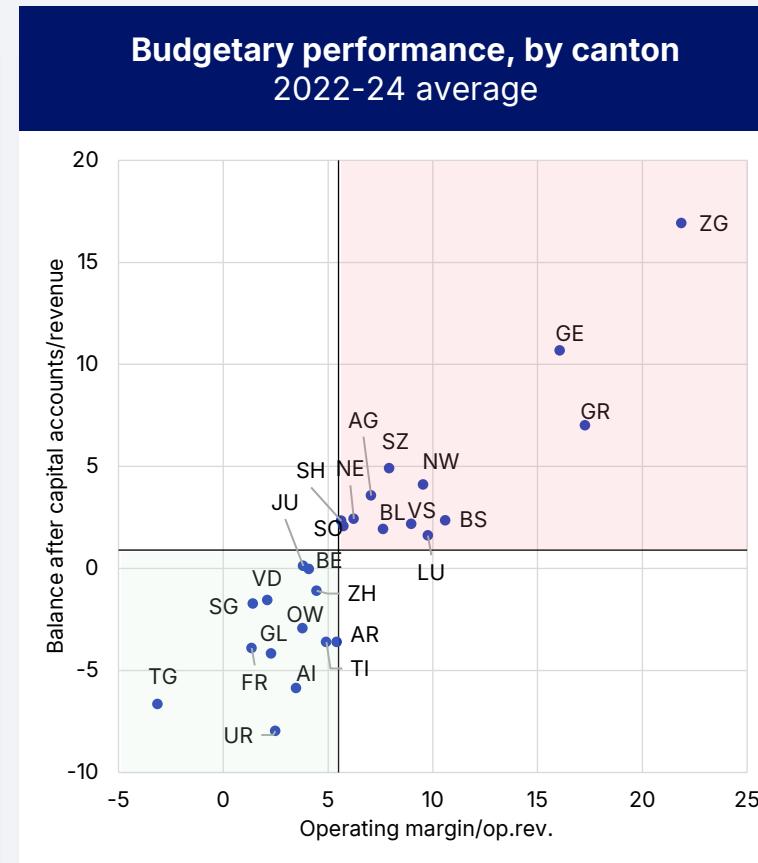
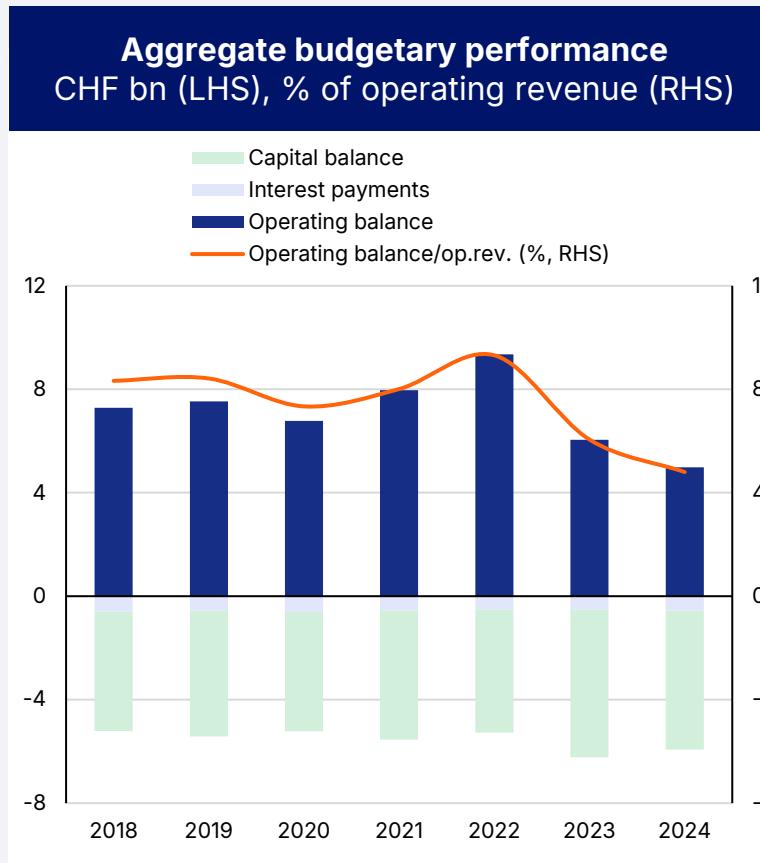


Note: Sample of 18 cities with 50k+ inhabitants. Axes cross at the respective median. Source: KOSTRA, Scope Ratings

7. Swiss Cantons: Stable Outlook

Fiscal outlook: budgetary margins squeezed by operating, investment costs

- Resumed SNB profit distribution will support operating balances, but normalising tax revenue growth and higher fiscal equalisation payments will require some cost savings. Structural expenditure pressures are rising, particularly for personnel costs, school, social and healthcare investment needs.
- Cantons' positive contribution to general government budget balance is expected to decline gradually by 2029. The Impact of the Relief Package 27 on cantonal finances is still unknown, but federal transfers to the cantons are likely to be reduced.



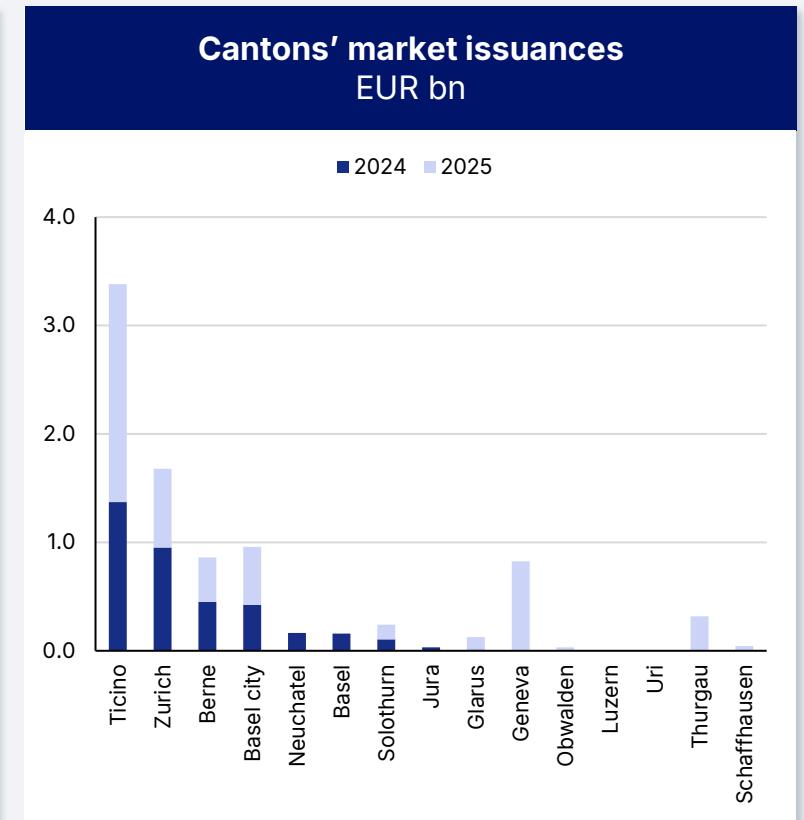
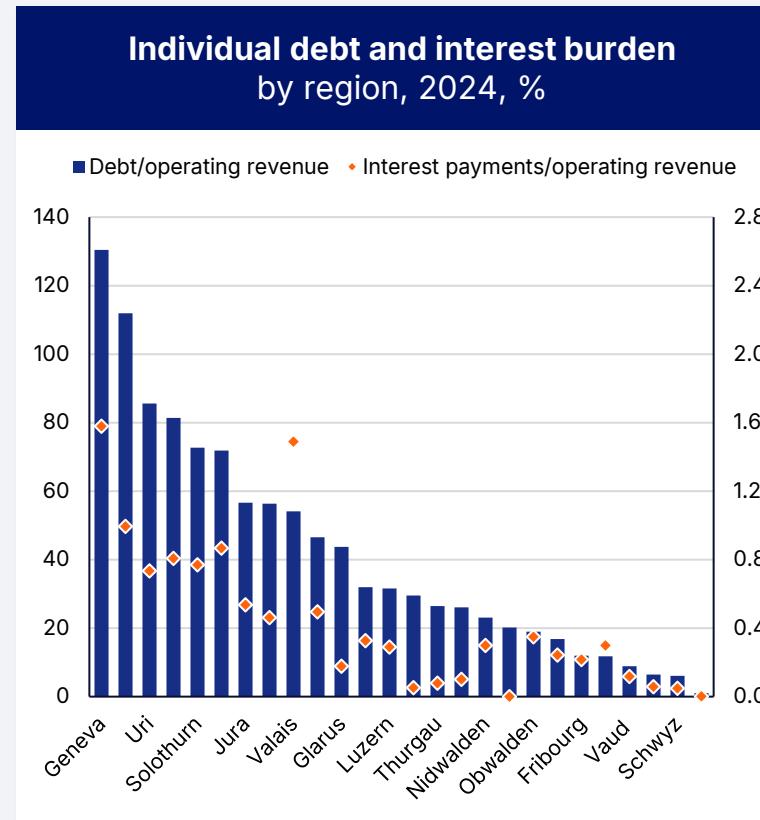
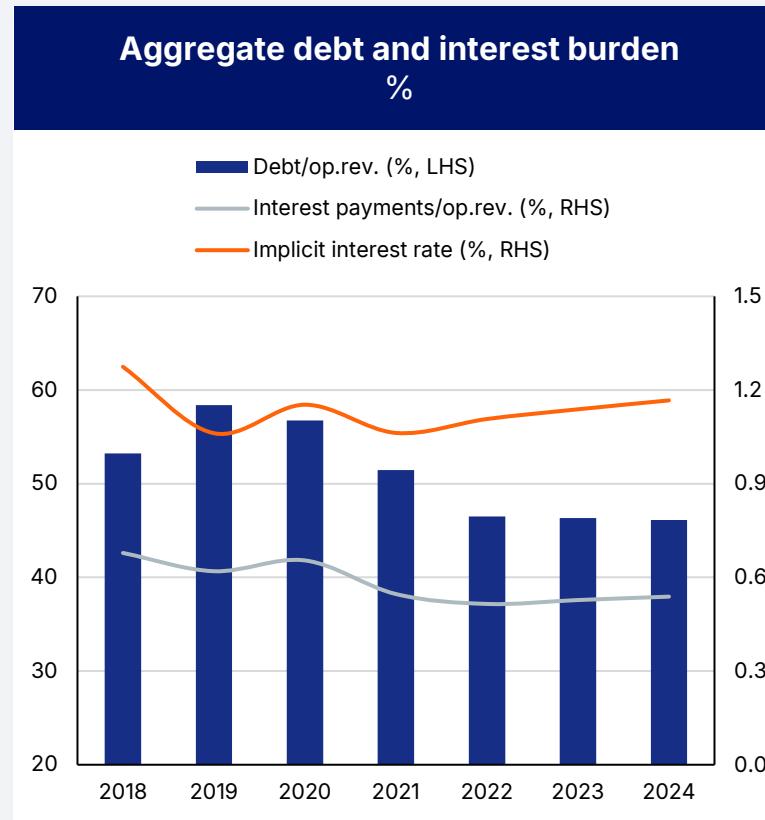
Source: Finanzdirektorenkonferen, Scope Ratings

Note: Axes cross at the respective median. Source: Finanzdirektorenkonferen, Scope Ratings

Source: Federal Finance Administration (FFA), Scope Ratings

Cantonal debt: investment needs increase but financing capacity still ample

- Indebtedness is heterogeneous across the Swiss cantons, due to significant fiscal and borrowing autonomy. Ambitious investment plans and budgetary pressures could challenge self-financing capacity and likely lead to increasing debt levels.
- Favourable funding costs and debt profiles, together with deep domestic capital markets limit the exposure to interest rate volatility and support debt sustainability.



Source: Finanzdirektorenkonferen, Scope Ratings

Source: Finanzdirektorenkonferen, Scope Ratings

Source: Bloomberg, Scope Ratings

8. Appendix

Overview of assigned sub-sovereign ratings available publicly and via subscription



Scope's Sub-Sovereign Ratings

German Länder		Spanish Autonomous Communities
Baden-Württemberg	AAA/Stable	
Bavaria	AAA/Stable	
Berlin	AAA/Stable	
Brandenburg	*	
Bremen	*	
Hamburg	*	
Hessen	AAA/Stable	
Lower Saxony	*	
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	*	
North Rhine-Westphalia	AAA/Stable	
Rhineland-Palatinate	*	
Saarland	*	
Saxony	*	
Saxony-Anhalt	AAA/Stable	
Schleswig-Holstein	*	
Thuringia	*	
Swiss cantons		Norwegian municipalities and counties
Canton of Geneva	*	City of Bergen
Canton of Zurich	*	City of Trondheim
Canton of Basel Country	*	City of Stavanger
		Agder County
		Akershus County
		Innlandet County
		Østfold County
		Rogaland County
		Telemark County
		Vestfold County
		Vestland County

*Rated on subscription, accessible on ScopeOne

Glossary

German Länder		French Regions		Spanish Autonomous Communities		Swiss cantons	
Baden-Württemberg	BW	Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes	ARA	Andalucía	AN	Aargau	AG
Bavaria	BY	Bourgogne-Franche-Comté	BFC	Aragón	AR	Appenzell Ausserrhoden	AR
Berlin	BE	Bretagne	BRE	Asturias	AS	Appenzell Innerrhoden	AI
Brandenburg	BB	Centre-Val de Loire	CVL	Islas Baleares	IB	Basel-Landschaft	BL
Bremen	HB	Grand Est	GE	Canarias	CN	Basel-Stadt	BS
Hamburg	HH	Hauts-de-France	HDF	Cantabria	CB	Bern	BE
Hessen	HE	Île-de-France	IDF	Castilla-La Mancha	CM	Fribourg	FR
Lower Saxony	NI	Normandie	NOR	Castilla y León	CL	Geneva	GE
Mecklenburg-Western Pommerania	NV	Nouvelle-Aquitaine	NAQ	Cataluña	CT	Glarus	GL
North Rhine-Westphalia	NRW	Occitanie	OCC	Comunidad Valenciana	VC	Graubünden	GR
Rhineland-Palatinate	RP	Pays de la Loire	PDL	Extremadura	EX	Jura	JU
Saarland	SL	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	PACA	Galicia	GA	Lucerne	LU
Saxony	SA	Corse	COR	La Rioja	RI	Neuchâtel	NE
Saxony-Anhalt	ST			Comunidad de Madrid	MD	Nidwalden	NW
Schleswig-Holstein	SH			Región de Murcia	MC	Obwalden	OW
Thuringia	TH			Navarra	NC	Schaffhausen	SH
		Belgian federated entities		País Vasco	PV	Schwyz	SZ
		French Community	LCFB			Solothurn	SO
		Flanders	FLEMSH			St. Gallen	SG
		Ostbelgien	DGBE			Thurgau	TG
		Wallonia	WALLOO			Ticino	TI
		Brussels-Capital	BRUCAP			Uri	UR
						Valais	VS
						Vaud	VD
						Zug	ZG
						Zurich	ZH

Contact

Headquarters EU

BERLIN
Lennéstraße 5
D-10785 Berlin
Phone +49 30 27891 0

Headquarters UK

LONDON
52 Grosvenor Gardens
UK, London, SW1W 0AU
Phone +44 20 3 93 68 151

Nordics & Baltics

OSLO
Karenlyst allé 53
N-0279 Oslo
Phone +47 21 09 38 35

Central & Eastern Europe

FRANKFURT AM MAIN
Eurotheum
Neue Mainzer Straße 66-68
D-60311 Frankfurt am Main
Phone +49 69 66 77 389 0

POZNAŃ

Władysława Andersa 7
PL, 61-894 Poznań

Southern Europe

MADRID
Paseo de la Castellana 141
E-28046 Madrid
Phone +34 919 491 662

MILAN

Via Nino Bixio, 31
IT-20129 Milano MI
Phone +39 02 8295 8254

Western Europe

PARIS
10 avenue de Messine
FR-75008 Paris
Phone +33 6 62 89 35 12



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