

Pensions in Europe: expenditure and beneficiaries

Statistics in focus

POPULATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

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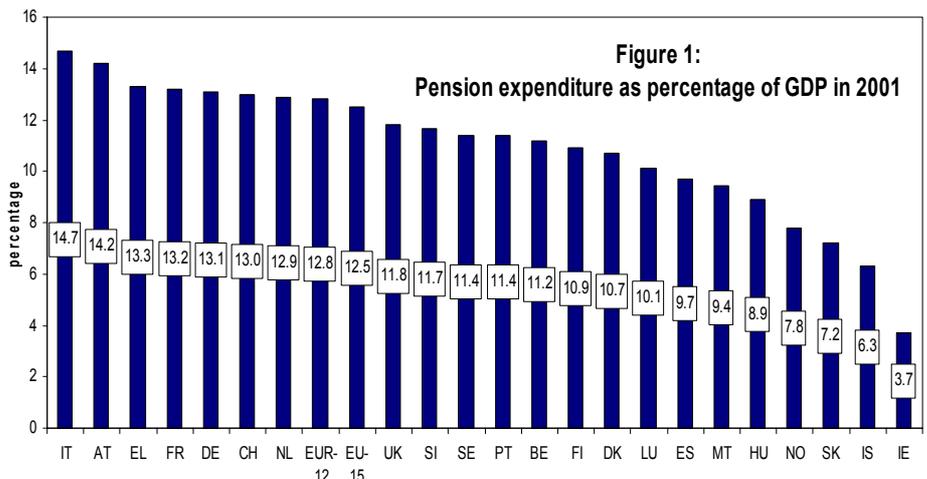
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- Pension expenditure in the EU-15 accounted for 12.5% of GDP in 2001, which is the lowest share within the last eight years. Nevertheless this ratio in 2001 has increased compared to 1993 for Denmark, Germany, Greece, Austria and Portugal. The highest expenditure is found in Italy (14.7% of GDP) and the lowest in Ireland (3.7% of GDP)¹.
- Pensions in 2001 amounted to 47.5% of all social benefits in the EU-15. In Italy pension expenditure represented 59.8% of social benefits.
- Old-age pensions increased their already predominant share within total pensions and accounted for 76.2% of all pensions in EU-15. At the same time the share of each of the other pension categories (disability, survivors' and early retirement pensions) decreased.
- Data on the number of pension beneficiaries for the years 2000 and 2001 are not yet available for all Member States, but they are essential for analysing the development of expenditure on pensions.



In Italy expenditure on pensions amounted to 14.7% of GDP, the highest ratio in Europe, followed by Austria, Greece, France and Germany (figure 1). Conversely, Ireland¹ allocated only 3.7% of its GDP to expenditure on pensions. In Iceland, Norway and Slovakia, the percentage of pension expenditure of GDP was also low (less than 8%).

If not only pensions, but the total social expenditure is compared to GDP, the ratios in Europe are highest in Sweden (31.3%), France, Germany and Denmark, whereas again Ireland had the lowest ratio accounting for 14.6%.²

¹ No data are available for Ireland on occupational pension schemes for private-sector employees with constituted reserves. Therefore, the recorded amount of pension expenditure is too low compared with the other countries. Nevertheless, Ireland would very likely remain the country with the lowest ratio of pension expenditure compared to GDP, if the missing data were included.

² More information about these data in: *Statistic in Focus*, Theme 3 – 6/2004 “Social Protection in Europe”, Eurostat.

Expenditure on pensions continues to stabilise

Between **1993 and 2001**, expenditure on pensions in the EU-15 decreased by 0.4 percentage points of GDP from 12.9% to 12.5% (table 1). This decrease was fairly widespread with the largest decreases in the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Finland (over 2 points). Conversely, an increase in expenditure in relation to GDP was particularly marked in Switzerland (+2.3 points), Greece (+2.0 points) and Portugal (+1.8 points).

Table 1: Expenditure on pensions as % of GDP

	1993	1995	1997	1999	2000	2001
EU-15	12.9	12.8	12.9	12.6	12.6	12.5
EUR-12	13.0	13.0	13.2	13.0	12.8	12.8
BE	13.0	12.1	11.8	11.5	11.1	11.2
DK	10.1	11.5	11.2	10.9	10.6	10.7
DE	12.5	12.8	13.0	13.0	13.0	13.1
EL	11.3	11.2	11.7	12.6	12.5	13.3
ES	10.3	10.3	10.3	9.9	10.0	9.7
FR	13.4	13.5	13.7	13.5	13.2	13.2
IE	5.6	5.1	4.3	3.8	3.7	3.7
IT	14.9	14.5	15.3	15.1	14.7	14.7
LU	12.5	12.7	12.0	10.7	9.7	10.1
NL	15.0	14.1	13.7	13.2	13.0	12.9
AT	14.0	14.2	14.2	14.1	14.1	14.2
PT	9.6	10.2	10.4	10.7	11.1	11.4
FI	13.8	12.8	12.0	11.3	10.7	10.9
SE	13.7	12.8	12.5	11.9	11.4	11.4
UK	12.2	11.9	12.0	11.6	12.2	11.8
IS	5.5	5.7	5.8	6.1	6.4	6.3
NO	8.8	8.5	8.0	8.7	7.6	7.8
CH	10.7	11.4	12.1	12.7	12.9	13.0
HU	:	:	:	9.1	8.7	8.9
MT	:	:	:	9.0	8.7	9.4
SI	:	:	11.5	11.5	11.6	11.7
SK	:	7.1	7.1	7.3	7.3	7.2

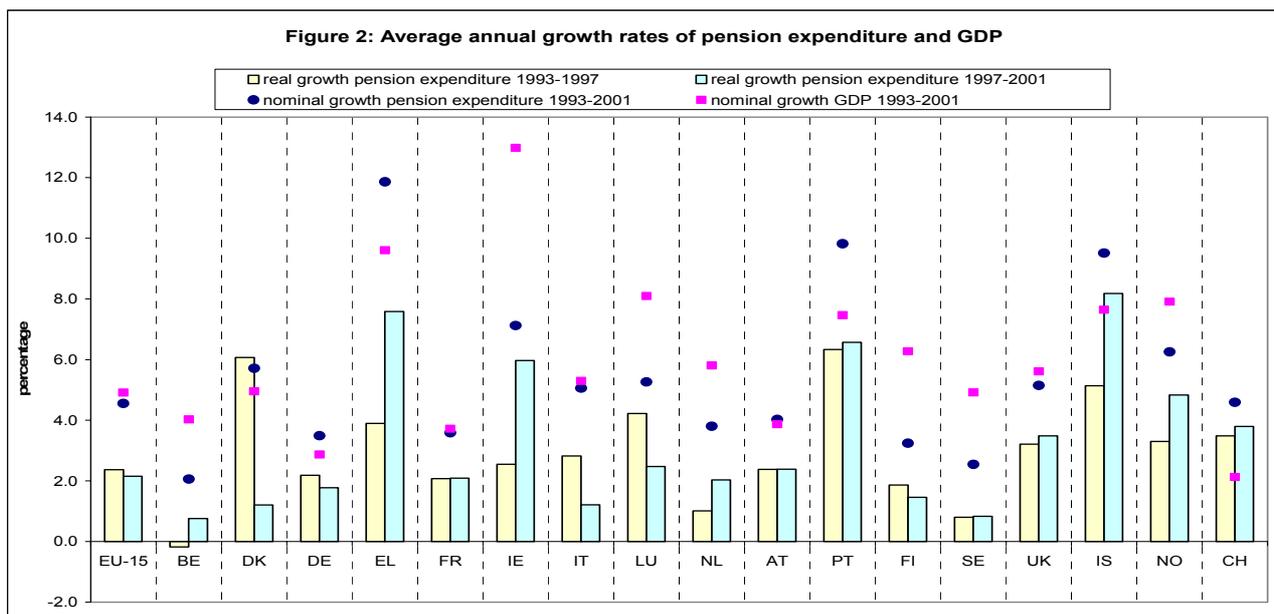
percentage of GDP'. Therefore the nominal growth rates for pension expenditure and GDP between 1993 and 2001 are compared (square and round marks). The second aim is to report on the development of pension expenditure in real terms, i.e. the nominal growth has been adjusted by the growth of consumer prices (inflation). The two columns compare the period 1997 to 2001 with the previous period 1993 to 1997.

Analysing the period **1993 to 1997**, expenditure on pensions in the EU-15 as a percentage of GDP stabilised at around 12.9% (table 1). In Belgium, expenditure on pensions actually decreased in real terms between 1993 and 1997. On the other hand, pension expenditure in Denmark and Portugal saw an increase in real terms of more than 6% (figure 2). Consequently, in Denmark the ratio to GDP increased by more than one percentage point.

Between **1997 and 2001**, expenditure on pensions as a percentage of GDP in the EU-15 dropped from 12.9% to 12.5%. This ratio also decreased in most of the Member States. The exceptions are Greece and Portugal, where expenditure on pensions grew significantly in real terms (an average of around 7.6% and 6.6% respectively per year). The fall in the growth rate compared to the previous period 1993-1997 was particularly marked in Denmark, Italy and Luxembourg. On the other hand, in Greece, Ireland and Iceland, the growth rates increased significantly compared to the previous period.

Calculation of indices in Figures 2: For each country the indices are in national currencies. For EU-15 the growth rate in real terms have been obtained by weighting each country's growth rates in national currency by the country's respective share in the expenditure in ECU/Euro in EU-15.

Figure 2 contains supplementary information and has two different aims. The first aim is to explain the development of the indicator 'pension expenditure as



Economic development, age structure of population and pension reforms determine the development of pension expenditure

The level of pension expenditure as a percentage of GDP differs from country to country, but the development of pension expenditure is always partially determined by the economic development (measured as GDP) as a result of regular pension revaluations (often coupled to wages or inflation). Hence, changes in the share of pension expenditure to GDP could be an evidence for a changing age structure of the population (changing number of beneficiaries) or an impact of pension reforms.

In Portugal, Greece and Iceland the **ratio of pension expenditure to GDP increased significantly**. This was not due to the GDP, all these countries show an increase of GDP above the European average, but these countries had the fastest ageing populations in Europe (together with Spain) between 1993 and 2001, with the result of an increasing number of pension beneficiaries. Lastly, also for Switzerland the ratio

increased significantly, but in this case due to a low growth of GDP (the lowest of all observed countries between 1993 and 2001).

Most of the countries that show a **significant decrease in the share of pension expenditure to GDP** benefited from high economic growth: Ireland, Norway, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Finland. In Sweden and Belgium the share decreased also significantly, because both countries had the lowest growth rates of pension expenditure (0.8% and 0.3% in real terms), but an economic growth around the European average. In Sweden the share of the population 65 and older to the total population was declining between 1993 and 2001 and in Belgium the amount of pensions paid in the event of early retirement, disability and to survivors remained almost constant in real terms as a result of the pension revaluation linked to prices and the pension reform in 1997.

Pensions account for a major share of social benefits

In addition to the analysis of pension expenditure with regard to economic development, it is also necessary to comment upon the importance of pensions in the field of social protection. First of all, pensions are the dominant expenditure item of social protection in all countries (figure 3). After Italy, the share of pensions as a percentage of social benefits is highest for Portugal, Malta and Austria, all over 51%. Pensions play an extremely important role in their social protection systems. The lowest ratios are observed in Ireland, Norway, Iceland, Sweden and Denmark (see footnote 1 for Ireland).

Although the percentage of pensions to social benefits is highest in Italy at nearly 60%, this ratio has decreased significantly compared to 1997 and 1999 (table 2). The EU average share is 47.5%, which also decreased compared to 1997 and 1999, although the share was lower in 1993. Denmark and Spain saw a significant growth of this ratio during the period 1993 to 2001, whereas the decrease was the highest for Greece, Ireland and Luxembourg.

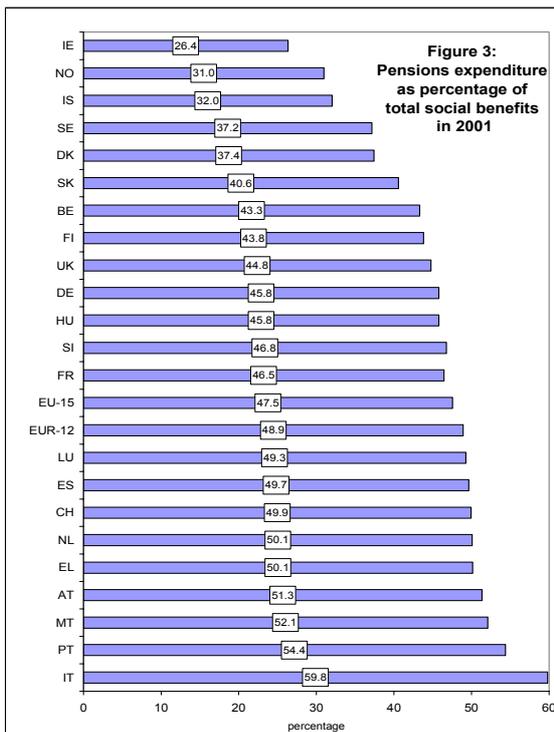


Table 2: Expenditure on pensions as % of total social benefits

	1993	1995	1997	1999	2000	2001
EU-15	46.9	47.3	48.1	48.1	48.1	47.5
EUR-12	48.3	48.6	49.3	49.3	49.1	48.9
BE	47.3	45.5	45.2	44.3	44.1	43.3
DK	32.6	36.6	37.7	37.3	37.4	37.4
DE	45.9	46.1	45.6	45.4	45.7	45.8
EL	53.1	52.0	52.1	51.2	48.9	50.1
ES	44.1	48.3	50.0	50.1	50.6	49.7
FR	45.9	46.5	46.8	47.1	46.7	46.5
IE	29.1	28.0	27.4	27.2	27.2	26.4
IT	59.2	60.9	62.1	62.1	60.5	59.8
LU	55.4	55.4	54.6	50.8	49.8	49.3
NL	48.9	48.2	49.6	50.4	50.6	50.1
AT	49.4	49.1	51.1	50.3	51.0	51.3
PT	51.9	50.7	55.2	53.9	54.0	54.4
FI	41.1	41.5	42.3	43.2	43.4	43.8
SE	36.3	37.4	38.5	38.2	37.8	37.2
UK	44.1	44.2	45.4	45.6	46.8	44.8
IS	30.1	30.8	31.4	31.7	33.0	32.1
NO	31.9	32.4	32.4	32.9	31.6	31.0
CH	47.5	48.3	47.0	49.1	49.5	49.9
HU	:	:	:	44.7	43.7	45.8
MT	:	:	:	49.4	49.5	49.4
SI	:	:	46.5	46.5	46.9	46.8
SK	:	40.2	38.5	38.2	40.1	40.6

Old-age pensions dominate pension expenditure

Data on pension expenditure are not only collected as a total value, but classified into different pension categories (table 3).

In 2001, expenditure on **old-age pensions** (including partial pensions) topped the list of pension expenditure in every country. This is particularly true in the United Kingdom, Germany and France where approximately 80% of pensions are of this kind (in Slovakia it was even 87.1%). Ireland, on the other hand, recorded the lowest value, at 45.4%.

Survivors' pensions are highest in Belgium, Ireland, Austria and Malta at around 20%. Denmark, on the other hand, spends practically nothing on this. On average, survivors' pensions accounted for 9.4% in the EU-15.

Table 3: Breakdown of expenditure on pensions in 2001
(as % of total pension expenditure)

	Old Age and partial pensions	Survivors' pensions	Disability pensions	Early retirement pensions
EU-15	76.2	9.4	9.6	4.8
EUR-12	75.4	10.1	8.8	5.6
BE	64.6	20.1	10.6	4.7
DK	63.5	0.0	15.1	21.4
DE	79.6	2.9	8.1	9.4
EL	64.9	6.2	6.4	22.5
ES	76.9	5.6	12.3	5.2
FR	79.5	11.7	6.4	2.4
IE	45.4	21.2	15.7	17.8
IT	76.1	17.7	5.7	0.5
LU	73.8	5.7	18.4	2.1
NL	61.8	11.2	21.4	5.6
AT	60.9	19.1	7.2	12.9
PT	66.8	11.9	20.0	1.2
FI	61.4	8.7	18.6	11.3
SE	75.9	5.8	18.0	0.3
UK	81.0	7.7	11.3	0.0
IS	64.3	8.9	26.8	0.0
NO	65.7	3.6	30.2	0.4
CH	73.9	9.1	17.1	0.0
HU	75.6	3.2	2.8	18.4
MT	68.7	19.7	9.0	2.5
SI	65.6	3.0	9.3	22.0
SK	87.1	2.2	9.7	1.0

Disability pensions accounted for 9.6% of total pensions in the EU-15 in 2001. They are very high in the Netherlands, Portugal, Finland, Luxembourg and Sweden (approximately 20% of the total), as well as in Iceland and Norway. By contrast, Greece, France and Italy spend less than 7% of their total pension expenditure on this heading. The various rules on benefits linked to disability are one explanation for these figures.

There are considerable differences between Member States with regard to **early retirement pensions**, which are anticipated old-age pensions, early-retirement benefits for reasons of reduced capacity to work and early-retirement benefits for labour market reasons. In comparison with an EU-15 average of 4.8% in 2001, countries such as Denmark, Greece and Slovenia spend over 20% of the total for early retirement, mainly anticipated old-age pensions. Some other countries (Ireland, Austria and Finland) spend significant amounts in excess of 11%. In contrast, the United Kingdom and, outside the EU-15, Iceland and Switzerland do not allocate any funds to this benefit.

Data on categories of pension

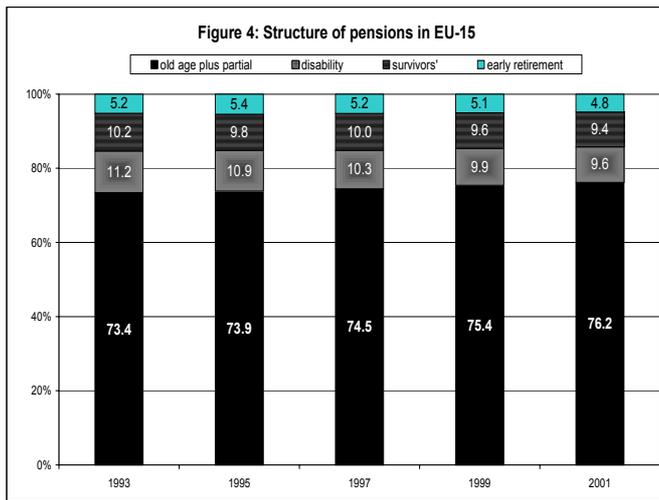
Benefits paid to beneficiaries who have reached the statutory retirement age as fixed by the reference scheme should be reported under old-age pensions. In some countries a consistent application of this rule is not always possible:

- In **Ireland, Portugal, Norway** and **Switzerland** (partly), disability pensions include those paid to beneficiaries over the statutory retirement age.
- In **Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg** (partly), **Austria, Portugal, Finland** and **Switzerland** (partly), survivors' pensions include those paid to beneficiaries over the statutory retirement age.
- In **Italy** and **Luxembourg**, old-age pensions include anticipated old-age pensions.
- In **Portugal**, for the period 1999-2001, certain values for early retirement benefits for labour market reasons are not available.

Old-age pensions increased their share continuously since 1993

Old-age pensions grew significantly more in the EU-15 between 1993 and 2001 than any other pension category. Compared to the total expenditure on pensions, which grew by 4.6% in nominal terms per annum, old age pensions grew by 5.0% per annum in nominal terms. The other pension categories had a nominal annual growth less than the total expenditure on pensions (3.7% for early retirement, 3.5% for survivors' pensions and 2.5% for disability pensions).

The different trends for the various components resulted in a higher percentage share for old-age pensions of 2.8 percentage points, rising from 73.4% in 1993 to 76.2% in 2001 (Figure 4). Consequently, the other three pension categories all lost share: 1.7 points loss for disability pensions, 0.8 points for survivors' pensions and 0.4 points for early retirement pensions.



The same trend as for EU-15 (old-age pensions increased their importance compared to the other pension categories) is observed for all Member States in the EU-15, except for Ireland and Austria (Figure 5). The highest increase of the share (importance) of **old-age pensions** between 1993 and 2001 is found in the Netherlands, Portugal and Finland. In these Member States growth rates of old-age pensions were significantly higher than the growth rate for the total expenditure on pensions.

The importance of **survivors' pensions** decreased in nearly all Member States of the EU-15 (especially in Spain, Belgium and Austria) with the only exceptions being Greece, the Netherlands and the UK. Among other things, this trend can be linked to improvements in

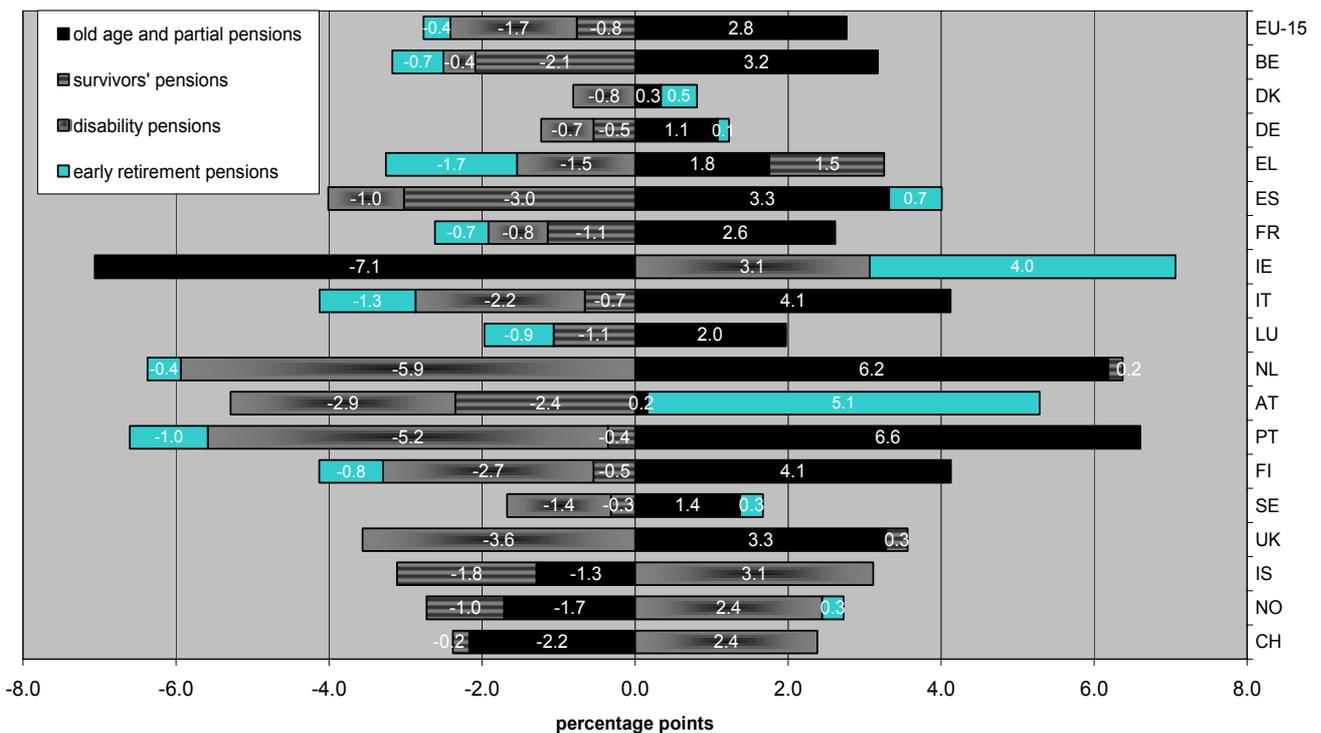
the amounts paid in women's old age pensions.

The share of **disability pensions** decreased in all Member States of the EU-15 between 1993 and 2001 (only exception is Ireland). This is a result of regulatory measures taken by several Member States. A significantly decrease in disability pensions was recorded for the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK. Austria (in nominal terms), and Belgium and the Netherlands (in real terms) even recorded a fall in such expenditure. In the Netherlands, for example, the conditions to qualify for a disability pension became much stricter in the mid 1990s.

Between 1993 and 2001 the share of **early retirement pensions** increased significantly for Austria and Ireland, and slightly for Spain, Denmark, Sweden and Germany. Part of this increase is due to the fact that, up until 1997, early retirement schemes were the instrument of choice for certain countries in combating the problems of long-term unemployment. Over the longer term, however, it can be seen that there has been a fall in these benefits in certain Member States, such as in Italy, as regards early-retirement benefits for labour-market reasons. Beside Italy, with a fall in expenditure in nominal terms, in Belgium, France and Luxembourg early retirement pensions also fell in real terms.

For the **three countries outside the EU-15** (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) the trend was completely different to the EU-15. Old-age pensions and survivors' pensions lost in importance, whereas the share of disability pensions increased, especially in Switzerland.

Figure 5: Change in the share of pension categories between 1993 and 2001 (in percentage points)



Beneficiaries of pensions

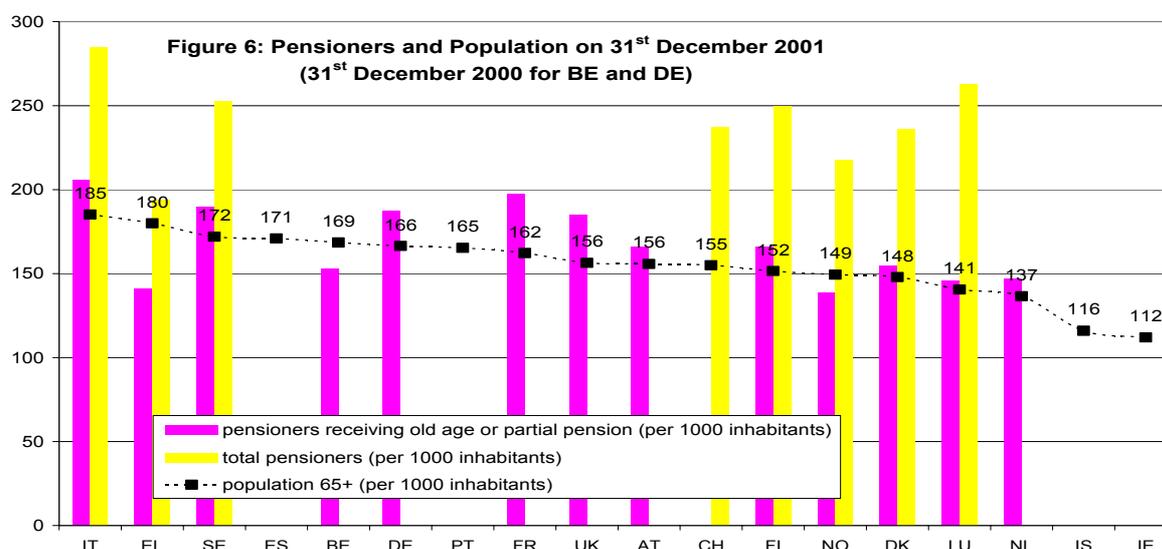
A first regular data collection on the number of beneficiaries has been carried out recently on the basis of common rules to eliminate double counting. Stock data (mostly for the 31st December) were collected for the years 2000 and 2001. As with the structure of pension expenditure, pension recipients should be classified into the seven pension categories. In addition, data are collected by gender, which expenditure is not. However, as long as time series are missing, meaningful analyses of trends in the number of beneficiaries of pensions are not feasible.

Population data is a good starting point for analysing data on beneficiaries. Diverging age pyramids and varying national laws lead to significantly different numbers of pensioners in the Member States. Figure 6 compares the different national situations concerning old-age pensioners and the total number of pensioners (old-age pensioners together with disability pensioners, survivors' and people on early retirement). Data on the share of population, which is 65 or more years old, are used as a reference (the structure of population for the year 2001 had to be estimated for Greece, Italy and the United Kingdom).

The number of total pensioners is difficult to analyse as this value is influenced by many factors not only the age

structure of population. At least for the 'oldest' population, which can be found in Italy, the highest number of total pensioners is recorded (285 pensioners per 1000 inhabitants). The relatively high ratio in Luxembourg is explainable by the huge amount of pensions paid to persons living outside the country (former commuters).

Correlation does exist between the indicator "pensioners above standard retirement age (pensioners receiving old-age and partial pensions)" and the size of population of 65 years older, but there are three exceptions: Greece, Belgium and Norway. In these countries the number of beneficiaries above the standard retirement age is even lower than the number of people that are 65 years and older. Greece that also has the lowest ratio of total pensioners compared to the population, is a special case, because a significant number people receive pensions from outside the country and not from the Greek pension system. For Belgium and Norway the number of pensioner over the standard retirement age is underestimated, because in Belgium survivors over the standard retirement age are partially recorded under "survivors' pension" and in Norway "disability pension" also include pensioners over the standard retirement age.



Data on beneficiaries essential for analysing development of pension expenditure

Connecting data on beneficiaries and expenditure on pensions is also possible for the first time. The number of beneficiaries of pensions can help to explain the demographic factor determining a large proportion of growth in pension expenditure. Calculating expenditure on old-age pensions on a per capita basis for the population aged 65 and more (as data on the total number of beneficiaries on pensions is not available for most countries and only for the last two reporting years) brings the trend in real terms down over this period for all countries except Denmark, Sweden and Norway; i.e., in these latter countries the population aged 65 and

more is lower in 2001 than in 1993 (table 4). The highest growth rate in real terms is still found in Portugal (+5.4% per annum), though Denmark (+3.8%) and the United Kingdom (+3.6%) are close behind. The removal of the demographic factor has a greater downward effect for Portugal, Spain and Greece.

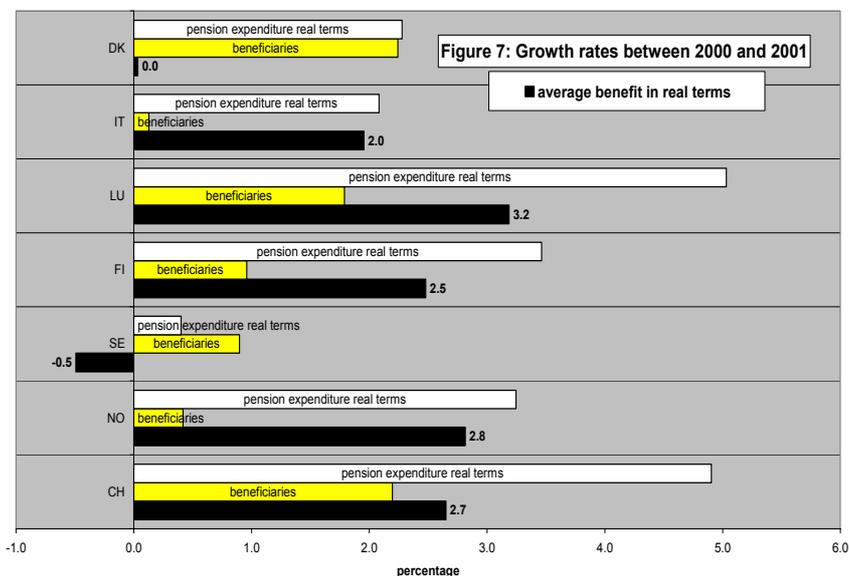
Taking account of the available data on beneficiaries, to clearly distinguish between the volume (number of beneficiaries) and price (amount of an average pension), the growth of pension expenditure in real terms can be adjusted by the growth of the number of

beneficiaries on pensions (figure 7). This growth of an average pension in real terms was close to zero in Denmark and even slightly negative in Sweden. On the other hand an average pension in Luxembourg between 2000 and 2001 increased by 3.2% in real terms. In Finland, Norway and Switzerland the growth rates of an average pension are similar (between 2.5% and 2.8%), when taking account of the differing growth rates in

beneficiaries. In Italy an average pension increased by 2.0% in real terms as the number of beneficiaries remained nearly stable in 2001 compared to 2000. Data for Italy illustrates that taking account of the number of beneficiaries is essential for the analysis of pension expenditure and that a low growth in the number of pensioners is an important explanation for low growth rates of pension expenditure.

Table 4:
Expenditure on old age and partial pensions in constant prices per population 65 and older

	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001
BE	100	96	96	98	97
DK	100	124	126	129	135
DE	100	104	104	106	104
EL	100	102	109	121	126
ES	100	101	105	107	112
FR	100	102	103	107	108
IE	100	97	96	105	113
IT	100	98	104	106	108
LU	100	105	109	111	119
NL	100	96	102	111	114
AT	100	103	104	109	115
PT	100	115	121	136	152
FI	100	101	104	106	110
SE	100	101	104	109	109
UK	100	103	114	120	135
IS	100	103	112	131	143
NO	100	106	115	130	138
CH	100	104	107	108	117



➤ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS

Methods and concepts: The expenditure on pensions presented in this publication is calculated according to the methodology of the European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics, "ESSPROS Manual 1996". Definition of social protection in the ESSPROS Manual: "Social protection encompasses interventions from public or private bodies intended to relieve households and individuals of the burden of a defined set of risks or needs, provided that there is neither a simultaneous reciprocal nor an individual arrangement involved. The list of risks or needs that may give rise to social protection is fixed by convention as follows: sickness/health care, disability, old-age, survivors, family/children, unemployment, housing and social exclusion not elsewhere classified."

The ESSPROS methodology comprises public and private schemes. Private pension arrangements are part of social protection in ESSPROS, if they are mandatory or fulfil the criteria of social solidarity, i.e. are not based on the individual risk-profile (see ESSPROS Manual 1996).

The ESSPROS methodology distinguishes between cash benefits and benefits in kind. Cash benefits may be periodic or lump sum. The "pensions" aggregate comprises only part of periodic cash benefits under the disability, old-age, survivors and unemployment functions. It is defined in this publication as the sum of the following means-tested or non-means-tested social benefits (followed by the function to which the category belongs):

- 1) Disability pension (disability function)
- 2) Early-retirement benefit due to reduced capacity to work (disability function)
- 3) Old-age pension (old-age function)
- 4) Anticipated old-age pension (old-age function)
- 5) Partial pension (old-age function)
- 6) Survivors' pension (survivors' function)
- 7) Early-retirement benefit for labour market reasons (unemployment function).

Under ESSPROS, pensions are recorded gross, i.e. without deduction of tax or other compulsory contributions payable by beneficiaries on benefits. Remarkable differences between gross data and data excluding tax and other compulsory contributions payable by beneficiaries (net data) do exist predominantly in the Nordic Countries, where pensions are treated as taxable income. First results for the ESSPROS-module "net benefits" show that e.g. in Denmark net spending in 2000 for pensions accounted for approximately 72.5% of the related gross data.

Abbreviations: The euro area (EUR-12) includes Belgium (BE), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), France (FR), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Luxembourg (LU), the Netherlands (NL), Austria (AT), Portugal (PT) and Finland (FI). The European Union (EU-15) includes the countries of the euro area plus Denmark (DK), Sweden (SE) and the United Kingdom (UK). IS=Iceland, NO=Norway, CH=Switzerland, HU=Hungary, MT=Malta, SK=Slovakia, SI = Slovenia.

Comments on the data: The 2001 data for BE, DE, ES, FR, IE, IT, NL, PT, UK, HU, SI and SK are provisional.

Eurostat publications: Methodology: "ESSPROS Manual 1996", 1996. Data: "European Social Statistics: Social protection 1992-2001"

Further information:

➤ Reference publications

Title European Social Statistics: Social Protection 1992-2001 (Forthcoming)

➤ Databases

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