

Atradius Payment Practices Barometer

B2B payment practices trends Western Europe 2026



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About the Atradius Payment Practices Barometer

The Atradius Payment Practices Barometer is an annual survey of business-to-business (B2B) payment practices in markets across the world.

Our survey gives you the opportunity to hear directly from businesses trading on credit with B2B customers about how they are coping with evolving trends in customer payment behaviour. Staying informed about these trends is vital because it helps to identify emerging shifts in customer payment habits, allowing businesses to address potential liquidity pressure and maintain smooth operations.

Businesses operating in – or planning to enter – the markets and industries covered by our survey can gain valuable insights from our reports, which also shed light on the challenges and risks companies anticipate in the coming months, as well as their expectations for future growth.

This report presents the survey results for **Western Europe**.

Markets surveyed: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The findings for Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, while part of Western Europe, are presented separately in the report dedicated to the Nordic region. Insights into topics by market and local sectors can be found in the individual reports that form the 2026 edition of the survey for Western Europe.

The survey was conducted between the end of Q1 and the beginning of Q2 2026 and remained open for a few days after the onset of the Middle East geopolitical tensions, allowing respondents to reflect on potential impacts as they completed the questionnaire. The findings should therefore be viewed with this context in mind.



B2B payment practices trends

Managing B2B payment risk leads the agenda in Western Europe

B2B payment behaviour across Western Europe is shifting. As access to finance tightens, customers rely more on trade credit in business-to-business (B2B) transactions. This keeps trade moving, but it also pushes more risk onto suppliers. As customer payment risk spreads across the corporate landscape, companies tighten credit control, track cash more closely and take a more selective approach to risk as core to resilience.

Just over half of B2B sales across Western Europe, around 52%, now take place on credit. This average hides wide differences between markets. The Netherlands stands out clearly, with nearly three quarters of B2B sales settled on deferred terms, the highest share in Western Europe. France sits at the other end of the scale, where only 22% of B2B sales are made on credit. Most markets across the region continue to increase their use of supplier credit, with Sweden showing one of the strongest shifts. Switzerland takes a more cautious approach, reflecting stronger concern around customer payment risk.

Payment terms across Western Europe remain relatively tight. Most businesses report setting payment terms within a 30-day credit window, which highlights a clear reluctance to ease terms despite rising pressure from customers. Fewer companies across the markets surveyed in Western Europe extend payment terms to up to two months from invoicing and longer credit periods remain uncommon. Italy is the clear exception, as businesses offer significantly longer terms than the regional average. Regionally, most markets remain closely aligned with the Western European benchmark, with little evidence of a broad shift towards structurally longer payment cycles.

As liquidity pressure feeds into day-to-day operations, payment behaviour among Western European business customers has weakened in recent months. Nearly four in five companies across the region report B2B customers pay invoices late. Companies in Switzerland express the most negative sentiment, pointing to strain even in markets seen as traditionally resilient. Ireland stands out as the main exception, with more positive payment experiences, while most other markets sit close to the regional benchmark.

More than half of the businesses surveyed across Western Europe report that liquidity pressure is the main reason behind late payments from business customers. Italian companies feel this pressure most strongly, while Irish firms appear least affected. Administrative bottlenecks, banking delays and technical issues related to e-invoicing or digital payment platforms add to settlement delays, even where cash is available.

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B2B payment practices trends

The share of working capital tied up in overdue B2B invoices varies across Western European markets. Regionally, about one quarter of invoices are paid after the due date. Greece records the highest share, locking up significant working capital, while the Netherlands stands out for its strong payment culture with the lowest incidence of past due payments in the region. Most other markets cluster close to the regional average. Once invoices fall overdue, settlement times appear broadly similar, averaging around one month beyond the due date. Italy records the longest delays, while the Netherlands ranks among the fastest. Overall, pressure on working capital is driven mainly by how often payments are delayed than by how quickly they are recovered.

Survey evidence shows that payment cycles, measured through Days Sales Outstanding (DSO), have continued to edge higher across Western Europe in recent months. Businesses report collecting cash slightly later than agreed, which pushes DSO slightly above agreed payment terms, increasing pressure on liquidity. While most Western European markets cluster around the regional average of just over one month, the remainder sit at either end of the range, reflecting longer or shorter payment cycles. Italy stands out as the clearest example, with payment cycles stretching more than in any other major market.

As DSO rises, the risk of bad debts also increases. Across the region, credit losses now average 1.6% of B2B invoiced turnover. Nearly one in four report losses of up to 5%, a level that steadily erodes working capital and profitability. Germany and Sweden are among the most exposed within this range. Losses above this threshold remain less common, though most often reported in Belgium.

Weaker B2B payment behaviour is now placing significant strain on working capital across Western Europe. Many companies, particularly in Greece, report less cash available for daily operations, reduced planning visibility and rising use of external finance, often at higher cost. Elsewhere, limits on investment are becoming more visible, particularly in Switzerland. Payment pressure also increasingly passes down supply chains, most clearly in Belgium.

In response, businesses across Western Europe report managing risk more carefully, without slowing trade. Most start with internal measures, such as active credit control, payment monitoring, and selective limits by customers. Tools like credit insurance, guarantees, or advance payments tend to sit in the background, used mainly for larger deals or higher risk customers. Overall, Western European companies are trying to stay flexible and keep trade relationships intact, while tightening control where pressure is clearly rising.



Key insights on the next page



Key insights

Western Europe

Payment behaviour of B2B customers (12 months)

Exposure clusters: reported level of B2B invoices paid late by percentage of respondents

0%
B2B invoices paid late

23%

Respondents

1% - 30%
B2B invoices paid late

46%

Respondents

31% - 60%
B2B invoices paid late

21%

Respondents

61% - 100%
B2B invoices paid late

10%

Respondents

Sample: all respondents in the surveyed market

Source: Atradius Payment Practices Barometer Western Europe – 2026

Top 4 reasons B2B customers pay invoices late

% of respondents - multiple response

Customer cash flow issues

53%

Internal approval delays

23%

Banking delays

23%

Complex payment process

15%

Sample: all respondents in the surveyed market

Source: Atradius Payment Practices Barometer Western Europe – 2026

Breakdown of past due payments

% of past due invoices by payment timing

<30 days

71%

Respondents

31-60 days

17%

Respondents

61-90 days

7%

Respondents

> 90 days

5%

Respondents

Sample: all respondents in the surveyed market

Source: Atradius Payment Practices Barometer Western Europe – 2026

Reported bad debts

% of respondents - bad debts levels

<1% bad debts

61%

Respondents

1% - 2% bad debts

11%

Respondents

2% - 5% bad debts

10%

Respondents

> 5% bad debts

18%

Respondents

Sample: all respondents in the surveyed market

Source: Atradius Payment Practices Barometer Western Europe – 2026

Top 4 impacts of customer payment risk on working capital

% of respondents - multiple response

Reduced liquidity headroom

35%

Struggle with cash flow planning

23%

Higher financing needs

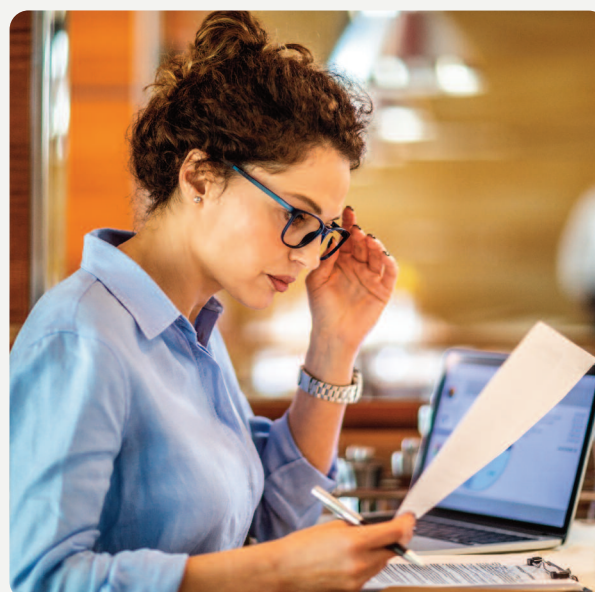
20%

Limit investment

14%

Sample: all respondents in the surveyed market

Source: Atradius Payment Practices Barometer Western Europe – 2026





Looking ahead

Business confidence fades as liquidity pressure builds

Across Western Europe, confidence remains low. Many businesses feel uncertain about what lies ahead and say they operate under ongoing pressure, trying to stay balanced in a challenging economic and trading environment.

In this climate, more than half of the firms surveyed, regardless of market or sector, do not anticipate any meaningful short-term changes in the payment behaviour of B2B customers. Expectations appear most settled among Dutch businesses. Elsewhere across the region, views vary notably from one market to another. In France, for instance, businesses are more likely to fear a worsening of B2B payment behaviour, as customers remain under pressure from tight financing and high operating costs. Geopolitical disruption continues to add strain, while volatile energy prices and fragile supply chains make planning more difficult. As a result, many companies say they no longer rely on a single outlook and instead prepare for several possible scenarios.

What stands out across the region is how many companies say they cannot see very far ahead. High uncertainty feeds directly into everyday B2B trade credit decisions. Extending credit feels riskier, and cash flow is monitored more closely. Seen up close, many businesses say they are operating with little buffer. Costs continue to rise; margins no longer offer much protection and sooner or later prices have to move. That leaves companies exposed to risk, knowing that any pushback or late payment can quickly affect cash flow.

A similar sense of unease comes through when businesses talk about insolvencies. Most companies across the region, particularly in the Netherlands, expect insolvency levels to remain where they are now, already higher than many would like. Among those expecting change, pessimism outweighs optimism. More businesses anticipate a further rise in insolvencies than believe conditions will stabilise or improve, a view felt most strongly in Finland. Others simply say they do not know what lies ahead, which may be the most telling response. Profitability expectations complete the picture. Most companies across Western Europe do not expect any meaningful change in the short term. Where views are not openly pessimistic, as among Greek businesses, uncertainty prevails, a mood particularly widespread in the UK.

All of this unfolds against an economic backdrop that feels uneven and highly fragmented. While services activity keeps the region moving, manufacturing and trade remain under pressure. Fears of a sharper economic contraction in the months ahead are felt most strongly among Italian businesses, while geopolitical instability cuts across markets almost uniformly, affecting businesses regardless of size or sector. Overall, survey feedback from across Western Europe highlights that unpredictable shifts in B2B payment behaviour have become one of the clearest signs of underlying strain. Many businesses describe uncertainty as a constant feature of daily operations. Those that accept this reality, and manage payment risk with that mindset, are better placed to hold their ground in the current unsettled environment.

Key insights on the next page



Key insights

Western Europe

Top 3 risks businesses expect to shape B2B payments (next 12 months)

% of respondents - multiple response

#1 | Economic slowdown

#2 | Cost pressures on the business

#3 | Geopolitical instability

Sample: all respondents in the surveyed market

Source: Atradius Payment Practices Barometer Western Europe – 2026



Expected insolvency risk outlook (next 12 months)

% of respondents

Stay elevated
55%

Rise further
30%

Not sure
15%

Sample: all respondents in the surveyed market

Source: Atradius Payment Practices Barometer Western Europe – 2026

Businesses across Western Europe are feeling the impact of shifting B2B payment behaviour. Cash is coming in more slowly, and that makes managing day to day liquidity harder. With confidence already low and the outlook uncertain, many companies say they are operating under constant pressure, focused less on growth and more on keeping cash flow steady



Survey design

Sample overview – Total interviews = 2,945

Markets			
Austria	Finland*	Italy	Switzerland
Belgium	Germany	Netherlands	United Kingdom
Denmark*	Greece	Spain	
France	Ireland	Sweden*	

* covered in the report for Nordics

Business sector	Interviews	%
Industry	593	20
Construction	591	20
Trade	591	20
Services	1,170	40
TOTAL	2,945	100

Business size	Interviews	%
Micro <10 employees	926	20
SME 10-49 employees	824	28
SME 50-249 employees	619	21
Large 250 or more employees	576	20
TOTAL	2,945	100

Survey methodology

We updated our panel to better reflect the market structure across activities and size classes. Additional details on the survey sample design can be found in the statistical appendix. For this edition, comparisons with previous reports are not possible, with annual variation captured only through respondent feedback.

Survey scope

Population: Companies in Western Europe were surveyed, with interviews conducted with the appropriate contacts responsible for accounts receivable management.

Sample design: The Strategic Sampling Plan enabled analysis of Western Europe data by sector and company size. A total of 2,945 businesses participated, with quotas maintained across four company size categories. The sample covers businesses where trade credit is actively used, by business sectors and size. Results are reported as weighted percentages to reflect the economic weight of each sector, size class, and market.

Selection process: Companies were contacted via an international internet panel, and respondents were screened for role and quota control at the start of the interview.

Interview method: Computer-Assisted Web Interviews (CAWI), each lasting approximately 15 minutes.

Timing: The survey was conducted between the end of Q1 and the beginning of Q2 2026.



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Please visit the [Atradius](#) website to access our latest publications. [Click here](#) to access our analysis of individual industry performance, detailed focus on country-specific and global economic concerns, insights into credit management issues, and information about protecting your receivables against payment default by customers.

To find out more about B2B receivables collection practices in Western Europe and worldwide, please visit atradiuscollections.com.

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- Reinsurance

Our presence across the globe

- Africa
- Asia
- Europe
- Middle East
- North America
- Oceania
- South America

All reports highlighting market and sector-specific findings from the 2026 Atradius Payment Practices Barometer for Western Europe and the Nordic region, together with the regional statistical appendix, are available for download from the [Knowledge and Research](#) section of the Atradius corporate website



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Atradius

David Ricardostraat
11066 JS Amsterdam
Postbus 8982
1006 JD Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Phone: +31 20 553 9111

info@atradius.com
atradius.com