How much do European countries spend on defense?

In 2025 Poland spent 4.25 % of GDP on defense, the most in NATO; most European allies sat just above 2 %, by NATO's estimates.

The spread is wide. At the top, Poland and the three Baltic states spend 3.7–4.3 % of GDP. At the bottom, three countries had not yet reached the 2 % line that allies agreed in 2014. In between sits most of the continent, clustered tightly around the old target.

The 2025 table

NATO publishes one comparable series for every ally: core defense expenditure as a share of GDP, measured in 2021 prices. Its July 2026 estimates for 2025 rank the European allies like this:

- **3 % and above:** Poland 4.25 %, Lithuania 4.03 %, Estonia 3.93 %, Latvia 3.67 %, Denmark 3.27 %, Norway 3.16 %.
- **2.5–3 %:** Sweden 2.85 %, Greece 2.79 %, Finland 2.75 %, Netherlands 2.53 %.
- **2–2.5 %:** Türkiye 2.33 %, United Kingdom 2.32 %, Germany 2.22 %, Romania 2.19 %, Bulgaria 2.13 %, North Macedonia 2.10 %, Italy 2.09 %, Croatia 2.07 %, Hungary 2.06 %, France 2.04 %, Montenegro 2.04 %, Slovakia 2.03 %, Luxembourg 2.01 %, Portugal 2.01 %, Belgium 2.00 %, Spain 2.00 %.
- **Below 2 %:** Czechia 1.86 %, Slovenia 1.57 %, Albania 1.48 %.

For comparison, the United States spent 3.17 % and Canada 2.03 %. NATO's European members and Canada together averaged 2.31 %. Iceland has no armed forces and is not in the table. Every 2025 and 2026 value is an estimate.

The shares hide the sums. Germany's 2.22 % bought about $97 billion of defense in 2025, Britain's $80 billion and France's $65 billion, while Poland's 4.25 %, the highest share, came to $33 billion. Together the European allies and Canada spent $571 billion. The United States spent $834 billion on its own. All of these are in NATO's constant 2021 dollars, so they are comparable with each other but not with this year's budget headlines.

What NATO counts

The definition is the reason these numbers can sit in one table. NATO counts payments a government makes "specifically to meet the needs of its armed forces, those of Allies or of the Alliance." That includes pensions of retired soldiers and defense-ministry staff, whichever ministry pays them; peacekeeping; military research; and police-type forces such as gendarmeries only to the extent that they are trained, equipped and realistically deployable as military units. Civil defense and war-damage payments are out. Since The Hague summit in 2025, allies also count direct contributions to Ukraine's defense when they measure progress toward the new target.

Because of that, NATO's number for a country rarely matches the one its own government announces. Czechia's finance ministry counts 2.06 % of GDP for 2026 under the national definition; NATO's estimate for the same year is 2.01 %. NATO prints the warning on page one of the release: its figures "may considerably diverge" from national budgets.

The 2 %, 3.5 % and 5 % lines

In 2014, after Russia annexed Crimea, allies at the Wales summit agreed that those below 2 % would "aim to move towards" it within a decade. That year only three allies met it, by NATO's current series: the United States, Greece and Britain. At Vilnius in 2023 the 2 % became a floor. By 2025, all but three of the 31 allies in NATO's table were at or above it.

The Hague summit of June 2025 replaced the old line with a bigger one: at least 3.5 % of GDP on core defense by 2035, plus up to 1.5 % on defense-

related spending such as critical infrastructure, civil preparedness and the defense industry. NATO expects five allies to clear the 3.5 % core line already in 2026: Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Greece.

Why the front line leads

Distance from Russia explains the top of the table; Greece, which plans against Türkiye, is the exception. Poland passed a Homeland Defence Act in 2022 that fixes defense at no less than 3 % of GDP and created an off-budget Armed Forces Support Fund, financed by borrowing; in 2024 nearly every fourth złoty of Polish defense spending went through it, according to the country's supreme audit office. Lithuania's defense council decided in January 2025 to spend 5–6 % of GDP every year from 2026 to 2030. Estonia budgets 5.4 % for 2026, and Latvia has written a 5 % minimum into law from 2027. Denmark set up a DKK 50 billion acceleration fund that took it above 3 %.

The change since 2014 shows it plainly: Lithuania went from 0.88 % to 4.03 %, Latvia from 0.97 % to 3.67 %, Poland from 1.86 % to 4.25 %. Further west, the pace is slower. Spain reached 2.00 % in 2025 only through a special plan that added €10.5 billion in a single year, and through an exchange of letters with NATO's secretary general it secured an exemption from the new 5 % goal. Germany moves the European total most: at 2.22 % it is already Europe's largest spender in money, and NATO expects 2.69 % in 2026.

How this differs from the EU figure

The European Defence Agency counts a different group: the 27 EU member states, including Austria, Ireland, Malta and Cyprus, which are not in NATO, and excluding non-EU allies such as Britain, Norway, Türkiye and Canada. Its total for 2025 is €418 billion, 2.2 % of GDP, in constant 2025 euros. NATO's 2.31 % and EDA's 2.2 % describe different countries under different rules, and neither should be relabeled as the other. The EU total is taken apart in How much does Europe spend on defence? both series, with page references, are in European defence in numbers.

The map sets the bill

Lithuania spends nearly twice Germany's share of GDP, yet its money buys about a thirtieth of what Germany's does. The spread from 1.5 % to 4.3 % follows the map: the closer a country sits to Russia, the larger the share of its income it gives to a border that protects everyone behind it. A shared defense budget would spread that cost across the whole continent. Today the frontier states pay the highest share of their income for it.

All questions →

FREQUENTLY ASKED

Which European country spends the most on defense?
Poland: 4.25 % of GDP in 2025 by NATO's estimate, the highest share in the alliance and above the United States at 3.17 %. For 2026 NATO expects Lithuania (5.33 %), Estonia (5.10 %) and Latvia (4.92 %) to move ahead of Poland (4.68 %).

Who spends the least?
Among NATO's European members in 2025, Albania (1.48 %), Slovenia (1.57 %) and Czechia (1.86 %) were the only ones below 2 % of GDP. Spain and Belgium sat exactly on the line at 2.00 %. NATO notes that Slovenia's new government, in office since June 2026, will review its projections.

Who spends the most in money?
Germany. In NATO's constant 2021 dollars it spent about $97 billion in 2025, ahead of Britain ($80 billion), France ($65 billion), Italy ($49 billion), Spain ($34 billion) and Poland ($33 billion). All European allies and Canada together spent $571 billion; the United States alone $834 billion.

What is the difference between the 2 % and 3.5 % targets?
The 2 % line comes from the 2014 Wales summit and became a floor in 2023. At The Hague in 2025 allies agreed to reach 3.5 % of GDP on core defense by 2035, plus up to 1.5 % on resilience such as infrastructure and civil preparedness: 5 % of GDP in all.

Why do national figures differ from NATO's?
NATO applies one definition to every ally: it counts military pensions, deployable paramilitary forces and aid to Ukraine, and excludes civil defense. National budgets draw the line elsewhere. NATO itself warns that its figures "may considerably diverge" from those published by national authorities.

SOURCES

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- Our Continent: European Defence Ledger v0.2.0 (10/2026) – per-country NATO values as extracted from NATO's 2026 workbook (Table 3, Table 2)
- NATO: Wales Summit Declaration, para 14 (9/2014) – aim to move towards 2 % within a decade; NATO: Vilnius Summit Communiqué, para 27 (7/2023) – at least 2 % annually
- NATO: The Hague Summit Declaration (6/2025) – 3.5 % core + up to 1.5 % by 2035, review in 2029, contributions to Ukraine counted; AP: Spain reaches deal with NATO to be excluded from the 5 % goal (6/2025)
- NIK: Armed Forces Support Fund audit, Kontrola Państwowa 6/2025 (1/2026) – Homeland Defence Act 2022, 3 % floor, nearly every fourth zloty through the off-budget fund in 2024
- LRT: Lithuania to spend 5–6 % of GDP on defence in 2026–2030 (1/2025) Estonian Ministry of Defence: Defence budget (4/2026) – 5.4 % in 2026; LSM: Saeima sets Latvia's defence spending at minimum 5 % of GDP from 2027 (3/2026)
- Danish Ministry of Defence: Agreement putting Denmark at more than 3 % of GDP (2/2025) – DKK 50 billion acceleration fund
- La Moncloa: Plan Industrial y Tecnológico para la Seguridad y la Defensa (4/2025) – €10.47 billion added in 2025 to reach 2 %
- EDA: Defence Data 2025–2026 (7/2026) – EU-27: €418 billion, 2.2 % of GDP, constant 2025 prices, reported by defense ministries
- Czech Ministry of Finance: State budget 2026 – executive summary (4/2026) – national definition 2.06 % of GDP for 2026