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MONTHLY REPORT • ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL MARKET OUTLOOK

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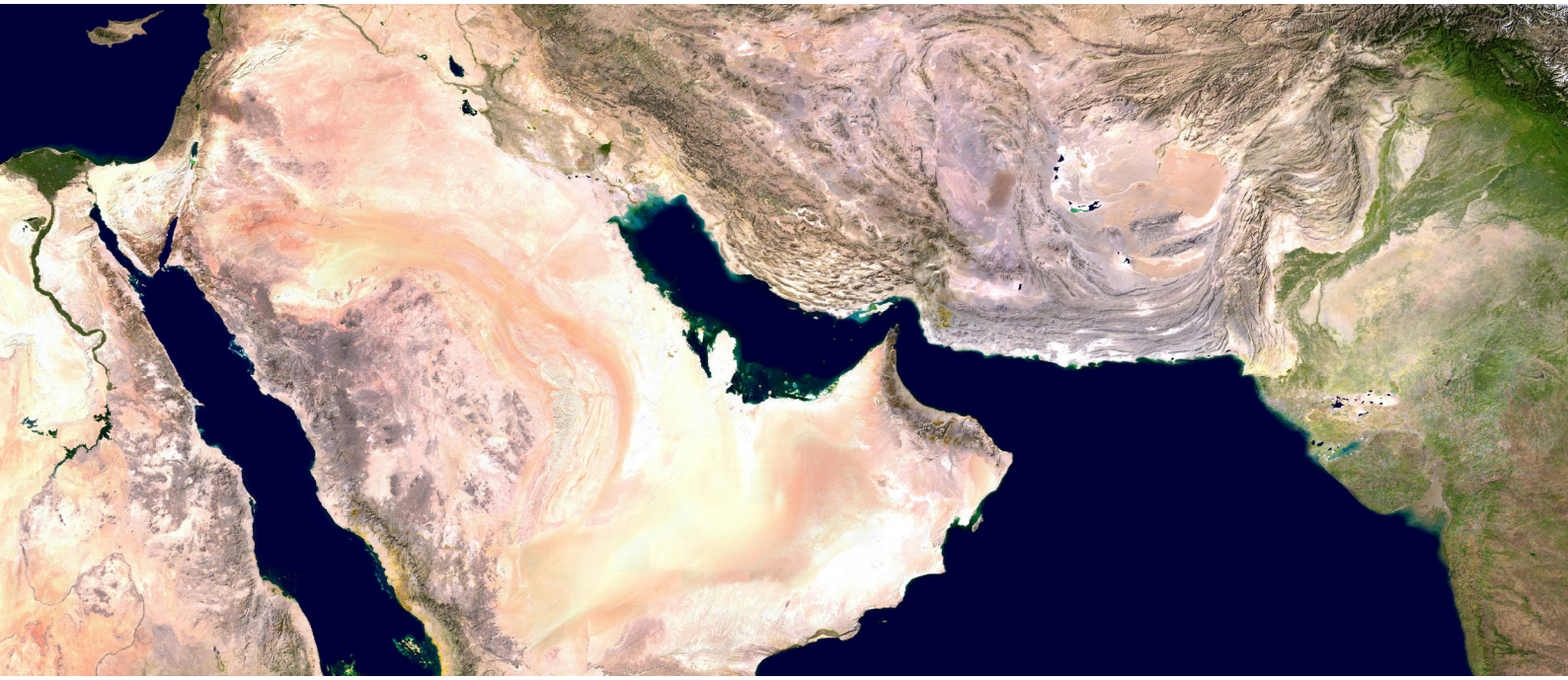

INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIES AND MARKET

SPANISH ECONOMY

CaixaBank Research

MONTHLY REPORT - ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL MARKET OUTLOOK
April 2026

The *Monthly Report* is a publication developed jointly by CaixaBank Research and BPI Research (UEEF)

CaixaBank Research
www.caixabankresearch.com
research@caixabank.com
Enric Fernández
Chief Economist
José Ramón Díez
Head of International Economies and Financial Markets
Oriol Aspachs
Head of Spanish Economy
Sandra Jódar
Head of Strategic Planning
Adrià Morron Salmeron and Oriol Carreras
Monthly Report coordinators

BPI Research (UEEF)
www.bancobpi.pt / https://www.bancobpi.pt/grupo-bpi/estudos-mercados/research
deef@bancobpi.pt
Paula Carvalho
Chief Economist

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Globofriction (chap. 26)

Globofriction captures one of the most characteristic features of the current era: simultaneous attraction and repulsion between economic blocs. On the one hand, they are competing for technological leadership, aware that the associated benefits go far beyond those currently gained by the companies leading innovation. Historically, countries that have led an economic revolution have ended up consolidating themselves as global powers in the following decades. On the other hand, economic blocs remain deeply intertwined by trade and financial interdependencies. This is the force of globalisation, the benefits of which are well known and remain very present.

There is no doubt that frictions have intensified in recent years as the disruptive potential of new technologies has become more evident and the ability to lead the new economic cycle is no longer in the hands of a single power, namely the US. The increase in trade barriers on a global scale is probably one of the phenomena that best illustrates this. Although it may seem like a recent phenomenon, it is not. The number of measures against trade liberalisation began to grow more than a decade ago, during the financial crisis, and since then it has continued to increase, spanning governments of all kinds until rendering the old international order and the institutions that supported it obsolete. However, the diplomacy with which some have acted stands in stark contrast to the brazenness and disdain shown by others.

The economic and geopolitical uncertainty indices also clearly reflect the consequences of these frictions between powers. Both have shown an increasing trend for some years now, with sharp rises associated with each episode of tension. However, when viewed in perspective, these episodes tend to be relatively brief. The threats intensify until the deep ties that still unite us become evident. So far, the force of globalisation has helped to ease frictions. In 2025, the escalation of the trade conflict between the US and China ended when their mutual dependency became evident: one needs the other's critical minerals; the other needs a large market to export to in order to continue growing. This year, we expect the war in the Middle East to come to an end after it has been recognised that everyone needs goods to flow freely through the Strait of Hormuz.

The struggle to lead the new economy – or at least not to fall excessively behind – has also resulted in a significant deterioration of public finances. The pressure to implement stimulus and economic transformation policies has continued to rise, and with it so has the public debt of many leading countries, brining it to historically high levels. Moreover, in several cases, there are no clear signs of a correction in the coming years. In the monetary sphere, political pressure on some key central banks has also intensified, although for the moment their independence remains intact.

Once again, globalisation – in this case financial – has probably been crucial in preventing greater harm. When temptations have arisen to implement openly irresponsible fiscal policies or to question the independence of central banks, the reaction of international financial markets has been swift and, at times, forceful. We only have to recall the lesson learned by Liz Truss, who lasted not even two months in office.

As long as the battle for leadership in the new economy remains ongoing, frictions between the major economic powers are likely to recur. The agreement between the US and China is valid for one year; the US threat to annex Greenland remains latent, and the chapter on Cuba could be reopened at any moment. *Globofriction* will undoubtedly have new episodes. Spoiler: all the indicators suggest that the force of globalisation will continue to impose its limits. By the way, the impetus being given by the EU – that space of economic and democratic freedom which often generates more scepticism than enthusiasm, which rarely features in predictions to lead the new economy, but which we are fortunate to live in – to free trade agreements is particularly relevant in this context.

Oriol Aspachs
April 2026

Chronology

MARCH 2026

11 The International Energy Agency agrees to release 400 million barrels of strategic reserves to mitigate the impact of the war in the Middle East.

JANUARY 2026

14 2025 was the third warmest year on record (1940-2025) and 1.5 °C above the pre-industrial average (1850-1900) according to the EU's Copernicus programme.
27 The EU and India conclude negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement.

NOVEMBER 2025

12 End to the longest government shutdown in US history.

FEBRUARY 2026

20 The US Supreme Court invalidates the tariffs announced under the IEEPA.
28 The US and Israel launch a coordinated attack against Iran in which Ali Khamenei is killed.

DECEMBER 2025

10 The Fed cuts rates by 25 bps, placing them in the 3.50%-3.75% range.
18 The Bank of England cuts rates by 25 bps, to 3.75%.
19 The Bank of Japan raises rates by 25 bps, to 0.75%.

OCTOBER 2025

29 The Fed lowers the fed funds rate by 25 bps to the 3.75%-4.00% range, its second cut of the year, and announces an end to the balance sheet reduction process.

Agenda

APRIL 2026

1 Spain: household savings rate (Q4).
6 Spain: registration with Social Security and registered unemployment (March).
9 Portugal: turnover in industry (February).
Portugal: international trade (February).
10 Spain: financial accounts (Q4).
16 China: GDP (Q1).
24 Spain: loans, deposits and NPL ratio (February).
28 Spain: labour force survey (Q1).
Portugal: bank credit portfolio (March).
28-29 Federal Open Market Committee meeting.
29 Spain: CPI flash estimate (April).
Portugal: employment and unemployment (March).
Euro area: economic sentiment indicator (April).
30 Spain: GDP flash estimate (Q1).
Portugal: GDP flash estimate (Q1).
Portugal: CPI flash estimate (April).
Governing Council of the European Central Bank meeting.
Euro area: GDP (Q1).
Euro area: CPI flash estimate (April).
US: GDP (Q1).

MAY 2026

4 Portugal: industrial production (March).
5 Spain: registration with Social Security and registered unemployment (April).
6 Portugal: employment and unemployment (Q1).
8 Spain: industrial production index (March).
15 Portugal: average monthly gross salary per worker (Q1).
Portugal: DBRS rating.
Japan: GDP (Q1).
19 Spain: foreign trade (March).
25 Spain: loans, deposits and NPL ratio (March).
28 Euro area: economic sentiment indicator (May).
29 Spain: CPI flash estimate (May).
Spain: DBRS rating.
Portugal: GDP breakdown (Q1).
Portugal: CPI flash estimate (May).

World economy: between noise and fury

More than a month after the start of the war in the Persian Gulf and pending the outcome of the truce, uncertainty continues to overshadow any assessment of the duration and extent of the instability currently dominating the behaviour of the global economy. With the price of oil fluctuating in the range of 95-110 dollars (45-55 euros for natural gas), now that Iran's ability to block the Strait of Hormuz and reduce the global oil supply by 10% in the short term has been confirmed, the inflationary channel has now been activated. Indeed, the initial impact on fuels has already been felt in the March inflation data (3.3% in Spain and 2.5% in the euro area). While we wait to see how the disturbance in energy prices will be transmitted to other products in the consumer basket over the coming quarters in order to assess the final impact on inflation, it will be necessary to consider the fiscal measures applied by each country to mitigate the impact of the supply shock, as in the case of Spain (see the Focus «The crisis in Iran: how much could it affect the Spanish economy?» in this same report). The good news is that medium-term inflation expectations continue to show significant stability on both sides of the Atlantic, which is helping to contain the impact of the disturbances through the financial channel.

The potential negative impact on growth through the trade channel will be asymmetric between different regions and countries, depending on their energy dependence on oil and gas from the Middle East, their energy efficiency, their sectoral structure, and their fiscal capacity to mitigate the impact of the supply shock. Major economies of Southeast Asia (such as India, the Philippines and Vietnam) will potentially be among the hardest hit, along with African countries where the agricultural sector plays a significant role, creating a high dependency on fertiliser prices and flows. In this context, and given that 80% of global trade uses maritime routes, the importance of something as fundamental as geography is once again highlighted, with choke points such as the Straits of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb playing a key role. After all, control of such shipping channels can alter the supply of products that are essential to global value chains (see the Focus «Geoeconomic exposure and strategic relevance of the Middle East» in this same report), making them of key strategic importance in the new global geopolitical framework, alongside other elements such as rare earths, payment systems and energy.

A special case is that of the US, given that, in principle, it would be less affected due to an improvement in its real terms of trade as a result of higher oil and gas prices. Nevertheless, the macroeconomic situation shows weaknesses, such as inflation that is still negatively impacted by the inertia of the tariff hikes while the labour market is showing signs of cooling, due to both supply factors (immigration policy) and demand factors (effects of AI and over-hiring in the years following COVID). This combination will complicate the Fed's strategy in the coming quarters and, together with the deterioration of the institutional framework, would explain the somewhat diminished role of the dollar as a safe-haven asset on this occasion. In this context, the ECB's position is more comfortable given that, in addition to rates being in neutral territory, inflation was on target prior to the outbreak of the conflict and Europe's direct exposure to the region's energy flows is much lower than in the case of the war in Ukraine, when the continent had to reconfigure its supply chains within a very short time frame (see the Focus «Energy tensions, inflation and monetary policy in the euro area» in this same report). In this regard, the expectations that have been priced in by the markets – of three or even four interest rate hikes in Europe before the end of the year – seem to anticipate scenarios that are closer to the ECB's severe or stagflation scenario (inflation of 4.4% in 2026 and of 4.8% in 2027) than to its adverse or moderate supply shock scenario (3.5% and 2.1%, respectively). Moreover, there does not currently appear to be any widespread sense of urgency within the ECB's Governing Council to implement several interest rate hikes within the space of a few months.

The presence of so many open fronts at all levels limits visibility when it comes to making economic and financial projections, and there is a feeling that the biggest risk, if the two-week truce does not hold, is that physical deliveries of crude oil could be threatened, and this could trigger an increase in demand for precautionary reasons, driving the price to much higher levels than those seen so far. Moreover, with a geopolitical event like the current one, while it is possible to reverse course, it is more difficult to avoid the structural scars in the decisions of economic agents caused by the loss of confidence, particularly given that those caused by the tariff storm of recent months have not yet fully manifested. In any case, the time to evaluate those scars will come. Meanwhile, although the clock has stopped for 15 days, it remains pertinent to recall that if, to use cinematic language, comedy equals tragedy plus time; in economics, the time variable is also capable of transforming a supply shock into stagflation.

José Ramón Díez

Average for the last month in the period, unless otherwise specified

Financial markets

	Average 2000-2007	Average 2008-2019	Average 2020-2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
INTEREST RATES							
Dollar							
Fed funds (lower limit)	3.18	0.54	1.75	4.25	3.50	3.00	3.00
3-month SOFR	3.62	1.01	2.09	4.37	3.71	3.10	3.07
12-month SOFR	3.86	1.48	2.39	4.19	3.48	3.10	2.78
2-year government bonds	3.70	1.04	2.06	4.24	3.51	3.50	3.75
10-year government bonds	4.69	2.57	2.31	4.40	4.14	4.50	4.60
Euro							
ECB depo	2.05	0.20	0.61	3.09	2.00	2.00	2.00
ECB refi	3.05	0.75	1.11	3.24	2.15	2.15	2.15
€STR	–	–0.54	0.52	3.06	1.93	1.94	1.97
1-month Euribor	3.18	0.50	0.57	2.89	1.92	2.00	2.03
3-month Euribor	3.24	0.65	0.70	2.83	2.05	2.04	2.06
6-month Euribor	3.29	0.78	0.87	2.63	2.14	2.12	2.11
12-month Euribor	3.40	0.96	1.04	2.44	2.27	2.23	2.18
Germany							
2-year government bonds	3.41	0.35	0.56	2.02	2.13	2.04	2.00
10-year government bonds	4.30	1.54	0.72	2.22	2.84	2.95	2.90
Spain							
3-year government bonds	3.62	1.69	0.92	2.26	2.39	2.57	2.60
5-year government bonds	3.91	2.19	1.07	2.48	2.64	2.88	2.92
10-year government bonds	4.42	3.17	1.61	2.90	3.28	3.45	3.50
Risk premium	11	164	90	68	45	50	60
Portugal							
3-year government bonds	3.68	3.33	0.76	2.03	2.16	2.17	2.17
5-year government bonds	3.96	3.94	0.98	2.15	2.49	2.62	2.64
10-year government bonds	4.49	4.67	1.52	2.68	3.14	3.40	3.45
Risk premium	19	314	81	46	31	45	55
EXCHANGE RATES							
EUR/USD (dollars per euro)	1.13	1.26	1.12	1.05	1.17	1.20	1.20
EUR/GBP (pounds per euro)	0.66	0.84	0.87	0.83	0.87	0.90	0.90
EUR/JPY (yen per euro)	129.56	126.41	135.43	161.18	182.71	180.00	175.00
OIL PRICE							
Brent ($/barrel)	42.3	80.1	73.8	73.1	61.6	66.0	64.8
Brent (euros/barrel)	36.1	62.5	67.0	69.8	52.6	55.0	54.0

Forecasts

Change in the average for the year versus the prior year average (%), unless otherwise indicated

International economy

	Average 2000-2007	Average 2008-2019	Average 2020-2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
GDP GROWTH[1]							
Global	4.3	3.3	2.8	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.2
Developed countries	*2.7*	*1.5*	*1.7*	*1.8*	*1.7*	*1.9*	*1.7*
United States	2.7	1.8	2.4	2.8	2.1	2.6	2.0
Euro area	2.3	0.9	1.1	0.8	1.5	1.3	1.5
Germany	1.6	1.3	0.2	–0.5	0.3	1.0	1.4
France	2.3	1.0	0.9	1.1	0.9	1.0	1.2
Italy	1.5	–0.3	1.5	0.5	0.7	0.8	1.1
Portugal	1.5	0.4	1.9	2.1	1.9	2.1	1.9
Spain	3.6	0.7	1.1	3.5	2.8	2.4	2.0
Japan	1.4	0.4	0.1	–0.2	1.1	0.8	0.6
United Kingdom	2.8	1.3	1.0	1.1	1.3	0.7	1.4
Emerging and developing countries	*6.3*	*4.9*	*3.5*	*4.3*	*4.4*	*4.2*	*4.1*
China	10.6	8.0	4.9	5.0	5.0	4.5	4.0
India	7.2	6.7	4.6	7.3	7.5	6.6	6.4
Brazil	3.6	1.6	1.9	3.4	2.3	1.8	1.8
Mexico	2.3	1.5	1.1	1.4	0.6	1.3	1.8
Russia	–	1.4	1.5	4.3	0.9	1.1	1.1
Türkiye	5.5	4.5	6.4	3.3	3.6	3.4	3.4
Poland	4.1	3.7	2.6	3.0	3.6	3.5	3.2
INFLATION							
Global	4.1	3.7	5.9	5.8	4.1	3.9	3.5
Developed countries	*2.1*	*1.6*	*3.9*	*2.6*	*2.5*	*2.2*	*2.1*
United States	2.7	1.8	4.5	2.9	2.6	2.6	2.2
Euro area	2.2	1.4	4.2	2.4	2.1	1.9	2.0
Germany	1.7	1.4	4.6	2.5	2.3	2.0	2.1
France	1.9	1.3	3.5	2.3	0.9	1.3	1.7
Italy	–0.1	1.4	4.1	1.1	1.6	1.5	1.8
Portugal	3.1	1.1	3.4	2.4	2.3	2.1	2.0
Spain	3.2	1.3	3.7	2.8	2.7	2.4	2.2
Japan	–0.3	0.4	1.4	2.7	3.2	2.0	2.0
United Kingdom	1.6	2.3	5.0	2.5	3.4	2.5	2.1
Emerging and developing countries	*6.9*	*5.6*	*7.3*	*7.9*	*5.1*	*5.1*	*4.4*
China	1.7	2.6	1.4	0.2	0.1	1.0	1.5
India	4.6	7.3	6.0	5.0	2.2	4.1	4.0
Brazil	7.3	5.7	6.4	4.4	5.0	4.2	3.8
Mexico	5.2	4.2	5.6	4.7	3.8	3.9	3.8
Russia	14.3	7.9	7.5	8.5	8.7	6.0	4.5
Türkiye	22.6	9.6	39.5	58.5	34.9	26.1	19.9
Poland	3.5	1.9	8.2	3.7	3.4	2.6	2.6

Note: *1. Figures adjusted for seasonality and calendar effects for the euro area, Germany, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Poland. Figures adjusted for seasonality for the United States and the United Kingdom.*

Forecasts

Change in the average for the year versus the prior year average (%), unless otherwise indicated

Spanish economy

	Average 2000-2007	Average 2008-2019	Average 2020-2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Macroeconomic aggregates							
Household consumption	3.7	0.0	0.4	3.0	3.3	3.0	2.1
Government consumption	4.5	0.9	3.1	2.9	2.4	1.4	1.8
Gross fixed capital formation	5.7	–1.2	1.0	3.6	5.8	5.2	2.5
Capital goods	4.9	0.2	–1.4	1.9	7.4	4.4	2.5
Construction	5.7	–2.6	0.4	4.0	5.2	5.6	2.4
Domestic demand (vs. GDP Δ)	4.4	–0.2	0.9	3.2	3.5	3.0	2.0
Exports of goods and services	4.7	2.9	2.4	3.2	3.6	2.1	2.1
Imports of goods and services	7.0	0.2	1.9	2.9	6.2	4.1	2.4
Gross domestic product	**3.6**	**0.7**	**1.1**	**3.5**	**2.8**	**2.4**	**2.0**
Other variables							
Employment	3.2	–0.5	2.0	2.8	3.1	2.5	1.8
Unemployment rate (% of labour force)	10.5	19.5	13.9	11.3	10.5	9.8	9.2
Consumer price index	3.2	1.3	3.7	2.8	2.7	2.4	2.2
Unit labour costs	3.1	0.6	4.1	3.3	4.2	3.6	2.7
Current account balance (% GDP)	–5.8	–0.2	1.2	3.2	2.9	2.7	2.9
External funding capacity/needs (% GDP)	–5.2	0.2	2.0	4.2	3.4	3.6	3.9
Fiscal balance (% GDP)[1]	0.3	–6.5	–6.1	–3.2	–2.5	–2.1	–2.1

Note: *1. Excludes losses for assistance provided to financial institutions.*

Forecasts

Portuguese economy

	Average 2000-2007	Average 2008-2019	Average 2020-2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Macroeconomic aggregates							
Household consumption	1.7	0.5	1.5	3.0	3.5	2.6	2.1
Government consumption	2.2	–0.3	1.9	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.0
Gross fixed capital formation	–0.3	–0.6	3.7	4.3	3.6	5.4	2.2
Capital goods	3.3	2.7	6.3	8.4	–1.4	–	–
Construction	–1.4	–2.4	3.1	3.0	5.5	–	–
Domestic demand (vs. GDP Δ)	1.3	0.0	2.0	3.0	3.1	3.1	1.9
Exports of goods and services	5.3	4.0	3.8	3.2	0.4	2.2	4.1
Imports of goods and services	3.6	2.7	3.6	4.7	4.3	3.4	3.9
Gross domestic product	**1.5**	**0.5**	**1.7**	**2.2**	**1.9**	**2.1**	**1.9**
Other variables							
Employment	0.4	–0.4	1.4	1.2	3.2	1.9	1.5
Unemployment rate (% of labour force)	6.1	11.4	6.6	6.4	6.0	5.9	5.9
Consumer price index	3.1	1.1	3.4	2.4	2.3	2.1	2.0
Current account balance (% GDP)	–9.2	–2.9	–0.4	2.1	1.2	1.1	1.2
External funding capacity/needs (% GDP)	–7.7	–1.5	0.6	3.3	2.0	3.8	2.1
Fiscal balance (% GDP)	–4.5	–5.1	–1.9	0.5	0.7	–0.6	–0.5

Forecasts

The Middle East leaves a «furious» mark on financial markets

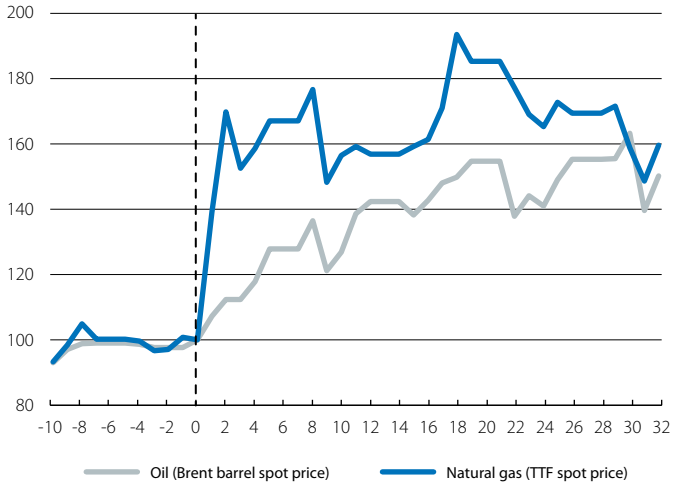
Geopolitical uncertainty drives markets. March was marked by a notable increase in volatility in the global financial markets, with the conflict in the Middle East as the main catalyst. The war triggered significant risk aversion, leading to stock market declines, spikes in volatility, a flight to safe-haven assets, and a sharp tightening in energy and other commodity prices. This increase in energy prices, in turn, led to a rise in short-term inflation expectations, resulting in a significant adjustment of monetary policy expectations and an increase in sovereign interest rates. In a context of high uncertainty regarding the duration and intensity of the conflict, markets reacted very sensitively to a constant flow of news such as political statements, episodes of military escalation (Israeli attacks on energy facilities and the involvement of regional players like the Houthis) and fluctuations in the rhetoric of international leaders. The overall tone of markets was one of fragility and unstable sentiment. As a reflection of the persistence of geopolitical risks and uncertainty regarding the impacts of the conflict, at the beginning of April markets experienced sessions with recoveries (supported by expectations of a de-escalation and the announcement of a truce) and new episodes of risk aversion (amid fears of further military escalation).

Energy prices surge. The most immediate transmission channel of the conflict to financial markets has been through energy commodities. The Middle East is a critical focal point for both the production and the global transportation of hydrocarbons, with the Strait of Hormuz playing a particularly key role, as approximately 20% of the world's crude oil and natural gas pass through it, creating significant tensions regarding supply expectations. In this context, the price of Brent surged by over 60% since the start of the conflict, at times reaching close to 120 dollars per barrel, the highest level since 2022 in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine. TTF gas in Europe, also recorded a significant increase of over 70%, reaching peaks slightly above 60 euros/MWh during moments of greatest tension. At the end of March, futures markets continued to price in a scenario of structurally higher prices than before the conflict, with year-end estimates close to 80 dollars per barrel for Brent and 50 euros/MWh for gas, well above previous levels (68 dollars and 32 euros/MWh, respectively).

The increase in energy costs also affected derivative products. In the US, the price of gasoline rose to 4 dollars per gallon, an increase of nearly 35% in just one month. Other derivatives such as fertilisers, especially urea from the Middle East, also recorded sharp increases of up to 55%, which could have additional implications for agricultural prices in the coming quarters. Among other commodities, the tension was more moderate. Industrial metals, such as aluminium, recorded more contained increases (of around 10%), while agricultural commodities rose by less than 5%. Precious metals showed weaker performance, with declines of around 10%, reflecting both the strengthening the dollar and a slight correction in gold and silver following last year's strong rally.

Commodities

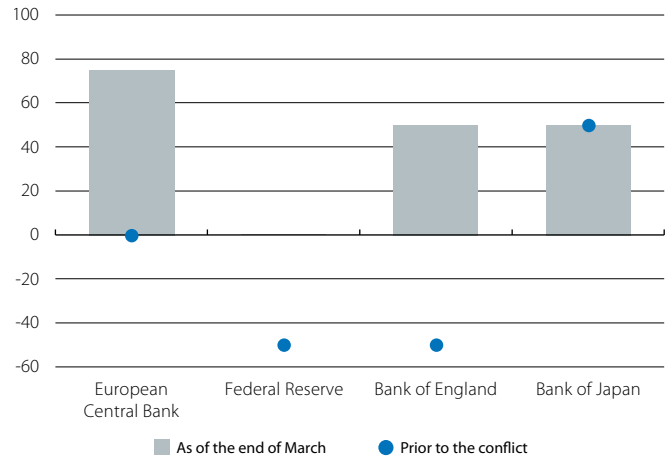
Index (100 = day 0 of the conflict)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

Market-implied changes in policy interest rates for 2026

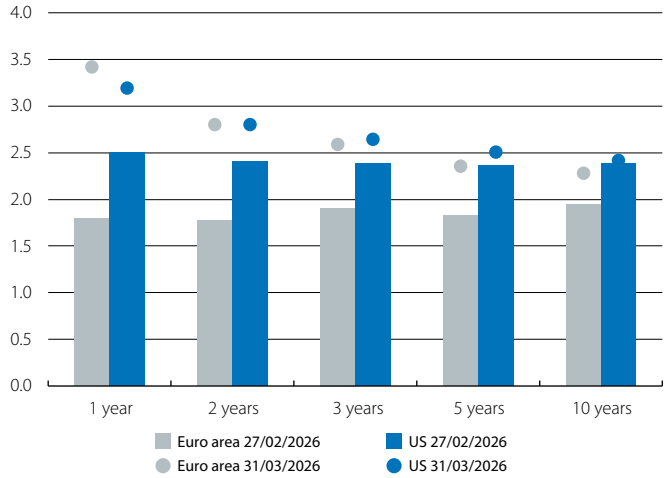
(bps)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

Inflation expectations

Year-on-year change (%)



Note: *Inflation expectations priced in through inflation swaps.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg and Refinitiv Eikon.*

Markets anticipate more restrictive central banks. The ECB kept interest rates unchanged at 2.00% at its March meeting, but explicitly acknowledged the inflationary risks arising from increased energy costs resulting with the conflict. In this regard, the institution adopted a more hawkish tone and indicated the possibility of tightening the monetary policy stance if a significant pass-through of energy costs to the overall price basket is observed. The ECB emphasised that it is starting from a neutral stance, which gives it room for manoeuvre, and reiterated its data-dependent approach. As a result, by the end of March, markets began to anticipate three rate hikes throughout 2026 (depo rate at 2.75%) compared to the expectation of stability from the beginning of the year. This adjustment was reflected in interbank interest rates, with the 12-month Euribor rising by some 60 basis points to 2.9%, the highest since September 2024.

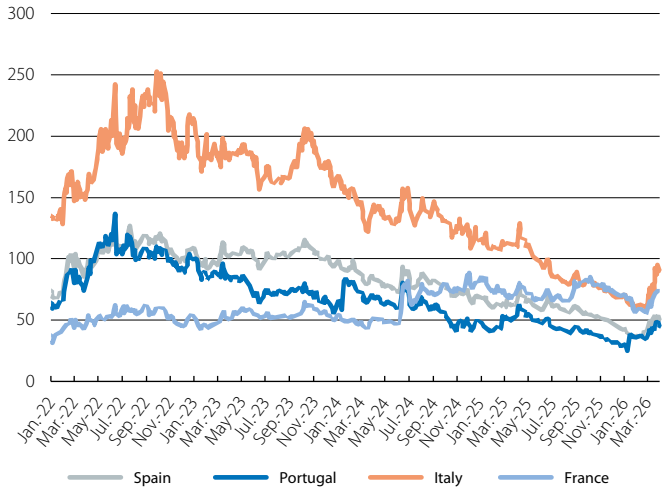
In the US, the Fed adopted a more cautious stance towards the conflict. While acknowledging the risks associated with rising energy costs, it considered premature to assess their macroeconomic impact and chose to focus its communication on the balance of domestic risks. In particular, the Fed expressed concern about the trend in goods inflation, affected by tariffs, and signs of weakness in the labour market. Chair Jerome Powell indicated that, in principle, they would be willing to «look through» a temporary energy shock, provided that long-term inflation expectations remain well anchored. However, the overall tone was cautious and he avoided committing to a specific path for rates. Markets made a hawkish reading of these messages and postponed the next rate cut to mid-2027, once the impact of the energy shock has dissipated, thus anticipating a Fed in «pause» mode during 2026. The shift in expectations extended to other economies. In the United Kingdom, the change was particularly notable and investors shifted from anticipating two rate cuts to two and three hikes for 2026. In Japan, meanwhile, expectations of at least two rate hikes were reinforced.

Sovereign rates reflect inflation risks and the shift in monetary policy expectations. Sovereign debt markets clearly reflected the combined impact of rising energy costs and the tightening of monetary policy expectations. In general terms, interest rates rose significantly, with particularly pronounced movements at the short end of the curves. In Germany and the US, short-term rates rose by approximately 60 and 40 basis points, respectively, during March. Euro area peripheral risk premia periphery also tightened, especially in Italy (given the country's greater energy dependence), but their levels nevertheless remained contained, particularly in Spain and Portugal (by end of March stood at 50 bps and 45 bps, respectively). Of particular note was the rebound in long-term US rates (also around 40 bps): while long-term inflation expectations have remained relatively anchored, the increase in nominal rates is largely explained by a rise in real rates. This suggests that investors are demanding higher returns to compensate for future uncertainty, whether due to increased inflationary volatility or a world of greater uncertainty, amid a backdrop of deteriorating public finances.

Only the energy sector escapes stock market declines. The increase in geopolitical uncertainty and the tightening of financial conditions resulted in widespread declines in global stock markets. Advanced and emerging economies acummulated

Sovereign risk premiums

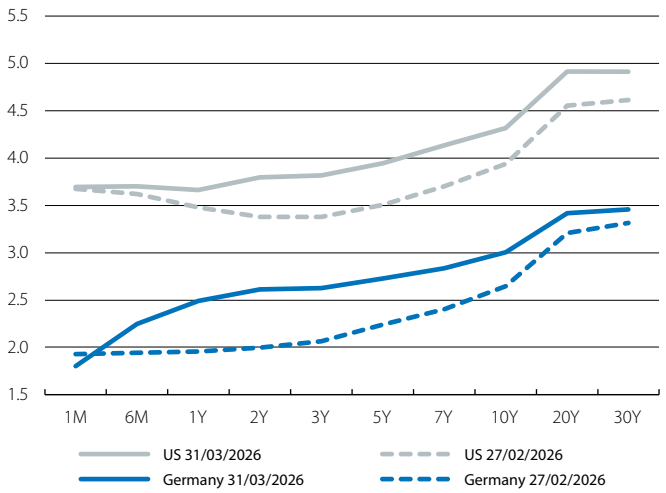
(bps)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

Sovereign yield curves

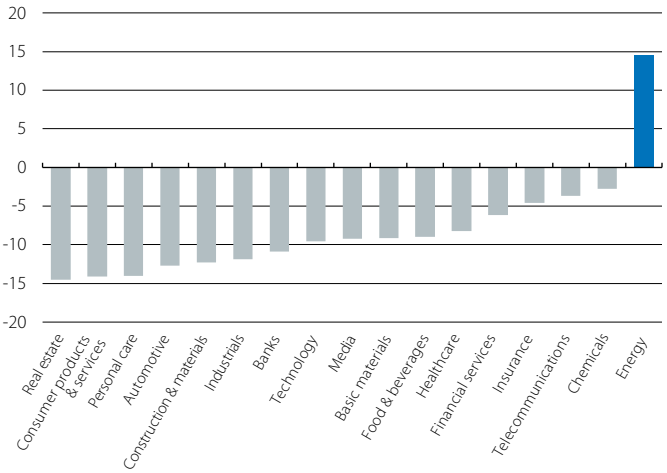
(%)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

Eurostoxx 600: sectors

Change (%)



Note: *Change between 27/02/2026 and 31/03/2026.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

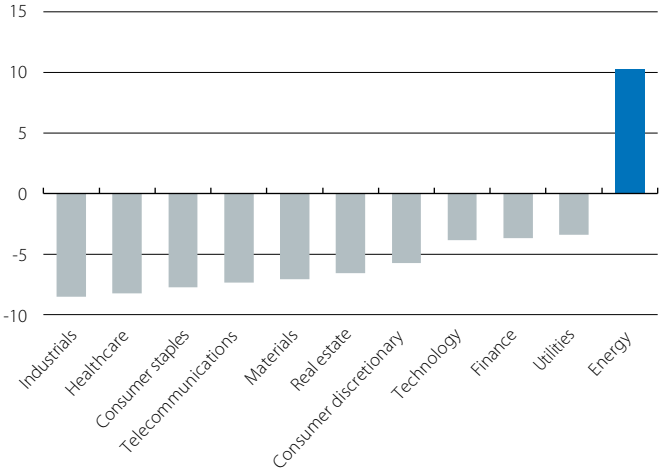
declines of 10% by the end of March, and most indices accumulate losses year to date. The declines were particularly pronounced in Asia, given its high energy dependence on the Middle East. At the sectoral level, almost all sectors recorded setbacks, with notable declines in more cyclical sectors such as industry, tourism and real estate. Other sectors showed relative resilience, including defensive sectors such as utilities, as well as the US tech sector. The major tech firms, which were already experiencing a period of correction prior to the conflict due to high valuations and doubts around the profitability of their massive investments in AI, showed a relatively more robust performance compared to other sectors, supported by their lower direct exposure to the energy cycle. The only sector with positive performance was the energy sector, due to the expectation of greater profits resulting from the rebound in commodity prices.

The dollar regains some of its appeal as a safe-haven asset. In currency markets, the dollar was the main beneficiary of risk aversion sentiment. After weakening for most of 2025, the US dollar regained ground against its main counterparts, driven by its safe-haven status and the relatively lower exposure of the US economy to the conflict. Within the G-10, the pound sterling and the Japanese yen showed relatively better performance, with moderate depreciations, while the euro traded around 1.15 during the month, down from the pre-conflict levels of 1.18. Currencies such as the Swedish krona recorded sharper declines. In Asia, the currencies most exposed and dependent on Gulf energy flows, such as the South Korean won or the Taiwanese dollar, depreciated by more than 4%, while the Chinese renminbi remained relatively stable (China accumulated significant crude oil reserves and is better positioned in terms of supply in the current context). In Latin America, divergences were observed depending on countries' exposure to commodities. The Colombian peso, supported by its status as a crude oil exporter, strengthened, while other currencies such as the Chilean peso registered declines.

High volatility in an uncertain environment. Overall, March was characterised by a highly volatile environment, with indicators such as the VIX exceeding 30 points at the moments of greatest tension – levels not seen since «Liberation Day» in April 2025. In the coming months, the evolution of the conflict will continue to be the main driver of financial markets. In particular, the duration, intensity and aftermath of the tensions will be key for assessing the impact on energy and its transmission to the rest of prices, the global economy and, therefore, the path of monetary policy and financial conditions. Meanwhile, markets will continue to navigate an environment of high uncertainty that increases the propensity to experience episodes of volatility.

S&P 500: sectors

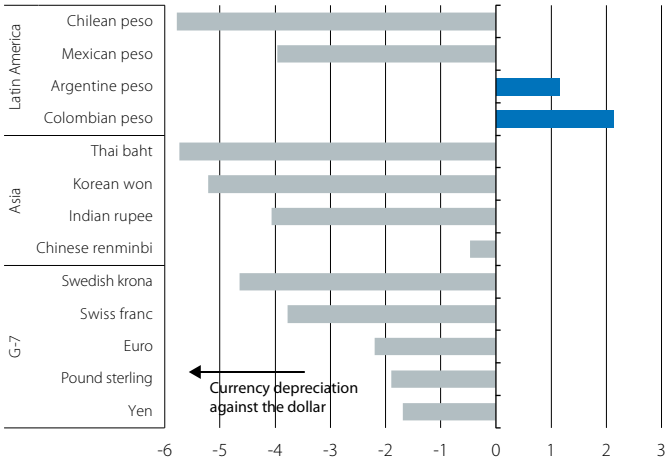
Change (%)



Note: *Change between 27/02/2026 and 31/03/2026.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

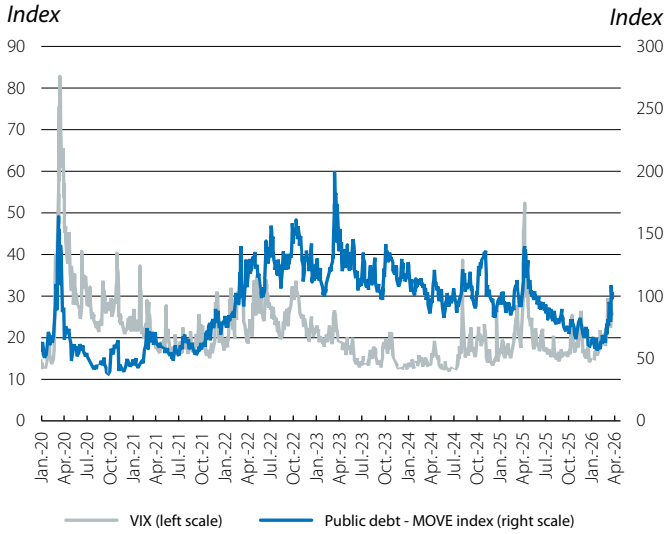
Currencies against the US dollar

Change (%)



Note: *Change between 27/02/2026 and 31/03/2026.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

Implied volatility



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

The oil market enters unknown territory

The conflict now widely referred to as the Third Gulf War has caused the largest disruption on record in the global energy market. The main point of tension is the Strait of Hormuz, a key maritime route through which around 20% of global oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) passes. With the strait effectively closed, a large share of the region's energy production is blocked. Energy markets reflected this scenario: the price of oil hovered around 100 dollars per barrel in the final weeks of March, driven by supply disruptions, attacks on tankers and damage to critical energy infrastructure.

Pre-conflict situation: solid fundamentals but with risks

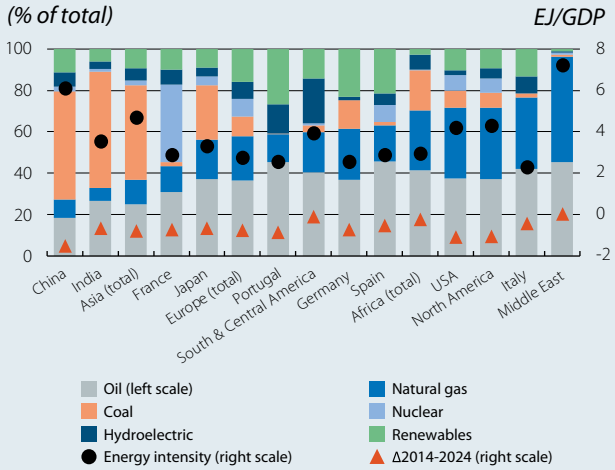
Up until the outbreak of the conflict, the market was in a comfortable position, with supply growth outpacing that of demand. A surplus of approximately 1.5-2.0 million barrels per day (mb/d) was driven by increased production in non-OPEC countries, the accelerated reversal of OPEC+ cuts, and demand in a moderate growth phase.[1] On the other hand, global oil inventories (crude and derivatives) stood at around 8.2 billion barrels, equivalent to approximately 80 days of global consumption, marking the highest level in five years and above the historical average.[2] All this pointed to a relatively contained underlying Brent price (close to USD 60 per barrel), to which a risk premium was added, linked to the build-up of geopolitical risks and conflicts in regions with the potential to disrupt market stability.

Hormuz, a critical strait: a vital artery for the global economy

Oil traffic passing through the Strait of Hormuz historically stood at around 20 mb/d. According to data on daily flows through the strait, a drop in traffic of over 90% has been observed since the start of the conflict. In this context, there are alternative routes through which Gulf countries can redirect part of the oil flows,[3] but even with these alternatives the closure of Hormuz implies a loss of supply of some 15 mb/d.

1. The International Energy Agency (IEA) anticipated an average growth in supply of 2.4 mb/d in 2026 (vs. 3.1 mb/d in 2025), compared to a demand growth of 0.9 mb/d in 2026 (vs. 0.8 mb/d in 2025). See the «Oil Market Report» from February 2026.
2. Around half of these are located in OECD countries, of which 1.25 billion barrels are held by governments (emergency reserves) and another 600 million barrels are industrial reserves maintained under government obligations.
3. The East-West pipeline, which connects the oil fields in the east of the Arabian Peninsula to the port of Yanbu on the Red Sea, has a capacity to transport up to 7 mb/d (vs. utilisation of 1.5-2 mb/d in 2025). The Abu Dhabi pipeline, which connects the UAE's refineries with the port of Fujairah in the Gulf of Oman, has limited re-routing capacity due to its high level of utilisation and vulnerability to Iranian attacks.

Global: primary energy consumption sources and energy intensity



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the Energy Institute.*

Some factors that could mitigate this supply shock have already been set in motion. The IEA has announced the release of 400 million barrels of strategic reserves, although there is uncertainty regarding the release rate, which could be between 1 and 3 mb/d. In addition, non-OECD countries may release some of their strategic reserves and sanctioned crude oil could enter the market, contributing an additional 2-3 mb/d.[4] Adjusting for the release of reserves, in the short term the net impact of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz is estimated to be between 8 and 12 mb/d, which would mean the loss of some 300 million barrels of oil in one month of conflict. These levels are significant, but manageable in scenarios with a brief conflict. Once the conflict is over, it is uncertain how long it will take for the flows passing through Hormuz to return to their historical levels. In particular, the deterioration of security conditions in the strait or damage to logistical and productive infrastructure in the region could result in it taking longer for trade flows to be re-established.

To the extent that the conflict drags on and imbalances between oil supply and demand accumulate, the likelihood of scenarios in which prices could be substantially higher than they were in March also increases, in an attempt to moderate a highly inelastic demand.[5] Additionally, the recovery of pre-conflict

4. In particular, it is estimated that China holds strategic reserves exceeding 1 billion barrels (equivalent to around 90 days of domestic consumption), although it has not yet announced the release of those reserves. In recent years, there has been an accumulation of sanctioned Russian and Iranian crude oil stored on ships. It is estimated that there are 100-150 million barrels of sanctioned Iranian crude oil (out of a total of almost 300 million).
5. For reference, in March 2022, the price of Brent crude oil approached 140 dollars per barrel.

production levels could require longer timeframes and increase the risks of a structural deterioration in productive capacity.

A global dependency on the Gulf, but with variable geography

Despite the global nature of the shock, its impact will be asymmetric. On the one hand, the direct dependency on energy flows from the Gulf varies significantly by country. 90% is destined for Asia and approximately half of the crude oil imported by India and China originates from the region,[6] while this figure exceeds 70% in the case of South Korea, and 80% for Japan. By way of comparison, in the case of the EU, crude oil imports from the Gulf account for between 10% and 20% of the total.[7]

On the other hand, the energy mix varies significantly between countries, as does their energy intensity, that is, the amount of energy required for economic activity. At one end of the spectrum are the countries of the Middle East themselves, with a very high energy intensity and a primary energy consumption derived almost exclusively from oil and gas. Asian emerging markets also exhibit high energy intensity, especially China, but with intensive coal consumption. Asian emerging markets also tend to exhibit high energy intensity, especially China, where coal consumption remains particularly intensive. Among advanced economies, which generally display lower energy intensity, France and Japan stand out for their relatively lower dependence on oil and gas, while the United States and Italy's energy mixes remain heavily reliant on fossil fuels.[8]

Duration of the conflict: a key (known) unknown

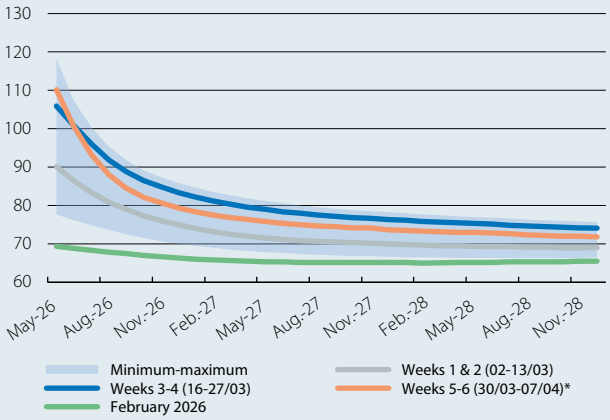
The economic impact of the conflict will be transmitted through various channels, notably energy, international trade, financial conditions, and uncertainty, the intensity and scope of which will depend on the duration of the conflict and the credibility of a potential ceasefire.

Some of the factors that could prolong the conflict include the ability of the Iranian leadership to maintain a *status quo* in the country and successfully resort to asymmetric warfare strategies, the ambiguity of the US and Israeli military objectives, the risk of a regional escalation, and the difficulty in achieving a ceasefire if maximalist conditions are imposed. Conversely, the US electoral calendar, the weakening of Iranian leadership, and damage to infrastructure increase the political and economic costs of prolonging the hostilities. In any case, it can be expected that, even under an early ceasefire, the medium-term scenario will remain marked by significant risks of renewed tensions.

Faced with a considerable range of known uncertainties (or *known unknowns*), such as the duration of the conflict or the extent of the damage to energy infrastructure, the market response during the first month of conflict

Oil: futures prices

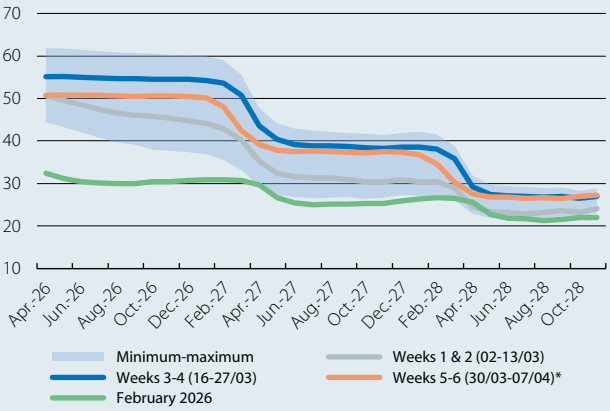
(Dollars per barrel)



Note: ** Using market closing data up to 7 April.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

Natural gas: futures prices

(Euros per MWh)



Note: ** Using market closing data up to 7 April.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

6. These two countries are the largest importers of crude oil from Russia, which accounts for around 35% of India's crude oil imports and 20% of China's.
7. In the case of natural gas, the situation is somewhat different. Despite Qatar being the largest global exporter of LNG, the observed dependencies on flows from the region are somewhat less pronounced, and import volumes are also significantly lower. Also, about 20% of the LNG imported by China comes from the region, although these imports are far inferior to those delivered via pipelines. Japan and India also show limited dependence on the region, while Pakistan and Korea show somewhat higher dependencies. Other major exporters of natural gas to Asia include Russia, Australia, the US and Malaysia. In the case of the EU, around 5% of LNG imports come from the Gulf. On the other hand, unlike the case of oil, the cost of storing LNG results in substantially lower natural gas inventories, which increases the vulnerability of economies more dependent on natural gas to supply disruptions and price fluctuations.
8. For further details on the sectoral impact and monetary policy implications in the euro area, see the Focuses «Geoeconomic exposure and strategic relevance of the Middle East» and «Energy tensions, inflation and monetary policy in the euro area» in this same report.

could be explained by different layers of uncertainty.[9] On the one hand, this could be a certain intuition (or an *unknown known*) that at least one of the parties will not be willing to engage in a prolonged conflict, given the rapidly rising economic costs of a disruption of this magnitude. By the end of March, with Brent futures trading at around 80 dollars one year ahead (up from 65 dollars in February) and natural gas futures at around 50 euros (versus 30 euros in February), the markets seem to be anticipating a relatively short-lived conflict, with limited structural damage and a stable ceasefire, along with a steady recovery of trade flows through Hormuz. On the other hand, the environment of elevated geopolitical risk and heightened market volatility points to a risk distribution with a heavy negative tail, skewed by an ample set of *unknown unknowns*.

Luís Pinheiro de Matos

9. The Rumsfeld Matrix, popularised by the former US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, in a press conference in 2002 during the Iraq War, is a framework for analysing information and uncertainty in strategic decision-making. It distinguishes four types of knowledge. Known knowns are facts that we know and understand well, and they form the basis on which decisions are made. Known unknowns are aspects we know exist, but about which information is lacking. Unknown knowns are pieces of knowledge we possess but do not recognise or consciously use, such as accumulated experience or intuition. Finally, unknown unknowns are factors we are unaware of and cannot anticipate, which often involve the greatest risks, such as extreme events (or «black swans») and unidentified risks.

Interest rates (%)

	31-March	28-February	Monthly change (bp)	Year-to-date (bp)	Year-on-year change (bp)
Euro area					
ECB Refi	2.15	2.15	0	0	–50
3-month Euribor	2.08	2.01	7	5	–25
1-year Euribor	2.87	2.22	65	63	55
1-year government bonds (Germany)	2.51	1.97	54	49	51
2-year government bonds (Germany)	2.62	2.00	62	49	60
10-year government bonds (Germany)	3.00	2.64	36	15	28
10-year government bonds (Spain)	3.51	3.06	44	22	14
10-year government bonds (Portugal)	3.45	3.00	45	30	21
US					
Fed funds (lower limit)	3.50	3.50	0	0	–75
3-month SOFR	3.68	3.67	2	3	–62
1-year government bonds	3.65	3.47	18	18	–38
2-year government bonds	3.79	3.37	42	32	–12
10-year government bonds	4.32	3.94	38	15	7

Spreads corporate bonds (bps)

	31-March	28-February	Monthly change (bp)	Year-to-date (bp)	Year-on-year change (bp)
Itraxx Corporate	72	55	16	21.0	9.4
Itraxx Financials Senior	78	59	19	23.4	10.0
Itraxx Subordinated Financials	134	101	32	40.6	14.8

Exchange rates

	31-March	28-February	Monthly change (%)	Year-to-date (%)	Year-on-year change (%)
EUR/USD (dollars per euro)	1.155	1.181	–2.2	–1.6	6.7
EUR/JPY (yen per euro)	183.380	184.360	–0.5	–0.3	13.0
EUR/GBP (pounds per euro)	0.873	0.876	–0.3	0.2	4.4
USD/JPY (yen per dollar)	158.720	156.050	1.7	1.3	5.9

Commodities

	31-March	28-February	Monthly change (%)	Year-to-date (%)	Year-on-year change (%)
Bloomberg Commodity Index	135.2	121.7	11.1	23.3	27.8
Brent ($/barrel)	118.4	72.5	63.3	94.5	60.7
Gold ($/ounce)	4,668.1	5,278.9	–11.6	8.1	51.3

Equity

	31-March	28-February	Monthly change (%)	Year-to-date (%)	Year-on-year change (%)
S&P 500 (USA)	6,528.5	6,878.9	–5.1	–4.6	17.0
Eurostoxx 50 (euro area)	5,569.7	6,138.4	–9.3	–3.8	4.5
Ibex 35 (Spain)	17,049.6	18,360.8	–7.1	–1.5	28.1
PSI 20 (Portugal)	9,131.6	9,276.1	–1.6	10.5	31.4
Nikkei 225 (Japan)	51,063.7	58,850.3	–13.2	1.4	37.6
MSCI Emerging	1,397.2	1,610.7	–13.3	–0.5	24.7

An uncertain energy shock hangs over the global economy

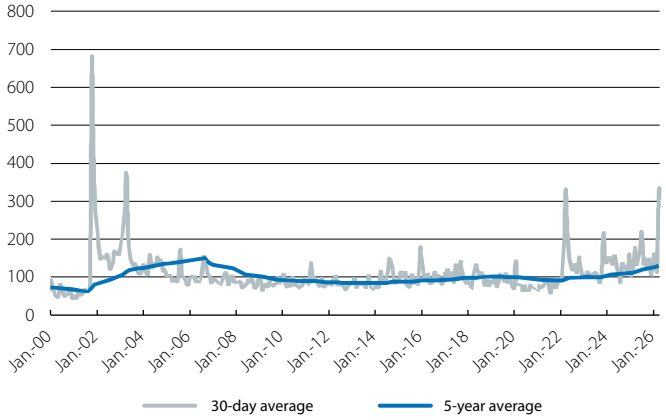
A new global shock, with coordinates yet to be defined. Faced with the largest oil shock in decades, the global economy is bracing for the consequences of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which around 20% of the oil and LNG produced and consumed globally flows. Throughout March, the conflict was characterised by heightened volatility in the financial markets, most notably in energy markets (see the Financial Markets - Economic Outlook section). Despite the uncertainty over two key variables – namely, the duration of the conflict and the extent of damage to key infrastructure – the price of Brent was close to 100 dollars per barrel (around 70 dollars in February), while futures prices for delivery through to the year end exceeded 80 dollars. On the gas side, prices were above 50 euros per MWh in contracts until next winter. These prices are compatible with scenarios involving a short-lived conflict and limited damage to productive capacity in the Gulf region, albeit with a long tail of downside risks.

The March data point to a sharper deterioration in services. The euro area PMIs show mixed patterns in March. The services index fell to 50.2 points (vs. 51.9 previously) and that of manufacturing rose to 51.6 points (vs. 50.8 previously). The price subcomponents indicate a rise in input costs that is not yet being passed on to final prices. By country, France was in contractionary territory (48.8 points vs. 49.9 previously), while Germany remained in the expansionary zone, although it also shows a significant decline (51.9 points vs. 53.2 previously). The main German business confidence indices confirm the deterioration in sentiment in March. The Ifo fell by 2.0 points (to 86.4, below the 100-point benchmark), due to the sharp decline in the expectation component, while the ZEW index shows that the percentage of respondents anticipating a deterioration in activity rose sharply this month. In the US, the services PMI also recorded a decline (49.8 points vs. 51.7 previously) and the manufacturing PMI rebounded (52.3 points vs. 51.6 previously) thanks to increased dynamism in production and new orders. The US PMI also indicates a sharp rise in production costs and a rapid pass-through to final prices, with this subcomponent recording its most pronounced increase since 2022.

The US economy comes back down to Earth. The second estimate of the Q4 2025 GDP figure placed its quarter-on-quarter growth at 0.2%, compared to 0.4% in the first estimate, leaving its average growth in 2025 at 2.1% (vs. the previous 2.2%). In particular, the quarter-on-quarter growth of public consumption was revised downwards to –1.5% (–0.2 pps), reflecting that the federal government shutdown had a greater impact than expected. Private consumption and investment also experienced slight downward revisions, but maintained dynamic growth rates. On the other hand, the sharp increase in employment in March (+178,000 jobs) is mainly explained by temporary effects, such as the reversal of strike effects and

Global: geopolitical risk

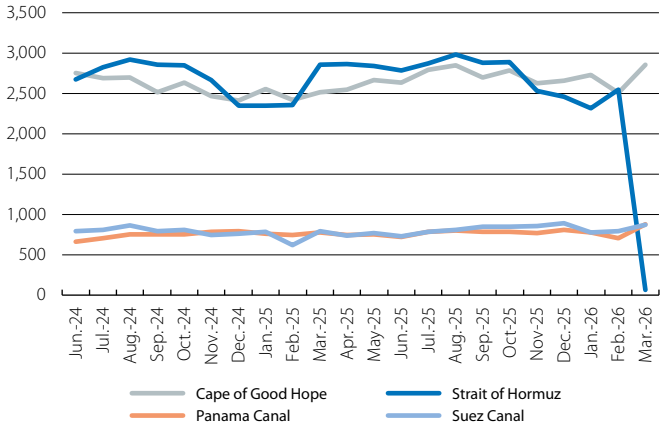
Index (100 = 1985-2019 average)



Note: *The index is constructed from newspaper articles by searching for keywords related to geopolitical risks in the electronic archives of 10 newspapers published in English. A higher value for the index indicates an increase in risk.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from D. Caldara and M. Iacoviello (2022), «Measuring Geopolitical Risk» (downloaded from https://www.matteoiacoviello.com/gpr.htm on 07/04/2026).*

Global: shipping traffic through the main maritime chokepoints

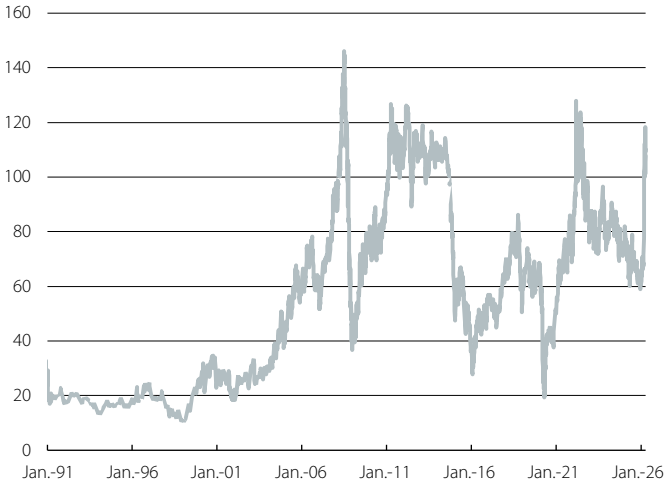
Number of ships



Note: *The chart uses monthly shipping traffic data through four major choke points for maritime traffic.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

Brent oil price

(Dollars per barrel)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

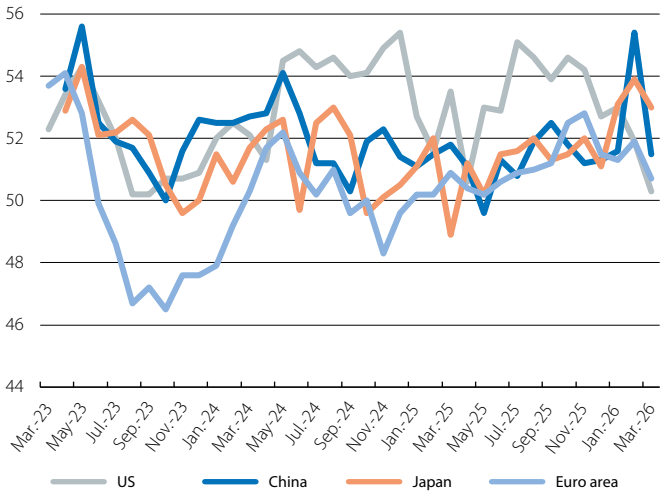
milder weather, rather than by any structural upturn in the labour market. The biggest increases were in sectors such as healthcare, construction, leisure and manufacturing, while the declines continued in technology, information and financial services. Average job creation in the US, meanwhile, stood at 68,300 jobs in Q1, with a recent trend indicating a practically stagnant labour market.

Inflation notes the first impact of rising energy costs. Amid rising energy prices, headline inflation in the euro area increased by 0.6 percentage points in March to 2.5%, while core inflation (which excludes food and energy) fell to 2.3% (vs. 2.4% previously). The energy component has shifted from a 3% year-on-year decline in February to a 5% year-on-year increase in March. In contrast, price pressures eased in the rest of the consumer basket, particularly in services, where inflation returned to 3.2% year-on-year following the rebound in February. These figures reflect favourable dynamics prior to the conflict in the Middle East, although in the future they could be affected by rising energy costs, as well as the key question for the ECB of whether this increase will spread to the rest of the basket. In the US, inflation remained stable in February: 2.4% year-on-year in headline inflation and 2.5% in the core index, the same as in January. On the other hand, the private consumption deflator shows underlying inflation still above 3%, while the producer price index rose by 0.5 pps in February to 3.4%. These inflationary pressures are more intense than in the euro area and could imply a more cautious trajectory than anticipated on the part of the Fed.

Asian economies start the year under the same moon: Japanese strength, Chinese solidity and rising prices. In Japan, the Tankan survey showed positive dynamics in Q1. The business conditions index for large manufacturers rose from 16 to 17, close to its 18-point peak reached in 2021. In the non-manufacturing sector, the index remained at 36, its highest level since the 1990s. On the other hand, price indices among large manufacturers increased, although they remain far from the levels recorded in recent years. In China, the economy accelerated in Q1, mainly due to the boost from exports. Industrial production grew by 6.3% year-on-year in January and February (vs. 5.2% in December), while retail sales recovered (2.8% year-on-year vs. 0.9% in December) and fixed investment in urban areas returned to positive territory, albeit still at very contained levels. In this context, the official manufacturing PMI rose from 49.0 to 50.4 points in March, while the RatingDog PMI, whose sample includes companies that are relatively more exposed to foreign markets, fell from 52.1 to 50.8 points. However, price pressures spiked sharply. The input prices subcomponent surged from 54.3 to 60.5 points, while the selling prices subcomponent stood at 53.8 points, a four-year high. On the services side, the official PMI rose from 49.7 to 50.1 points, a sign confirming that Chinese households might be less affected by the rise in global energy prices, in an environment of low inflation and regulated prices.

Global: composite PMI

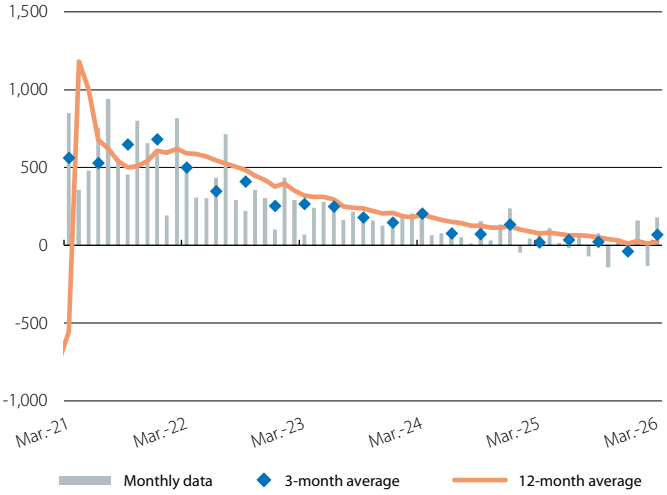
Index



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from S&P Global.*

US: employment

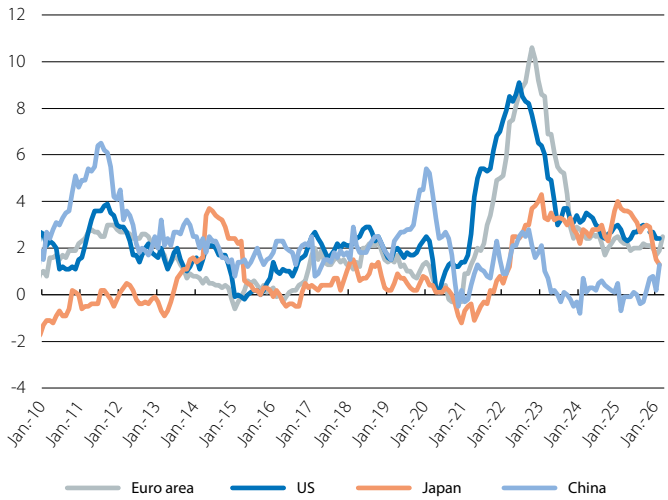
Monthly change (thousands of jobs)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.*

Global: headline CPI

Year-on-year change (%)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg*

Geoeconomic exposure and strategic relevance of the Middle East

Global supply chains have been shaken once again following the joint US and Israeli attack on Iran and the subsequent spread of the conflict to other countries in the Middle East. Subject to uncertainty over the shock's severity and duration, this episode is shaping up to be the greatest disruption to international trade since COVID-19. In addition to its significance as one of the world's main producers of oil, gas, and chemical derivatives, it also holds a strategic geographical position for maritime freight transport and air passenger transport between Europe and Asia. All this means that rising input costs and a lack of critical supplies are once again causing concern for the international productive sector (which, in the case of Europe, was just beginning to recover from the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine)[1] and, ultimately, for households due to the potential erosion of their purchasing power.

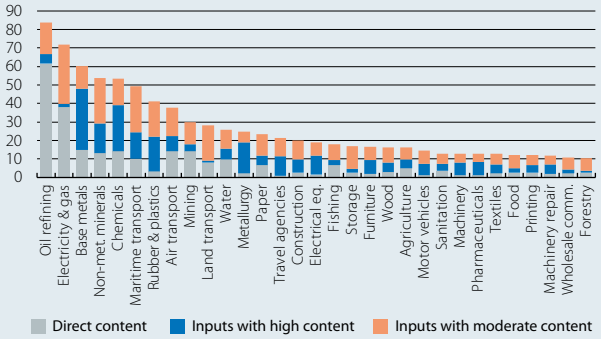
An asymmetric sectoral effect in response to the global rise in energy input costs

Asia is the main destination for oil and gas exports from the Middle East, while in Europe the direct dependency is more moderate, though still significant for some countries.[2] Nevertheless, the global nature of commodity markets means that the shock has also been transmitted to economies sourcing energy well outside the conflict area, and even well-supplied regions, such as North America. In this way, oil- and gas-intensive companies worldwide have been exposed to an increase in their production costs. The sectors with the greatest direct exposure are oil refining and power generation, the chemical and metallurgical industry, transport services, construction-related materials and agriculture (see the first chart, with aggregated data for the EU). In addition to this impact, there is a second layer through derivative products: some, like fertilisers at the start of the food value chain, have a more specific scope; others act as key intermediate goods for various branches of manufacturing, such as plastics and metals in the automotive industry, and others have a more widespread impact, like electricity, a critical input for the majority of economic activity and particularly critical for data centres supporting AI deployment.[3]

In recent years, the EU has reduced its energy intensity,[4] and following Russia's invasion of Ukraine it has made great efforts to diversify its energy sources.[5] However, it remains highly dependent on external sources for its primary energy needs. Furthermore, the share of renewables in electricity generation coexists with a marginal pricing system in which fossil fuels in general, and gas in particular, often continue to determine the price.[6] All this means that Europe's sensitivity to international energy markets remains high. The differences between countries are largely due to the productive structure and the relative weight of the aforementioned energy-intensive sectors: Eastern Europe is the relatively most exposed area, with Poland, Slovakia and Lithuania at the forefront (see second chart), and among the larger economies, Germany has the highest percentage of energy content and France the lowest.

EU: economic activities with the highest energy content

(% of production value, 2023)

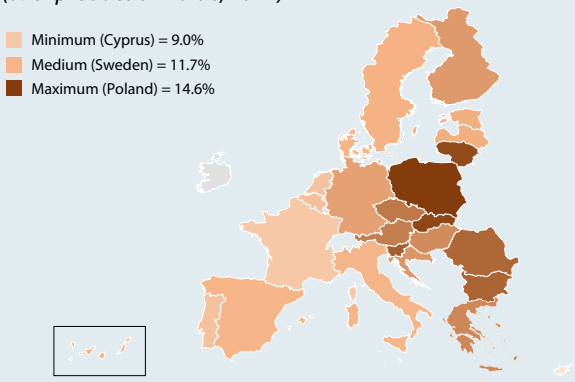


Notes: *Direct content includes mining products, oil refining, electricity and gas. Inputs with high (medium) content include those sectors with direct content equal to or greater than 10% (5%) of production.*

Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Eurostat.*

EU: energy content by country

(% of production value, 2024)



Notes: *Average energy content of each sector in the EU-27 weighted according to the relative sectoral value added in each Member State. The energy content is the sum of the direct content and the inputs with high and medium direct content. Data not available for Ireland, Luxembourg and Malta.*

Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Eurostat.*

1. See the Focus «Characterisation of the business cycle in the EU: neither widespread, nor robust» in the MR01/2026.
2. See the Focus «The oil market enters unknown territory» in this same *Monthly Report*.
3. As proof of this key role, the Trump administration signed a pledge on 4 March with the commitment of seven tech firms to internalise any electricity costs that data centres may generate for consumers.
4. International Energy Agency (2025), «Energy Efficiency 2025».
5. See the Focus «Europe faces another energy crisis» in this same *Monthly Report*.
6. M. Draghi (2024), «The Future of European Competitiveness».

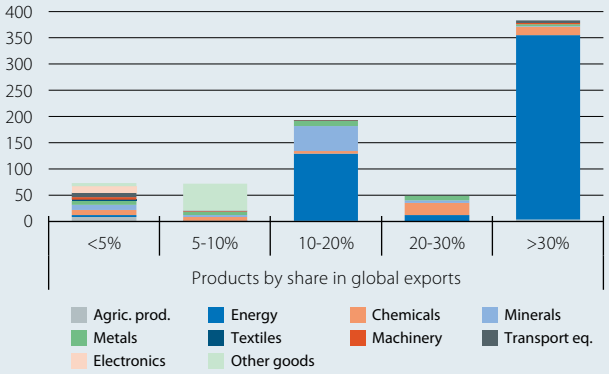
The Middle East's geoeconomic relevance beyond energy markets

The economic importance of the Middle East extends far beyond the oil and gas markets, which are the most visible aspect of the war's impact in the short term. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE are significant producers and exporters of non-energy products, particularly in the chemical and metalliferous sectors (see third chart). These products include nutrients for producing fertilisers, such as urea, for which the production of the region as a whole accounts for around a third of global exports, on which India and Brazil are highly dependent. The region also supplies essential commodities for a wide range of plastic products, such as ethylene glycol, polyethylene (PE) and polypropylene (PP), which represent over 25% of the global market share, with Asia being the main customer. Helium too – a noble gas that is critical for the semiconductor industry and for which the region is a key supplier, with Taiwan being among the most dependent countries. Another example is aluminium and its alloys (15% share), which are used in metallurgy, the automotive sector, construction and machinery, and of which Europe is one of the largest buyers (see the map of the EU's main import dependencies in the fourth chart).

Furthermore, the region is a strategic hub in economic relations between Europe and Asia. In addition to the significance of the Strait of Hormuz as an export route for oil and gas, the region is also home to the Suez Canal, one of the most critical choke points for global maritime freight transport. This latter route has already been under considerable stress since the end of 2023 due to Houthi attacks in the Red Sea around the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which has reduced maritime traffic passing through this point by 50%, and increased the length and duration of the route to Europe (by 6,500 kilometres and 10-15 days, respectively), diverting it around the Cape of Good Hope.[7] All this has led to significant delays in order deliveries and increased freight costs on this route, which is particularly important for goods with a low unit value, such as bulk shipments of grain and fertilisers or basic manufactured goods such as furniture, textiles and toys. This situation could be exacerbated by the extension of the conflict in the Middle East. It should be recalled that the EU has significant dependencies on China in critical minerals for the automotive and tech industries,[8] as well as for consumer electronics (mobile phones and laptops) and electrical equipment (household appliances, industrial batteries and generators).[9]

Exports from the Middle East: by global share and sector

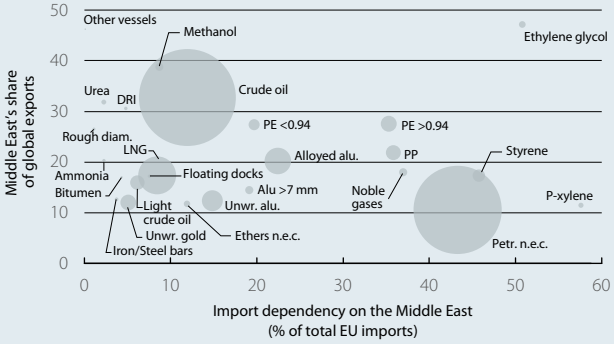
(USD billions, 2024)



Note: *Sum of exports from Iran, Iraq, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman. Calculations based on products at the 6-digit level of the HS classification.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the Atlas of Economic Complexity.*

EU: import dependency on the Middle East

Selected products, 2025



Notes: *Products at the 6-digit level of the HS classification in which the Middle East has a global export share of 10% or more. The Middle East includes Iran, Iraq, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman. The area of the circles is proportional to the value of EU imports from the Middle East.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Eurostat and the Atlas of Economic Complexity.*

Finally, it is also worth highlighting the role played by Dubai and Doha as international air hubs. In addition to serving as international connectors between Europe, Asia and Africa, the region has gained increasing importance as a tourist and business destination through the promotion of major international events, sectoral congresses and a notable development of hotel and leisure infrastructures. In 2024, Dubai Airport – the second busiest in the world and the first in international traffic – reached 92 million passengers, while Doha's approached 53 million. The escalation and prolongation of the war in Iran could divert air traffic and travellers to other areas, potentially benefiting Europe, as happened during the Arab Spring in 2010 and, more recently, following the conflicts in Israel.

David Martínez Turégano

7. United Nations (2025), «Review of maritime transport 2025: Staying the course in turbulent waters».
8. See the Focus «China's alchemy: how it transforms critical minerals into global power» in the MR01/2026.
9. See the Focus «Import dependencies and competitive emergencies for Europe's industry» in the MR07/2025.

Europe faces another energy crisis

Europe, which prior to the outbreak of the armed conflict in Iran was facing this year with relative optimism, is now confronting the impact of a new surge in energy prices. The invasion of Ukraine in 2022 already triggered a major supply crisis, driving up crude oil prices and, above all, natural gas prices, which necessitated fiscal measures to limit its impact on economic activity. The conflict in the Middle East presents a new energy shock, and although the situation and risks are different,[1] it has once again put Europe's energy model under the spotlight.

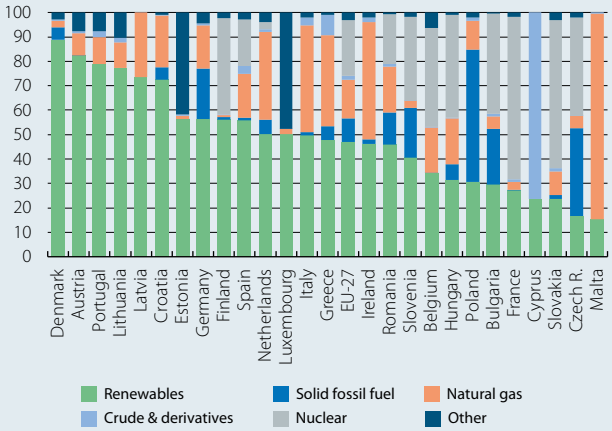
Despite significant progress, Europe remains highly dependent on fossil fuels

Despite the efforts made in recent years to reduce energy intensity in Europe and boost the role of renewables as alternative energy sources, the region remains sensitive to shifts in international energy prices. In fact, more than 70% of all the energy consumed by the EU-27 is generated from non-renewable sources.[2] One of the main energy consumers is transport, accounting for nearly one-third of the EU's total energy consumption and relying almost entirely on petroleum derivatives, such as petrol and diesel, which have already recorded a significant price increase (of nearly 20% and 36%, respectively, in the year to date) and have raised costs in the sector. On the other hand, households[3] and the industrial sector each account for around 25% of total energy consumption, mainly through natural gas and electricity.

Electricity is not a primary energy source, but its price will depend on the cost of the inputs used in its generation. In Europe, electricity prices are set through a marginal system, which means that the final price is determined by the most expensive source of energy that is needed to meet demand, and this is often generated with gas, despite not being the main source of generation.[4] In the EU as a whole, over 47% of electricity is generated from renewables, compared to less than 16% from gas, 10% from coal, and 23% from nuclear energy. However, the aggregate picture conceals significant divergences

Europe: sources of electricity generation

(% of the total)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Eurostat.*

between countries, which is crucial when assessing the impact of a rise in fossil fuel prices, especially in economies with a significant share of energy-intensive industry.[5]

Generally speaking, the economies of Eastern Europe are in a less favourable position, both because they lie at the bottom of the energy efficiency ranking and due to their energy mix and production structure. Specifically, Poland, where industry accounts for almost a fifth of the country's economy and consumes nearly 40% of the country's electricity, generates about 54% of this electricity from coal[6] and has virtually no nuclear generation. Furthermore, its energy-intensive industry accounts for around 7.0% of the total GVA.

Germany is also noteworthy: its industrial sector, one of the largest in the euro area (almost 21% of GDP), directly consumes more than 37% of all the gas used in the country and nearly 47% of all the electricity. Moreover, 18% of this electricity is generated with gas and 21% with coal. France, on the other hand, shows less sensitivity thanks to its nuclear power plants that cover most of its electricity demand (around 67%) and an economy that is less dependent on the industrial sector (which accounts for only 12% of GDP). Spain and Italy, where industry accounts for 14% and 18% of GDP, respectively, show different

1. See the article «Energy tensions, inflation and monetary policy in the euro area» in this same *Monthly Report*.
2. See *Energy in Europe – 2026 edition*, Eurostat.
3. Refers to energy consumption in homes. The expenditure on petrol/diesel incurred by households for their travel is accounted for within the transport sector. See https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32008R1099.
4. Electricity cannot be easily stored, so in Europe, the amount of energy needed for each hour of the following day is calculated daily. For each of those hours, power plants indicate how much electricity they can produce and the minimum price at which they are willing to offer it. The market then sorts these offers from lowest to highest price and accepts them one by one until the entire anticipated demand is met. The last power plant needed to meet demand, usually the most expensive among those that come online, is the one that determines the final electricity price for that hour.
5. Industries considered energy-intensive include basic metals, chemicals, non-metallic minerals, food, and paper. These five sectors consume, on average in the EU-27, two-thirds of all the energy consumed across the entire industrial sector.
6. The conflict in the Middle East does not directly affect coal prices, as the region is not a producer of this commodity. However, the increase in price or the scarcity of crude oil and/or gas may lead to some substitution of these energy sources with coal, driving up its price. In fact, during the energy crisis of 2021-2022, the price of coal quadrupled and since the outbreak of the conflict in the Middle East it has already increased by almost 17%.

starting positions. Industry in Spain accounts for around 60% of the nation's natural gas consumption and nearly 30% of its electricity consumption, although it has reduced coal-fired electricity generation to less than 1% and combines 56% renewables with 19% nuclear, providing it with a certain buffer. Italy, however, is more vulnerable as its industry accounts for over 30% of the national consumption of natural gas and electricity, but 44% of the country's electricity is generated with gas and the share of renewables in its production is the lowest among the four major euro area economies.

A new crisis, a new opportunity for progress

Europe has made significant efforts in recent years to improve its energy efficiency and significantly reduce its dependence on fossil fuels. However, traditional and non-renewable energy sources continue to play a very significant role in the economy as a whole, and the current spike in energy prices is once again testing Europe's resilience while reminding us of its weaknesses in the energy sphere. Furthermore, the conflict in the Middle East adds a risk factor, both due to the potential reduction in the global supply of hydrocarbons (given the threat that attacks on key infrastructure in the region could affect production/distribution in the coming years) and due to logistical and trade disruptions arising from the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the issues in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

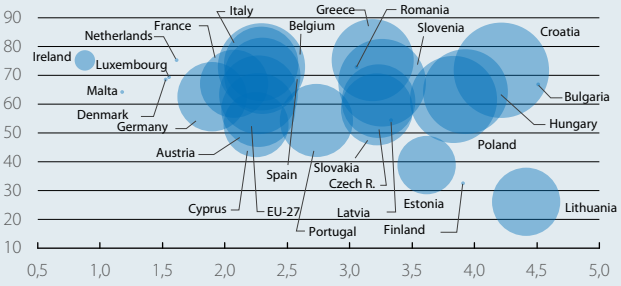
Nevertheless, Europe is not facing this current situation from scratch: the united response to the 2022 crisis accelerated several initiatives to reduce the continent's energy dependency. The sources of gas supply have been diversified (with new liquefied natural gas import infrastructure and agreements with alternative suppliers), electrical and gas connections and solidarity between EU countries are being strengthened, and public policies (such as RePower-EU and the Next Generation funds) are driving investment in renewables, energy efficiency and electrification.

Therefore, the current situation represents a new challenge, but also a new opportunity to correct historical imbalances in the energy system. Two energy crises in less than five years could lead to a faster transition towards a sustainable and secure energy model, with diversification of sources and greater European cooperation. Achieving these goals is the best guarantee that, in the future, European households and businesses will be better protected against the fluctuations of international energy markets. The roadmap is already set; the challenge once again is to implement it with the urgency demanded by the current circumstances.

Rita Sánchez Soliva

Europe: exposure of industry to fossil fuels

*(% of non-renewable energy used in industry)**



Notes: *The size of the bubble indicates the share of gross value added (GVA) that is contributed by energy-intensive industries. Industries considered energy-intensive include basic metals, chemicals, non-metallic minerals, food, and paper. For Ireland, no data are available for the chemicals industry. No data are available for any of the energy-intensive industries for Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands and Romania. * The percentage of electricity generated from fossil fuels is also included.*

Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Eurostat.*

Energy tensions, inflation and monetary policy in the euro area

In March, the bombings exchanged between Iran and the US and Israel caused significant stress in energy commodities; Brent crude oil fluctuated around 100 dollars per barrel throughout the month, while TTF gas did so between 50 and 60 euros per MWh. This points to a rebound of inflation and has led the markets to price in rate hikes at the ECB's forthcoming meetings.

Iran: an energy shock, but not like in 2022

The conflict in the Middle East represents a disruption to global supply and, therefore, may drive up inflation and hinder economic activity. The question is whether the magnitude, persistence and propagation of the disruptions will result in a change in the economic outlook or merely a recalibration of forecasts. Although uncertainty is very high, the nature of the shock brought back memories of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. But the two shocks are different.

In 2022, the stress was not only a matter of rising oil and gas prices but also a problem with energy flows themselves: Europe had to reconfigure its supply chains due to its high dependency on Russia. In contrast, Europe's direct dependencies on the Middle East are limited (see first chart) and the supply disruption mainly affects Asia.

On the pricing side, between February and March, the futures markets shifted from quoting averages for 2026 of 65 dollars per barrel of Brent and 30 euros per MWh of TTF gas to between 80 and 90 dollars for Brent and 45 and 55 euros for TTF (see second chart). Despite the significance of the change, the shock was much stronger in 2022: whereas in mid-2021 the respective prices for 2022 were quoted at 70 dollars and 25 euros, the year's average ended up being 100 dollars and 130 euros, resulting in annual energy inflation of nearly 40% in the euro area.

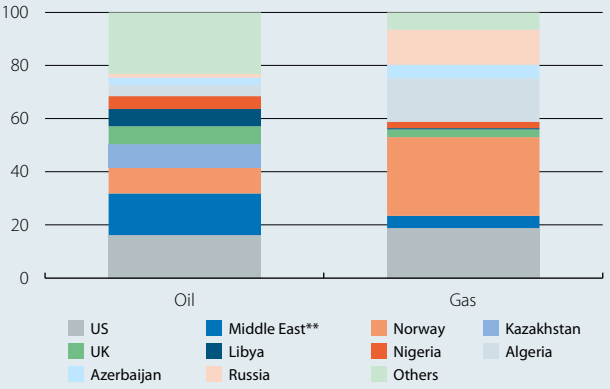
The macroeconomic and monetary environment is also different. In 2022, the war coincided with the post-pandemic reopening of the global economy. The interaction between the energy shock and the imbalances in supply and demand caused a perfect storm for inflation to spread. Furthermore, monetary policy was in a highly expansionary position,[1] which slowed down the ECB's response.

In 2026, the European economy is in a better starting position. Without the imbalances or pressures in the global supply chains of 2022, the euro area's economic activity has maintained moderate growth, while monetary policy has been in a neutral position for several quarters now and the ECB's «meeting by meeting» and «data-dependent» approach to decision-making allows it to react swiftly.

1. In February 2022, the ECB had the official rate at a historic low of –0.50% and was implementing unconventional policies, including both net asset purchases (PEPP and APP) and long-term liquidity injections (TLTRO-III).

Euro area: oil and gas imports

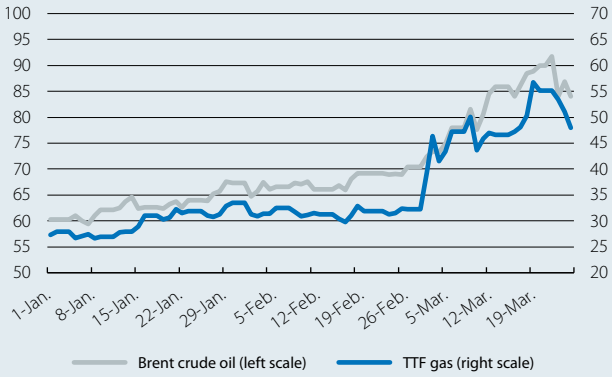
*(% of the total)**



Notes: ** Data from 2024, excluding imports from other EU countries. ** Includes the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant, Iraq and Iran.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Eurostat.*

Average price forecast for 2026 according to market futures

(Dollars per barrel) *(Euros per MWh)*



Note: *Evolution so far this year according to closing prices in the futures markets.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Bloomberg.*

The ECB also has the buffer of inflation expectations anchored at the 2% target in the medium term. However, there may be an unfavourable difference compared to 2022, as expectations tend to be heavily influenced by recent memories: whereas the past experience in 2022 was a decade of low inflation, in 2026 the latest inflationary crisis remains fresh in the collective memory.

Inflation: direct and indirect impacts

Energy accounts for just under 10% of the euro area's price basket (HICP) and its inflation shows a close link with gas and oil prices. Thus, we estimate that the range of Brent and TTF futures quoted in March could translate into energy inflation of between 5% and 12% for 2026 as a whole in the euro area, before dropping to 0%-1% in 2027.[2] Starting

2. We use paths for oil and gas prices according to the futures referenced between March and December 2026 and quoted throughout March. The range is framed between the 30% and 99% price percentiles. These paths translate into energy inflation with linear regressions that fit well: one between oil and the HICP for fuels and lubricants, and another between gas and the HICP for energy excluding fuels.

from a headline inflation rate of 2%, energy prices could mechanically cause an increase in the HICP to 2.5%-3.1% in 2026 for the euro area as a whole, easing back to 2% in 2027 (see third chart).

A persistently significant increase in energy costs could also impact the prices of the other components of the consumer basket through the various economic sectors' energy dependencies.[3] The input-output tables for the euro area show oil and electricity intensity at the sectoral level and provide an approximation of the potential of this indirect effect on inflation. To estimate it, we transfer the energy intensities of each sector to the different components of the HICP and stress their prices with the range of energy inflation rates between 5% and 12%.[4,5] Assuming that the strength of transmission is proportional to energy intensity, the indirect impact can be significant, although in practice it would affect inflation with a time lag[6] and would probably only materialise with high intensity (as predicted by the exercise) in a scenario with persistently significant stress in energy prices.

Constraints for the ECB

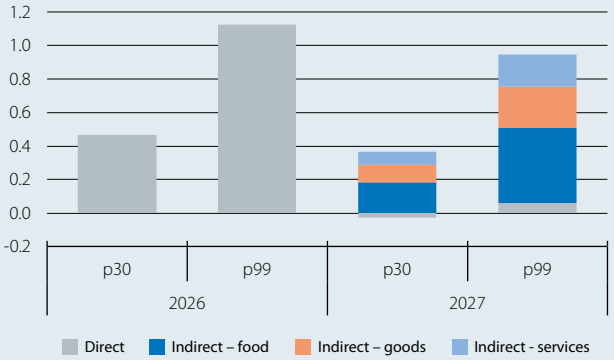
This range of impacts does not differ much from what was being quoted by the markets in March, when inflation swaps pointed to rates of slightly above 3% and 2.5% one and two years ahead, respectively. At the same time, the markets were pricing in between 2 and 3 ECB rate hikes during 2026, placing the depo rate at the end of the year between 2.50% and 2.75%.

We can assess these expectations based on the so-called Taylor rule, which projects the interest rate that the ECB should set according to the evolution of economic activity and inflation.[7] In the fourth chart, we present a range of responses according to the inflation sensitivities analysed previously, the potential impacts on activity (which are currently estimated to be contained)[8] and how gradual the ECB's response is.

This exercise does not rule out the possibility that the ECB could barely react at all to the energy shock, relying instead on its transitory nature and the favourable starting point of the euro area's economy and monetary policy. Nevertheless, there is also the possibility of a scenario in which the combination of a more severe and persistent energy shock and a swift response from the ECB could lead to a tightening of interest rates similar to that priced in by the financial markets in March. In such a scenario, the ECB could shift from a clearly neutral monetary policy to interest rates that would lie between the upper band of what would still be considered neutral and the lower band of a restrictive policy.

Euro area inflation: impact of an energy shock

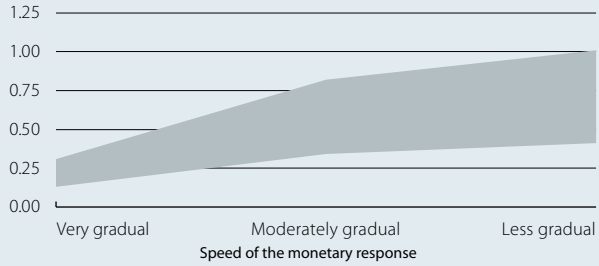
Contribution to headline inflation (pps)



Notes: *p30 and p99 indicate price paths for oil and gas quoted by the futures markets in March (the 30th and 99th percentiles). The direct effect is the contribution of energy inflation caused by the impact of oil and gas prices. The indirect effect is the contribution of the rest of the consumer basket caused by the transmission of energy inflation.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Eurostat and own estimates.*

ECB: response of the official interest rate to the energy shock

Change relative to the starting point (pps)



Notes: *The range encompasses projected scenarios based on different oil and gas futures quoted in March 2026 (from the 30th to the 99th percentiles). The ECB's response is simulated with an inertial Taylor rule in which the interest rate depends on its starting point, the neutral rate, the deviation of inflation from 2% and the output gap. A very (less) gradual response indicates that the rule assigns a high (low) weight to the starting point of rates.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on own estimates and data from Bloomberg and the ECB.*

3. See the article «Geoeconomic exposure and strategic relevance of the Middle East» in this same *Monthly Report*.
4. We reproduce the methodology used by Fagandini *et al.* (2024), «Decomposing HICPX inflation into energy-sensitive and wage-sensitive items», ECB Economic Bulletin 3/2024, to calculate an «energy-sensitive» HICP. After assigning energy intensity among 103 items of the HICP, we transmit to them the increase in energy costs based on the ratio between the energy intensity of each component and that of purely energy items.
5. The exercise identifies food and services related to transport and the repair of goods as the most likely sectors to suffer indirect effects from energy.
6. After the peak in energy inflation in 2022, it took 9 months for the inflation peak in non-energy goods to materialise, while the time lag was 10 months for food, and 14 months for services.
7. Based on De Mazelis *et al.* (2023), «Monetary policy strategies for the euro area: optimal rules in the presence of the ELB», ECB Working Paper, we use the rule: $i_t = \rho(i_{t-1} - i^*_{t-1}) + (1-\rho)[1,5 \cdot (\pi_t - 2) + y_t]$, where i^* is the natural interest rate, π is inflation and y is the output gap (difference between observed and potential GDP). We assume a nominal natural rate of interest of 2% and an initial output gap of zero. The parameter ρ measures the gradualness of the response.
8. Based on the behaviour of energy futures throughout March, most estimates point to a markedly more moderate impact on economic activity than on inflation (reflecting the euro area's low direct exposure and its greater energy resilience). Thus, we feed the Taylor rule with the adverse and severe GDP scenarios presented by the ECB last March, projecting growth within the 0.4%-1.2% range.

How far has the EU progressed on the Competitiveness Compass?

In 2024, the Letta and Draghi reports identified the EU's competitive bottlenecks and proposed reforms to reignite medium-term economic growth.[1] On this basis, in 2025 the European Commission presented the Competitiveness Compass: a roadmap to deepen economic integration, close the innovation gap with the US and reconcile growth and decarbonisation.[2] In 2026, in a more complex geopolitical environment, the overall assessment is positive in terms of direction and debate, but limited in progress, with key decisions still pending and with an uncertain outlook. Looking ahead to 2027, with limited fiscal space, the end of NGEU and the negotiation of the next budget, the priority is to accelerate the reform agenda in order to tackle present and future challenges.

Progress on regulatory simplification and diversification of economic relations

Almost 500 days after the presentation of the Competitiveness Compass, the balance is mixed and the same applies to progress on the Draghi report's recommendations: as of January 2026, only 15% had been fully implemented and 24% partially.[3]

The most visible progress is concentrated on three fronts: (i) financing instruments, such as SAFE loans linked to new defence commitments;[4] (ii) the continuation of initiatives already deployed, such as the Net-Zero Industry Act – the industrial pillar of the Green Deal –, IPCEI projects in clean technologies, strategic projects under the Critical Raw Materials Act and the decoupling from Russian energy driven by REPowerEU; and (iii) targeted adjustments to streamline existing regulation, such as the Omnibus packages – of which the Commission has adopted 6 of the 10 planned, including the digital and sustainability packages –[5] and the creation of the small mid-caps segment to extend administrative regulatory relief beyond SMEs.[6] In addition to this we find initiatives falling strictly within EU-level competences, especially in trade policy and strategic partnerships, such as the agreements with MERCOSUR, Indonesia, India and Australia, which are currently pending ratification[7] and are aimed at diversifying the EU's economic relations.[8]

In addition, the Commission continues to follow up on the recommendations of Letta and Draghi through strategies and action plans in various areas, although their translation into tangible results will depend on the co-legislators and national implementation. In the context of the single market, the One Europe, One Market framework aims to reduce frictions and strengthen the enforcement of existing rules.[9] The roadmap focuses on addressing the so-called «terrible ten» – the 10 barriers identified by the Commission as being the most detrimental to the internal market – through measures ranging from regulatory simplification to regulatory harmonisation in services. One element of this approach is EU Inc. (the 28th regime), a proposal for an optional corporate framework with fully digital corporate operations – online incorporation within 48 hours at a cost of under 100 euros – insolvency procedures adapted to micro-enterprises and tart-ups, application of the once-only principle in corporate information and greater capital flexibility to facilitate the scaling of innovative companies.

In the financial sector, the Savings and Investment Union (SIU) plays a cross-cutting enabling role. The roll-out is gradual: the first legislative package presented by the Commission focuses on the securitisation market, aiming to reactivate an underutilised segment and release additional financing capacity. In parallel, progress has been made in designing savings-investment products in order to boost retail participation in capital markets. The most delicate initiatives – integration, market scale, and supervision – are left for later stages and will require broader political agreements. For its part, the digital euro – key to financial autonomy and resilience – is progressing in its preparatory phase led by the ECB, although its impact and timeline remain subject to pending legislative decisions.

In innovation and technological adoption, the Commission has presented the AI Continent action plan, which organises the European agenda for the deployment of this technology. This includes the Apply AI strategy, aimed at accelerating adoption in strategic sectors through pilot projects, dedicated infrastructure – including factories and gigafactories – and providing specific support for SMEs to reduce barriers to entry. In human capital, the Union of Skills complements this agenda with measures aimed at bolstering training in STEM and digital skills, improving the recognition of qualifications and facilitating labour mobility, which are key to alleviating bottlenecks in sectors linked to the green and digital transition.

What remains pending (and most critical): a genuine internal market at scale

Despite the correct strategic orientation, critical components of the Competitiveness Compass for the integration of the single market remain blocked, representing a significant drag on medium-term growth. Some require greater coordination – such as the provision of European public goods (defence, networks, interconnections) or in the design of pan-European projects under the State aid framework – but others demand

1. M. Draghi (2024). «The Future of European Competitiveness» and E. Letta (2024), «Much more than a market».
2. See the Focus «A shift in the EU's political priorities» in the MR04/2025.
3. EPIC (2026). «The Draghi Observatory Implementation Index Update: Assessing EU Delivery of the Draghi Report».
4. See the Focus «5% of GDP on defence: Why? What for? Is it feasible?» in the MR09/2025.
5. The estimated savings for companies from these six packages stands at 7 billion euros.
6. See the Focus «Firm size and productivity gaps in the EU» in the MR10/2025.
7. On 23 March, the Commission notified the members of MERCOSUR that the interim treaty will come into force on 1 May.
8. See the Focus «EU export diversification beyond Trump's tariffs» in the MR12/2025.
9. European Commission (2026), «The 2026 Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report».

agreements, if not unanimity, among Member States, in areas where national incentives are not always aligned: regulatory harmonisation in services, fiscal and labour convergence, revision of the competition framework and progress towards a genuine capital markets union.

The IMF estimates that internal barriers in the EU are equivalent to tariffs of 44% for goods (compared to 15% in the US) and of up to 110% for services, illustrating the magnitude of the challenge.[10] Progress towards a single market for services goes beyond administrative simplification and requires harmonising substantive aspects: licences and professional requirements, sectoral regulations, rules on data use and transfer, and even elements related to economic regulation that influence prices, margins, and service delivery models. Many of these policy areas are anchored in long-established national models and modifying them will require significant political capital. A similar issue arises with EU Inc., the impact of which will be limited if there is no progress towards broader convergence in taxation, labour framework and insolvency procedures.

Similarly, the strategy for the SIU provides direction, but it is still far from constituting a true capital markets union as envisaged by Letta and Draghi deem essential in order to achieve scale and efficiency in channelling financing towards innovative activities. Removing structural frictions is essential to allow capital to flow freely across Europe: align insolvency and debt enforcement frameworks; simplify cross-border procedures and taxes that currently deter investment on a European scale; effectively integrate stock and private fixed-income markets, including their clearing and settlement systems; move towards convergent supervision to avoid a fragmented application of the single rulebook; and complete the banking union with a pan-European deposit guarantee fund.

In the industrial sector, strategic dependencies remain substantial.[11] In March, the Commission presented the Industrial Accelerator Act, with measures intended to generate demand for European products and technologies with a low carbon footprint (via public procurement and support schemes) and to accelerate permitting procedures in strategic sectors. These tools will only be effective if they strengthen the single market and if the reduction of dependencies is supported by productivity, innovation and scale, and not by quantitative import substitution targets that increase the cost of inputs and erode competitiveness.[12] In technological development and adoption, bottlenecks persist along the value chain, with upstream dependencies (semiconductors and computing power) and gaps in access to data, financing, human capital and energy.

In decarbonisation, two central challenges persist: regulatory certainty and reduction of energy costs. Beyond networks, interconnections and permits, the European agenda acknowledges that the final price of electricity end-user prices depend on market rules and the stability of the framework. The 2024 electricity market design reform introduced improvements to reduce exposure to gas price volatility and incentivise long-term contracts, although its impact on prices remains limited. In parallel, the revision of the ETS scheduled for 2026 must balance carbon price stability and investment signal without undermining its central role in the transition.[13] Without credible progress in energy costs, the price gap relative to other economies will continue to weigh on industrial competitiveness.

From strategy to full implementation

Looking ahead to the second half of 2026 and 2027, there is a window of opportunity, but the margin is narrow. The end of NGEU coincides with the negotiation of the 2028-2034 EU budget, greater investment needs in defence, energy and critical technologies, and a context of demographic ageing and low productivity.[14] This is compounded by an increasingly demanding geopolitical environment – an entrenched conflict in Ukraine and recent tensions in the Middle East, a reconfiguration of global trade, and episodes of energy volatility – which increases the value of resilience but also intensifies competition for limited public resources.[15]

In this context, the competitive agenda will only gain credibility if it translates into actionable decisions. Firstly, this means making the single market operational in areas with the greatest potential – services, data, business and talent mobility – and prioritising the elimination of the most costly barriers to scaling. Secondly, it means implementing the SIU in real integration and growth financing, and making progress on insolvency, fiscal frictions and supervisory convergence. Thirdly, it must lead to a structural reduction in energy costs, so that decarbonisation also enhances industrial competitiveness. Fourthly, it requires an acceleration in the technological race, with AI at the core, and relying on strategic alliances in order to secure critical inputs and open new spaces for economic cooperation.

The proposal for a Competitiveness Fund in the next budgetary framework could help organise instruments and concentrate resources, but it does not replace the need to reach political agreements on integration and governance. If part of the agenda progresses through coalitions of countries, then the base should be broad enough not to erode the internal market nor lead to a multi-speed Europe that undermines social and territorial cohesion.[16] Ultimately, the decisive step in the coming quarters is to move decisively from strategies and action plans to implementation.

David Martínez Turégano

10. IMF (2024). «A Recovery Short of Europe's Full Potential».
11. See the Focus «Import dependencies and competitive emergencies for Europe's industry» in the MR06/2025.
12. J. Zettelmeyer (2025). «Draghi on a shoestring: the European Commission's Competitiveness Compass».
13. CEPS (2025). «Reforming the EU ETS: Balancing price stability and investment signals».
14. See the Focus «The 2028-2034 EU budget: An impossible mission?» in the MR09/2025, and the Dossiers «The transformative capacity of NGEU and other fiscal stimulus plans» in the MR03/2025, «Challenges and policies in the age of longevity» in the MR09/2025 and «An analysis of European productivity» in the MR01/2026.
15. See the article «Europe's medium-term fiscal dilemma» from the Dossier in the MR11/2025.
16. J. Zettelmeyer *op. cit.*

Year-on-year (%) change, unless otherwise specified

UNITED STATES

	2024	2025	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	01/26	02/26	03/26
Activity									
Real GDP	2.8	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.0	–	–	–
Retail sales (excluding cars and petrol)	3.4	4.5	4.8	4.9	4.6	3.9	4.5	4.1	...
Consumer confidence *(value)*	104.5	96.1	99.8	93.1	97.4	94.2	89.0	91.0	91.8
Industrial production	–0.7	1.2	0.7	0.5	1.7	1.7	2.3	1.4	...
Manufacturing activity index (ISM) *(value)*	48.2	48.9	49.9	48.8	48.7	48.2	52.6	52.4	52.7
Housing starts *(thousands)*	1,371	1,357	1,401	1,354	1,346	1,328	1,487	...	...
Case-Shiller home price index *(value)*	330	339	339	338	337	341	343	...	...
Unemployment rate *(% lab. force)*	4.0	4.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.5	4.3	4.4	4.3
Employment-population ratio *(% pop. > 16 years)*	60.1	59.8	60.0	59.8	59.6	59.7	59.4	59.3	59.2
Trade balance [1] *(% GDP)*	–2.8	–3.4	–3.5	–3.6	–3.4	–3.0	–2.7	–2.5	...
Prices									
Headline inflation	2.9	2.6	2.7	2.4	2.9	2.7	2.4	2.4	...
Core inflation	3.4	2.9	3.1	2.8	3.1	2.6	2.5	2.5	...

JAPAN

	2024	2025	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	01/26	02/26	03/26
Activity									
Real GDP	–0.2	1.2	1.6	2.1	0.7	0.4	–	–	–
Consumer confidence *(value)*	37.2	34.7	34.7	32.8	34.6	36.8	37.9	40.0	...
Industrial production	–3.0	0.1	2.8	0.1	–1.1	–1.3	2.6	0.3	...
Business activity index (Tankan) *(value)*	12.8	13.5	12.0	13.0	14.0	15.0	–	–	–
Unemployment rate *(% lab. force)*	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.6	...
Trade balance [1] *(% GDP)*	–1.0	–0.6	–0.9	–0.7	–0.5	–0.4	–0.2	–0.3	...
Prices									
Headline inflation	2.7	3.2	3.8	3.4	2.9	2.7	1.5	1.3	...
Core inflation	2.4	3.0	2.7	3.2	3.2	3.0	2.7	2.6	...

CHINA

	2024	2025	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	01/26	02/26	03/26
Activity									
Real GDP	5.0	5.0	5.4	5.2	4.8	4.5	–	–	–
Retail sales	3.3	3.8	3.6	4.4	2.4	0.7	...	2.8	...
Industrial production	5.6	5.9	6.8	6.2	5.8	5.0	...	6.3	...
PMI manufacturing *(value)*	49.8	49.6	49.9	49.4	49.5	49.4	49.3	49.0	50.4
Foreign sector									
Trade balance [1,2]	997	1,193	1,086	1,146	1,176	1,193	1,177	1,237	...
Exports	4.6	5.5	5.7	6.0	6.5	3.8	9.8	39.4	...
Imports	1.0	0.0	–6.8	–0.8	4.5	2.9	25.6	13.8	...
Prices									
Headline inflation	0.2	0.1	–0.1	0.0	–0.2	0.6	0.2	1.3	...
Official interest rate [3]	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Renminbi per dollar	7.2	7.2	7.3	7.2	7.2	7.1	7.0	6.9	6.9

Notes: *1. Cumulative figure over last 12 months. 2. Billion dollars. 3. End of period.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the Department of Economic Analysis, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Federal Reserve, Standard & Poor's, ISM, National Bureau of Statistics of Japan, Bank of Japan, National Bureau of Statistics of China and Refinitiv.*

EURO AREA

Activity and employment indicators

Values, unless otherwise specified

	2024	2025	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	01/26	02/26	03/26
Retail sales *(year-on-year change)*	1.3	2.4	2.3	3.0	2.0	2.2	2.0	...	...
Industrial production *(year-on-year change)*	–2.9	1.5	1.3	1.2	1.6	2.1	–1.2	...	...
Consumer confidence	–12.6	–13.4	–12.7	–14.2	–13.6	–12.9	–12.5	–12.3	–16.3
Economic sentiment	95.9	95.9	95.9	94.8	95.9	97.2	99.2	98.2	96.6
Manufacturing PMI	45.9	49.1	47.6	49.3	50.1	49.5	49.8	50.8	51.6
Services PMI	51.5	51.3	51.0	50.1	50.9	53.0	51.6	51.9	50.2
Labour market									
Employment (people) *(year-on-year change)*	1.0	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.7	–	–	–
Unemployment rate *(% labour force)*	6.3	6.3	6.3	6.3	6.3	6.3	6.1	6.2	...
Germany *(% labour force)*	3.4	3.8	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.9	4.0	4.0	...
France *(% labour force)*	7.4	7.7	7.5	7.6	7.7	7.9	7.8	7.8	...
Italy *(% labour force)*	6.6	6.1	6.4	6.3	6.0	5.7	5.2	5.3	...
Real GDP *(year-on-year change)*	0.9	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.2	–	–	–
Germany *(year-on-year change)*	–0.5	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4	–	–	–
France *(year-on-year change)*	1.1	0.9	0.7	0.8	1.0	1.2	–	–	–
Italy *(year-on-year change)*	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.7	0.8	–	–	–

Prices

Year-on-year change (%), unless otherwise specified

	2024	2025	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	01/26	02/26	03/26
General	2.4	2.1	2.3	2.0	2.1	2.1	1.7	1.9	2.5
Core	2.8	2.4	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.2	2.4	2.3

Foreign sector

Cumulative balance over the last 12 months as % of GDP of the last 4 quarters, unless otherwise specified

	2024	2025	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	01/26	02/26	03/26
Current balance	3.4	8.4	3.0	3.5	4.6	8.4	2.2	...	...
Germany	5.9	18.5	5.5	6.7	9.5	18.5	4.5	...	...
France	0.1	–1.3	0.0	–0.3	–1.1	–1.3	–0.2	...	...
Italy	1.1	5.0	0.9	1.3	2.4	5.0	1.3	...	...
Nominal effective exchange rate[1] *(value)*	94.2	96.1	92.8	96.2	97.9	97.5	97.4	97.3	96.5

Credit and deposits of non-financial sectors

Year-on-year change (%), unless otherwise specified

	2024	2025	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	01/26	02/26	03/26
Private sector financing									
Credit to non-financial firms[2]	0.8	2.7	2.2	2.6	2.9	3.0	2.8	2.9	...
Credit to households[2,3]	0.5	2.2	1.5	2.1	2.5	2.9	3.0	3.0	...
Interest rate on loans to non-financial firms[4] *(%)*	4.9	3.4	3.9	3.4	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.2	...
Interest rate on loans to households for house purchases[5] *(%)*	4.6	3.7	4.0	3.7	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.5	...
Deposits									
On demand deposits	–3.9	5.0	3.7	5.3	5.5	5.4	5.8	5.3	...
Other short-term deposits	12.4	–0.1	2.3	–0.1	–1.5	–1.0	–0.6	0.2	...
Marketable instruments	20.0	7.7	14.6	11.0	4.4	0.9	1.3	–1.3	...
Interest rate on deposits up to 1 year from households *(%)*	3.0	1.9	2.2	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.8	...

Notes: *1. Weighted by flow of foreign trade. Higher figures indicate the currency has appreciated. 2. Data adjusted for sales and securitization. 3. Including NPISH. 4. Loans of more than one million euros with a floating rate and an initial rate fixation period of up to one year. 5. Loans with a floating rate and an initial rate fixation period of up to one year.*

Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the Eurostat, European Central Bank, European Commission, national statistics institutes and Markit.*

The Spanish economy endures

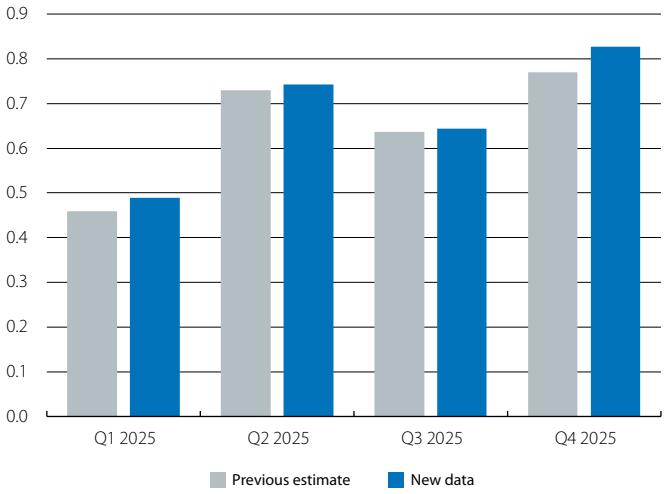
Geopolitical instability complicates the macroeconomic scenario. The complex international context of recent years has once again been shaken by the war in the Middle East, accentuating the downside risks to our scenario, particularly due to the rising cost of energy. Although it is still early to assess its impact on the economy, given the significant uncertainty about its duration and scope, we are facing the situation from a relatively favourable starting point: the Spanish economy showed very robust dynamics at the end of 2025, which led us to revise our GDP growth forecast for 2026 upwards to 2.4% in February, prior to the outbreak of the crisis. Furthermore, the economic activity indicators for Q1 have remained buoyant. Added to this is the reduction of the budget deficit and of external indebtedness in recent years – distinguishing factors compared to previous crises.

At CaixaBank Research, we estimate that if the rise in energy costs is temporary and moderate, in line with what oil and gas futures indicated during the month of March, then the growth forecasts for the Spanish economy would only be weakened by a few percentage points. Even so, the impact would not be uniform across the entire economy, with energy-intensive industry and the transport and agrifood sectors being the hardest hit. The effect would be less pronounced than in the euro area, given Spain's lower dependence on energy flows originating in the Middle East (around 5% of the oil and less than 2% of the liquefied natural gas arriving in Spain passes through the Strait of Hormuz) and the greater weight of renewables in the energy mix. Additionally, to mitigate the effects of the crisis, the government has approved a package of measures valued at around 5 billion euros, which includes tax reductions on fuels, gas, and electricity production, as well as direct aid to sectors and households (see the Focus «The crisis in Iran: how much could it affect the Spanish economy?» in this same report). In any case, it will be necessary to closely monitor how the conflict develops, whether the war is resolved quickly or becomes prolonged and, above all, the severity of the damage caused to energy infrastructure.

Economic activity indicators point to dynamic growth in Q1. Adverse weather conditions and disruptions to rail traffic hampered economic activity at the start of the year, but it has gradually picked up and the quarter ended up closing with dynamic growth. On the services side, the PMI index rebounded in March to 53.3 points, offsetting much of the decline experienced in February: it stands 3.5 points below the previous quarter's level, but still indicates notable growth in the sector (above 50 points marks expansion). The manufacturing PMI, for its part, fell by 1.8 points on average in Q1 compared to Q4 2024, reaching 49.3 points, indicating a potential decline in the industrial sector driven by increasing uncertainty. On the consumption side, retail sales excluding service stations, in volume and seasonally adjusted terms, fell by 0.4% in January-February compared to the average for Q4 2025, marking the first decline since Q1 2023. However, the CaixaBank Research Consumption Tracker, with data for

Spain: GDP

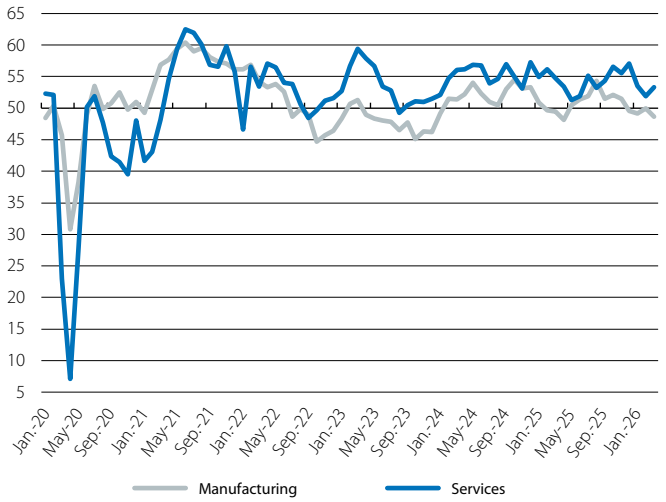
Quarter-on-quarter change (%)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the National Statistics Institute (INE).*

Spain: PMI

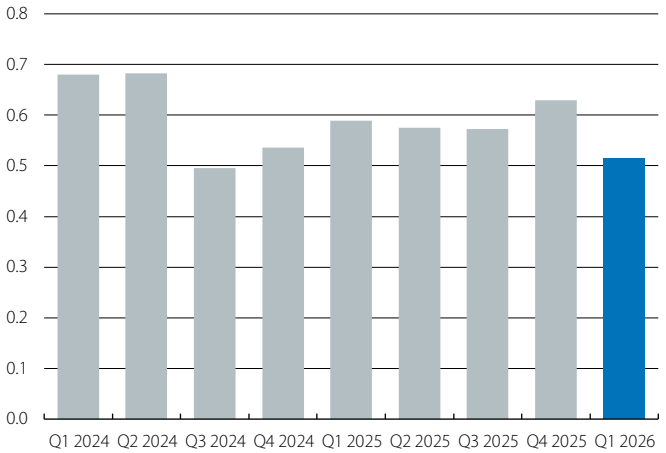
Level



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from S&P Global PMI.*

Spain: Social Security affiliates

Quarter-on-quarter change (%)



Note: *Seasonally adjusted series.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration.*

the entire quarter, grew 3.5% year-on-year. This falls short of the 4.6% recorded in the previous quarter, although the monthly profile is particularly revealing: in January it grew by a robust 4.0%; in February it plummeted to 1.8%, largely due to the bad weather in the first half of the month; and in March it rebounded to 4.7%. Overall, the available indicators suggest GDP growth in Q1 of around 0.4%-0.5% quarter-on-quarter.

Employment remains robust in March. The number of Social Security affiliates increased by 211,511 people in March (0.98% month-on-month), slightly above the usual growth for this month in recent years (0.91% on average in 2023-2025). Thus, in Q1 as a whole, affiliation in seasonally adjusted terms registered a slight deceleration of 0.1 pp in its growth rate, placing it at 0.5% quarter-on-quarter.

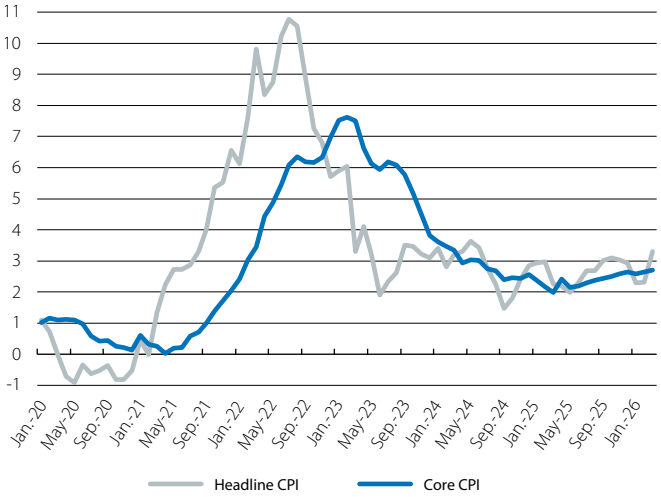
Where the impact of the conflict in the Middle East and the government's measures is most evident is in the rise in inflation. According to the CPI flash estimate, headline inflation stood at 3.3% in March, 1 point higher than the previous month. However, the rebound would have been even greater without the measures adopted by the government, approaching 4.0%. Core inflation, which excludes energy prices, remained at 2.7%, but if the conflict is prolonged and the pressures on energy costs persist, it could also be affected. The rise in energy prices introduces upside risks to our inflation forecast. The forecast scenario anticipates an inflation rate of 2.4% for the year as a whole, but it could be around 3% if oil and gas prices follow the pattern anticipated during March by the futures markets, although the recently announced truce, if consolidated, could moderate the extent of the increase.

The reduction of the budget deficit in recent years helps to face the new shock. The general government deficit stood at 40.33 billion euros in 2025 (2.4% of GDP), which is 0.8 pps less than the previous year and the best figure since 2007. In this way, the deficit improved on the government's target by 0.1 pp. If we exclude the budgetary impact derived from the floods in Valencia, which does not count in terms of the European fiscal rules, then the deficit decreases from 2.9% to 2.2%.

External indebtedness remains relatively low and is another distinguishing factor compared to previous crises. The deficit of the net international investment position (NIIP, referring to the balance of financial assets and liabilities vis-à-vis the rest of the world) increased by 3.8 pps in 2025, reaching 44.8% of GDP. Nevertheless, it remains low compared with previous years (–83.6% on average in 2014-2019) and far from the historical peak of 2009 (–97.2%). The deterioration was exclusively the result of a negative valuation effect, linked to prices and the exchange rate (the increase in value and the appreciation of the euro impacted liabilities more than assets), while net financial transactions were positive (assets increased more than liabilities). Gross external debt (the balance of liabilities that generate future payment obligations) increased slightly to 163.6% of GDP (162.9% in 2024), although it remains below the 2019 level (168.6%).

Spain: CPI

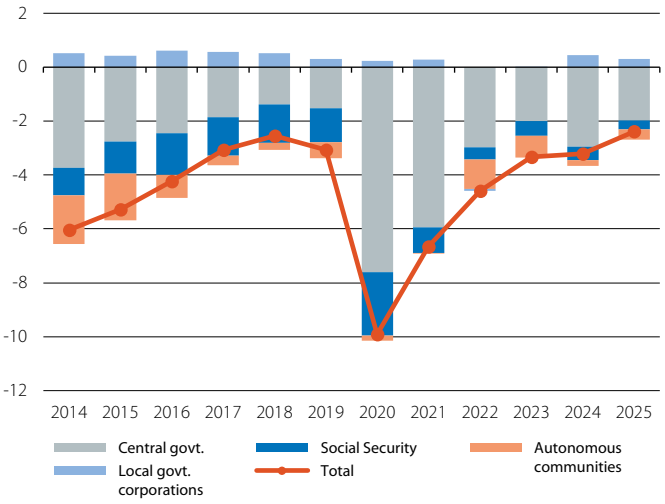
Year-on-year change (%)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the National Statistics Institute (INE).*

Spain: general government balance

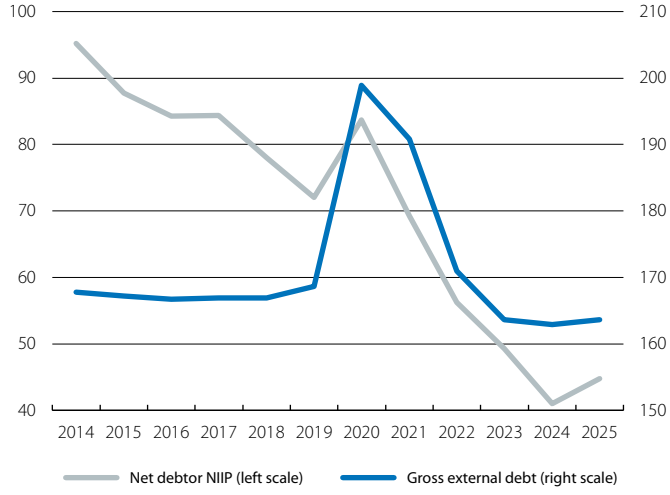
(% of GDP)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the Ministry of Finance.*

Spain: Net debtor NIIP and gross external debt

(% of GDP) *(% of GDP)*



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the Bank of Spain.*

The transmission of the interest rate cycle to households in Spain: micro-level evidence of a moderate adjustment and gradual recovery

The change in the monetary cycle initiated in 2022 – with rapid interest rate hikes to contain the spike in inflation – and the subsequent cuts beginning in the summer of 2024 offer a unique opportunity to precisely analyse how changes in rates are transmitted to household finances and, ultimately, to consumption. The context is well known. In the spring of 2022, the 12-month Euribor was in negative territory. However, the ECB's interest rate hikes, initiated in the summer of that year to curb the inflationary pressures associated with rising energy costs triggered by the conflict in Ukraine, pushed the Euribor up to a peak of 4.2% in the autumn of 2023. Subsequently, from the summer of 2024, once inflation had stabilised at just above 2%, the ECB initiated a process of monetary easing, and on the eve of the outbreak of the war in the Middle East the Euribor stood at around 2.25% (since then, it has shown volatility and was above 2.5% in March). These ups and downs in the Euribor have a direct impact on households with variable-rate mortgages, as the mortgage payment is updated – usually annually – according to this rate.

The use of CaixaBank's internal and duly anonymised data – which allows for monthly tracking of the mortgage payments, income, consumption, and debt of hundreds of thousands of households – provides an especially rich and granular view of this transmission process. Specifically, the analysis is based on a broad and representative sample of households from 2022 with a single mortgage:[1] 67% have a variable rate loan (including mixed-rate mortgages) and 33% have a fixed rate. These proportions are consistent with the information from the Spanish Mortgage Association (AHE), according to which fixed-rate mortgages accounted for 32% of the total mortgage balance in 2023.

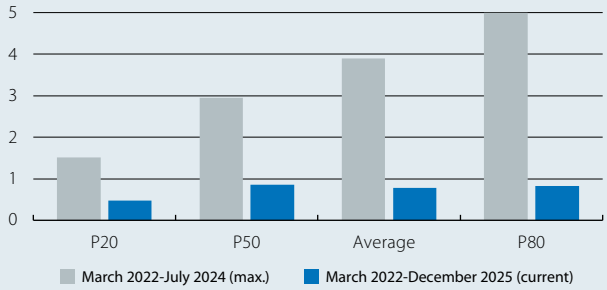
The result is a dynamic snapshot that clearly shows how households with variable-rate mortgages gradually absorb the impact of rising instalments during interest rate hikes and how they subsequently benefit from the relief associated with the easing of the Euribor.

We begin by analysing the evolution of the main mortgage metrics. In March 2022, the average mortgage interest rate in Spain (overall, whether fixed or variable) was 1.5%, according to data from the Bank of Spain. More than two years later, in July 2024, the rate had risen to 3.7%. Later, in December 2025, once the process of rate cuts had been consolidated, the rate was 2.8%. In parallel, our internal data show that the outstanding balance of variable-rate mortgage holders in our sample decreased by 14% between March 2022 and July 2024.

1. We consider the sample to be representative because it includes a large number of mortgage customers throughout the country and the proportion of fixed/variable-rate mortgages is closely aligned with that recorded by the Spanish Mortgage Association (AHE).

Spain: change in the relative financial burden of households with variable-rate mortgages, by decile of financial burden

(pps)



Notes: *Relative financial burden corresponds to the ratio between households' mortgage payments and their monthly income over the last six months, known as the debt service-to-income (DSTI) ratio. The percentiles and the average correspond to the level of relative financial burden.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on anonymised internal data.*

In order to assess changes over time in households' financial burden, we analyse the ratio between households' mortgage payments and their monthly income over the past six months, known as the debt service-to-income (DSTI) ratio. In our internal sample, the median DSTI of households with variable-rate mortgages increased by around 3 pps between March 2022 and July 2024. However, this increase would have been significantly higher had there not been the dynamic income growth observed during this period. From then on, between the summer of 2024 and the end of 2025, the median DSTI decreased by 2.1 points and still remains 0.9 points above the level prior to the interest rate hikes. This pattern reflects both the improvement in incomes and the impact of the monetary easing.

In this financial context, and in order to isolate the effect of interest rates from other factors that influence consumption, we conducted an econometric analysis (using a technique known as «difference in differences») which estimates the causal impact of the rise and subsequent fall in interest rates on consumption. Consumption is defined as household expenditure carried out via card payments, direct debit charges

and also cash withdrawals. This strategy compares the consumption pattern of households with variable-rate mortgages over the period analysed with that of a control group consisting of households with fixed-rate mortgages. The result reveals the change in consumption observed at any given time among households with variable-rate mortgages compared to a situation with no revision of their mortgage payments.[2] Before the start of the rate hike cycle, the spending patterns of households with variable and fixed-rate mortgages were following a practically parallel pattern, reinforcing the validity of this approach.

The results show that in Q1 2024 – the period when monetary policy had the greatest impact on consumption in our analysis – the consumption of households with variable-rate mortgages was 2.7% lower than it would have been without the Euribor increases. This is a statistically significant effect, albeit one of a relatively moderate magnitude. The reduction in consumption was gradual: six months after the first revision of the mortgage payment, consumption had decreased by 1.2%; after 12 months, the decline reached 2.1%; and after 18 months, it stood at 2.5%.

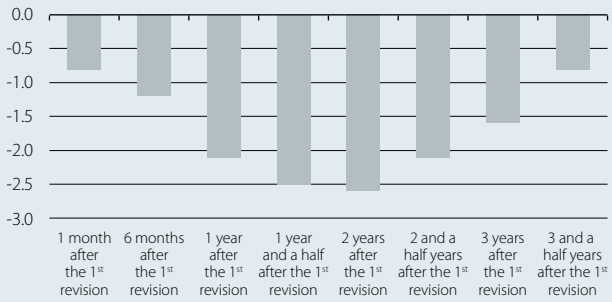
The start of interest rate cuts in the summer of 2024 marks a turning point. After several quarters of reductions, the easing of the Euribor began to be reflected in mortgage payments and, subsequently, in consumption too. In Q4 2025, the expenditure of households with variable-rate mortgages increased by 1.8% compared to consumption prior to the initial rate cuts as a result of the reduction of their instalments – an effect that is also statistically significant. An illustrative way to interpret this figure is as follows: in Q4 2025, the median payment of households with variable-rate mortgages decreased by approximately 40 euros due to lower interest rates compared to before the initial rate cuts. The median consumption of these households increased by around 30 euros, meaning that they opted to consume three-quarters of the total reduction in their mortgage payment.

Although this may seem like a modest change at the individual level, its aggregate impact is significant. Given that households with variable-rate mortgages account for around 22% of aggregate private consumption in Spain, this increase observed throughout 2025 contributed to raising the aggregate growth in consumption by around 0.4 pps. In terms of GDP, the impact is approximately equivalent to 0.2 pps.

2. The analysis controls for monthly fixed effects and observed household characteristics, such as income, savings, and demographic variables, and follows Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021) to account for staggered treatment adoption. The identification strategy exploits the fact that mortgage instalments are revised at different times (for variable-rate mortgages) or do not change (for fixed-rate mortgages).

Spain: impact of the rate cycle on the consumption of households with variable-rate mortgages

(pps)



Notes: *Estimates obtained using a difference-in-differences model. All variables are monthly and aggregated at the household level. Consumption corresponds to monthly consumption via card payments and direct debit charges, and also includes cash withdrawals.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on anonymised internal data.*

Finally, following the rise and subsequent fall in rates, the consumption of these households in December 2025 was only 1.0% below what it would have been in the absence of interest rate changes. This exercise, insofar as we know, constitutes the first analysis for Spain that combines a large sample of bank micro-data with advanced econometric techniques to causally estimate the transmission of monetary policy to household consumption. The DSTI allows us to measure the degree of financial stress; the evolution of mortgage instalments and income shows how changes in rates affect household budgets, and consumption reveals households' final response.

Interest rates are not an abstract variable: they directly influence the spending decisions of millions of households. The results show that the monetary policy of the last cycle has clearly influenced household consumption in Spain, albeit with moderate intensity, and that interest rate cuts have had a tangible impact in boosting spending among households with variable-rate mortgages. Furthermore, having this unique sample and such a powerful econometric methodology will allow us to analyse how future shifts in monetary policy, such as might occur with the conflict in the Middle East, impact consumption.

Eduard Alcobé, Javier Garcia-Arenas, Alberto Graziano and Josep Mestres

NGEU: execution is progressing, but we are approaching the moment of truth

Execution of the Next Generation EU (NGEU) funds through the Recovery and Resilience Plan continues to gain traction, although the schedule is tight and the final stretch will require increased efforts. Indeed, by the deadline of 31 August, all investments funded with grants and loans need to have been allocated through the resolution of the relevant calls and tenders, and compliance with all milestones must be demonstrated to the European Commission. Also, Spain must submit payment requests before 30 September, while the Commission will have a deadline of 31 December to make the disbursements, as it will only have until then to certify the investments, that is, to verify that the money has been allocated to the committed projects.

The state of the matter and a tight schedule

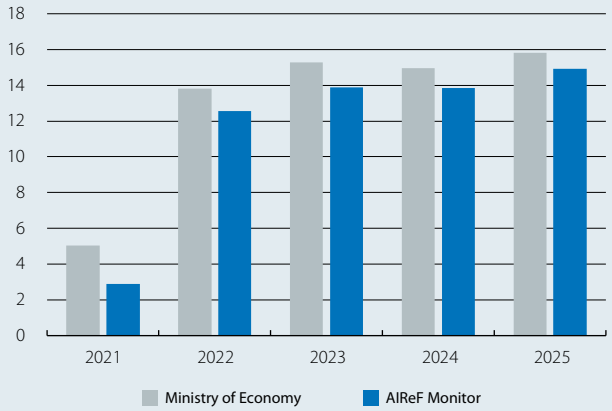
According to data from the Recovery and Resilience Facility Scoreboard maintained by the European Commission itself, Spain has completed 54% of the milestones set out in the Plan, including the most structural ones – labour and pension reforms –; however, there are still 224 milestones yet to be achieved, associated with 24.8 billion euros in transfers and 6.5 billion in loans. Many of these milestones require complex investments: the deployment of renewables, the digitalisation of SMEs, charging infrastructure for electric vehicles, the modernisation of irrigation systems, energy-efficiency upgrades to homes and water management initiatives. Among the most challenging pending milestones are the digitalisation of regional and local administrations and the part of the committed tax reform concerning increased taxation of diesel.

Regarding transfers, Spain has received disbursements from the European Commission amounting to 55.09 billion euros, out of an allocated total of 79.8 billion. Furthermore, following the approval of the Addendum by the European Commission, at the end of 2025 Spain decided not to request almost all of the NGEU loans, such that it will ultimately only use 22.8 billion euros, compared to the initially planned 83.2 billion euros. This decision was explained by the fact that, at the end of last year, the cost of NGEU financing was very similar to that of market financing. Of the 22.8 billion in loans, the European Commission has already transferred 16.27 billion to date.

At the beginning of March, Spain submitted the sixth payment request under the Recovery Plan. The amount requested totals 7.256 billion euros – 6.205 billion in grants and 1.051 billion in loans. Once the Commission has validated this request, the percentage of the milestones met by Spain will increase from 54% to 70%, placing it among the top European countries in terms of compliance.[1]

Spain: degree of PRTR execution

Total NGEU grants (EUR billions)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the ELISA Monitoring Portal of the Ministry of Economy and the AIReF Monitor.*

The impact of NGEU on GDP growth in 2026 is estimated to be between 0.4 and 0.6 pps. This boost comes from two distinct but complementary vectors. On the one hand, by 2026 all pending funds in the form of grants must be executed: 15 billion, according to the Ministry of Economy's ELISA tool, and more than 20 billion, according to the AIReF, although 2.8 billion have already been allocated to the Spain Grows (España Crece) fund, which will invest beyond 2026. This figure aligns with the rate of execution of previous years, but the challenge lies in concentrating all this activity before 31 August, the deadline set by the European mechanism. On the other hand, greater dynamism is expected in the projects financed with loans, given that in 2025 they were still in the early stages of deployment. By November 2025, operations financed with these loans amounting to around 7 billion euros had been approved, and there was also a pipeline of projects in the identification and evaluation phase for a further 5 billion.

In this context, 2026 will be a decisive year. Beyond this year, investments will continue to be deployed without a cliff effect, supported by the creation of the sovereign Spain Grows (España Crece) fund, which is financed with 10.5 billion euros in unused Next Generation loans and an additional 2.8 billion in non-repayable transfers, raising the initial capital associated with this initiative

1. Among the main European countries, Germany has achieved 61% of its milestones, Italy 64%, Poland 45%, Portugal 60% and France 83%.

to 13.3 billion. The fund will be managed by the ICO, which will co-invest with the private sector in strategic projects to boost potential growth.

Having reviewed the schedule, in the following section we analyse how the execution is progressing in practice.

Execution up to 2025: more good news than bad

Between 2021 and December 2025, the sum of NGEU grants that had been «executed» – i.e. calls and tenders completed by the various public administrations – amounted to 59 billion and 64.9 billion euros according to the AIReF Monitor and the Ministry of Economy's ELISA tool, respectively, which is equivalent to between 74% and 81% of the programme's total (79.8 billion euros).[2] The annual execution rate in 2025 was slightly higher than in 2024: around 15 billion euros were executed in 2025,[3] which is about 1 billion more than in 2024, an increase on which both metrics agree.

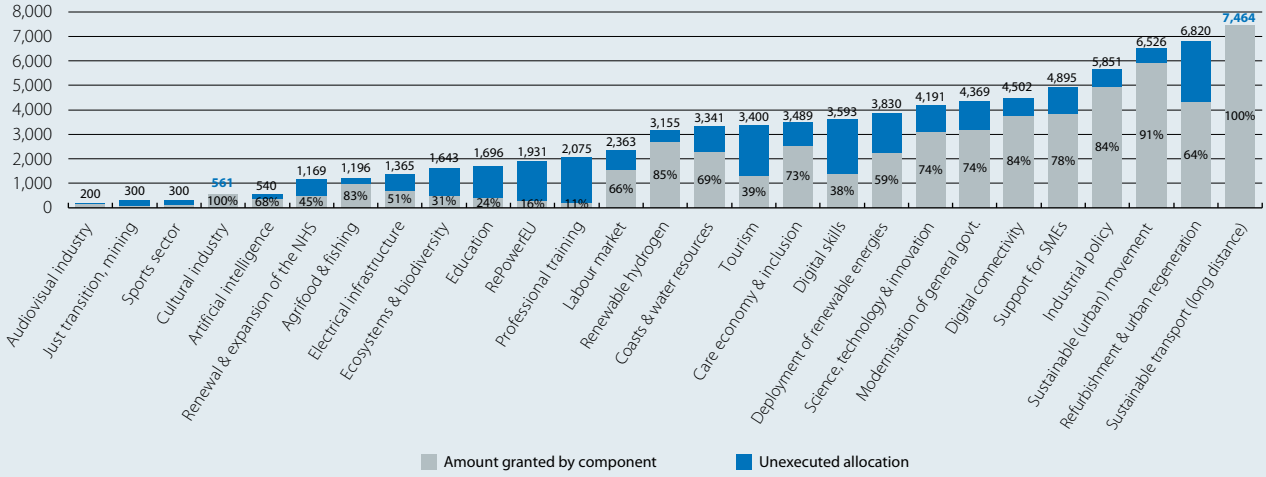
If we look at the final phase of execution, that is, the funds that have reached the productive fabric of the economy, the figures are lower than those awarded in calls and tenders, as there is a delay before payments are made and, on occasions, beneficiaries must submit additional documentation, which delays their receipt. According to Eurostat, the effective public expenditure financed by NGEU European funds amounted to 31 billion between 2021 and 2024. Also, between 2021 and November 2025, the central government made payments amounting to 46 billion euros, a sum that includes transfers to other administrations and public entities or companies.

The analysis by component up to December 2025 performed by AIReF shows a mixed picture. The second chart reveals that the areas with the highest degree of relative execution in relation to the total allocation are sustainable mobility – both urban and long-distance – digital connectivity and industrial policy. In contrast, the most significant delays are concentrated in energy refurbishment and urban regeneration (which includes energy-efficiency upgrades to the existing housing stock and the construction and refurbishment of more than 20,000 social rental homes), renewable energies, water resources, vocational training and education, tourism, and science and technologies. It should be noted that nearly 2.5 billion euros in refurbishment and regeneration and around 2 billion euros in tourism, vocational training, and digital skills remain yet to be executed.

The regional analysis shows that the largest communities in terms of population and GDP are leading the total volume of funds executed.[4] However, this advantage diminishes when the data is adjusted per capita. In per capita terms, regions with smaller populations but large industrial projects stand out. These include Aragon, the dynamism of which is explained by investments linked to the strategic PERTE project for electric vehicles – including the battery plant, the expansion of Stellantis and other associated projects.

Spain: allocation and percentage granted by component

(EUR millions, applies only to grants, and %)



Note: *Data up to December.*
Source: *AIReF Monitor.*

2. It is normal for the numbers not to match exactly; the key methodological difference lies in the recording criterion. ELISA considers a call to be «resolved» when final awardees are identified, even if there has been no signing of contracts nor, in some programmes, an individualised grant in the strict sense. In contrast, the AIReF Observatory only includes contracts once they are signed, and grants when there is a formal awarding with a specific beneficiary and amount, so its monitoring takes place at a later stage in the administrative process.
3. Specifically, 15.8 billion according to ELISA and 14.9 billion according to AIReF.
4. All calls and tenders are included in each autonomous community, whether convened by the central, regional, or local government.

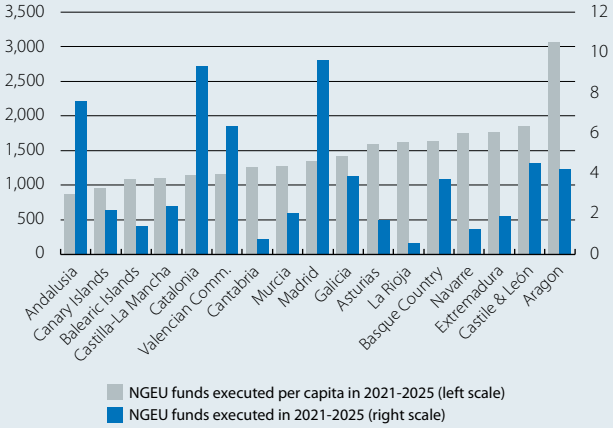
Other regions, such as Asturias and La Rioja, also reflect this pattern, with a high per capita execution.

The overall balance, therefore, is relatively positive, but we must avoid complacency: execution is progressing, the macro impact is being consolidated, and the most significant reforms are already underway, but the moment of truth is just around the corner. The ability to mobilise, prioritise and absorb the bulk of the pending investments will determine whether the Plan fully delivers on its transformative promise.

Javier Garcia-Arenas

Spain: NGEU funds by autonomous community

(Euros) *(EUR billions)*



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the ELISA portal of the Ministry of Economy.*

Spain in the face of the new energy shock: a comparison with Europe

The recent escalation of the conflict in the Persian Gulf, with the outbreak of the war in Iran, has once again placed energy at the centre of the global economic agenda. Although the scope and duration of the conflict remain uncertain, markets, especially those for oil and natural gas, have reacted swiftly. In this context, we analyse where the Spanish economy stands in the face of this new energy shock.

From a supply perspective, one of Spain's main strengths is its low direct exposure to the Persian Gulf. Around 10% of the country's oil imports come from the region (mainly from Saudi Arabia and Iraq), while for natural gas this percentage is less than 2%, primarily from Qatar. This limited dependency reduces the risk of physical supply disruptions. However, the global nature of these markets means that a sustained increase in geopolitical tensions is reflected in prices regardless of the origin of the imports.

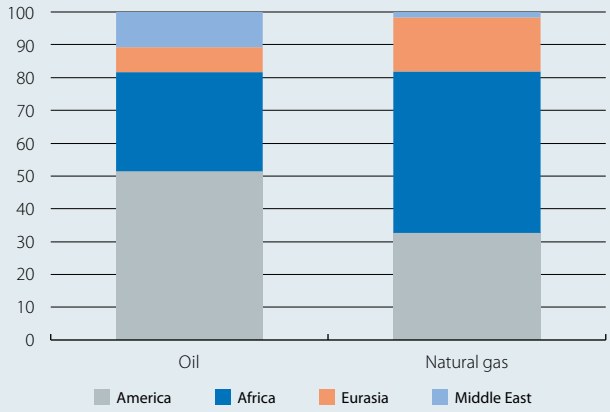
Compared to the EU as a whole, Spain has a slightly lower exposure to the Persian Gulf, but a greater dependence on Algeria and Nigeria for oil and gas imports, as well as on the US in the case of gas. The important role of Algeria as a source of gas imports represents a comparative advantage, as it is primarily transported via pipeline. This type of supply is less likely to be redirected to other markets and, therefore, tends to be more stable than liquefied natural gas (LNG). Moreover, this lower capacity to be redirected, together with the absence of costs associated with liquefaction and regasification, tends to result in a lower price compared to LNG.

Another relevant structural factor is the accumulated improvement in the energy efficiency of the Spanish economy. Since the beginning of the century, energy intensity, measured as the amount of energy required to generate 1,000 euros of GDP at constant prices, has decreased by about a third. This progress helps to cushion the macroeconomic impact of rising energy costs by limiting the increase in production costs and, ultimately, in final prices. Opposing these favourable elements, Spain's main weakness remains its high energy dependency on foreign sources: 70% of the country's energy needs must be met through imports, a rate that is only 5 percentage points lower than at the turn of the century.

In terms of energy intensity, Spain is very close to the European average. Where significant differences are observed is in the total energy dependency, which is higher in Spain than in the rest of Europe. As we can see in the fourth chart, Spain meets its energy needs to a greater extent with imported petroleum products,

Spain: oil and gas imports

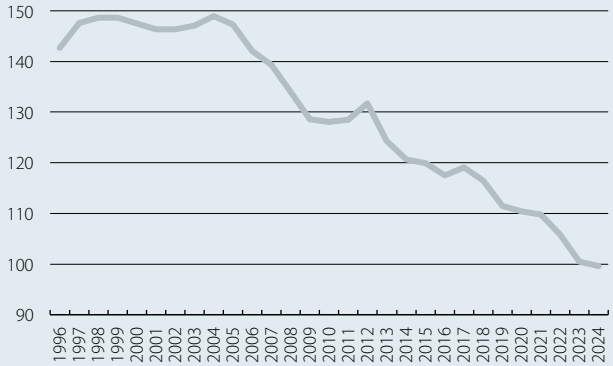
(% of the total)



Notes: *Data from 2025. Percentage of the total in volume terms.*
Source: *CaixaBank, based on data from CORES.*

Spain: energy intensity

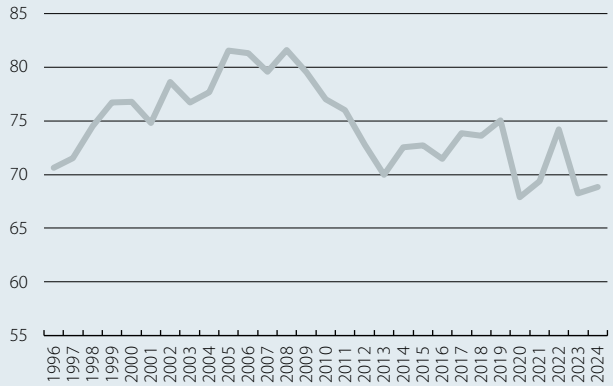
(Units of energy per 1,000 euros of GDP at constant prices)



Notes: *Energy measured in kilograms of oil equivalent. The numerator corresponds to the gross available energy (primary production, recovery and recycling, net imports and change in inventories).*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Eurostat.*

Spain: energy dependency

Net energy imports over gross available energy (%)



Note: *Gross available energy includes primary production, recovery and recycling, net imports and change in inventories.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Eurostat.*

whereas in the rest of Europe these are largely met with coal, of which there are significant reserves on the continent, particularly in Germany and Poland.[1]

The electricity market: the Iberian exception

The wholesale electricity market is one of the main strengths of the Spanish economy in the energy sector relative to the rest of Europe. Unlike oil or gas, the European electricity market is less homogeneous, so external shocks are not transmitted in the same way across all countries.[2] Despite the energy tensions, the wholesale price of electricity on the Iberian Peninsula actually decreased in March in year-on-year terms, unlike in other European countries, and it was also well below the levels observed in Northern Europe (see fifth chart).[3]

This pattern is mainly due to the greater share of renewable energies in electricity generation on the peninsula. The European electricity market operates under a marginal system, where the technology that is required to cover the last unit of demand is the one that sets the price. The greater presence of renewables in our economy means that there are more time slots during the day when this source becomes the marginal energy. Given that renewable energies have very low marginal costs, especially compared to natural gas combined cycle power plants, this tends to reduce the price.[4]

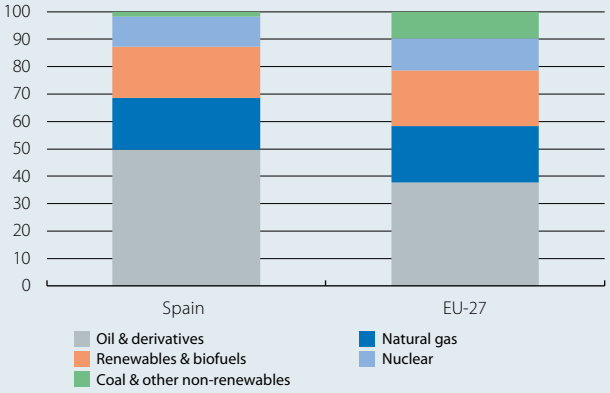
Overall, although the war in Iran introduces a new focal point of tension in international energy markets, the limited direct exposure to the Persian Gulf, advances in energy efficiency, and advantages in the electricity market all place the Spanish economy in a favourable position to absorb the shock. However, the country's high dependence on foreign energy remains a source of vulnerability. This balance indicates that, although Spain remains exposed to a price shock, it has certain structural elements that could mitigate its impact compared to recent episodes.

Zoel Martín Vilató

1. It may be surprising that the combined weight of renewable energies and biofuels in the gross available energy is not greater in Spain, given its relative advantage in electricity generation. This apparent discrepancy is explained by the fact that electricity generation is only one part of the total energy system, while other uses such as transport continue to show a high dependence on petroleum products.
2. It is important to clarify that the final price which consumers pay for electricity includes various fixed costs (tolls, charges, taxes) that significantly increase the total bill, which means that Spain's electricity market represents a comparative advantage mainly for electricity-intensive companies. The National Commission on Markets and Competition (CNMC) estimates that these costs account for around two-thirds of the bill for domestic consumers, while for industrial consumers they represent less than half of the total.
3. Due to the strong seasonality of electricity prices, month-on-month comparisons are not informative.
4. Also, even when combined cycles set the electricity price, the relatively advantageous position in gas supplies limits the increase in costs compared to other countries.

Energy sources

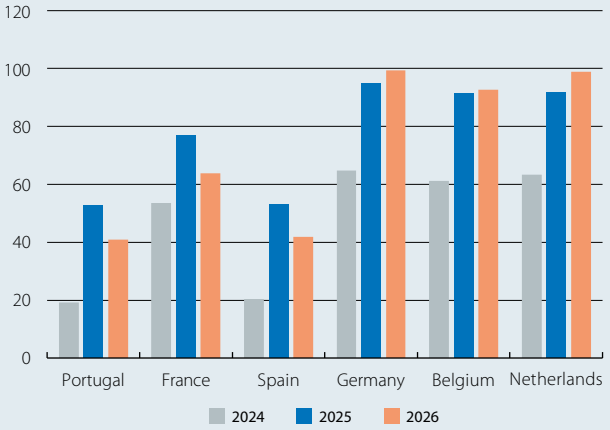
(% of gross available energy)



Notes: *Data from 2024. Gross available energy includes primary production, recovery and recycling, net imports and change in inventories.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Eurostat.*

Wholesale electricity prices in March

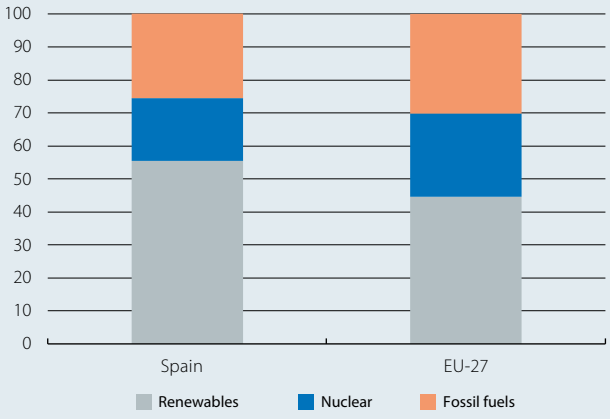
(euros/MWh)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from ESIOS-REE.*

Structure of electricity generation

(%)



Note: *Average data for 2025.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from Red Eléctrica de España.*

The crisis in Iran: how much could it affect the Spanish economy?

The war in the Middle East could generate a new shock to the global economy that would also affect the Spanish economy. In this article, we analyse the three main channels through which it could do so: the first is inflation, through the rising cost of energy, other products originating from the Persian Gulf, and increased maritime transport costs; the second is external demand, if the conflict hampers the growth of our trading partners; and the third is the financial channel, in the event of rising interest rates and tighter financial conditions. In addition to these three factors, there is the effect of fiscal policy; indeed, the government already announced a first set of measures on 20 March to cushion the impact of the shock.

Inflation: the main short-term impact channel

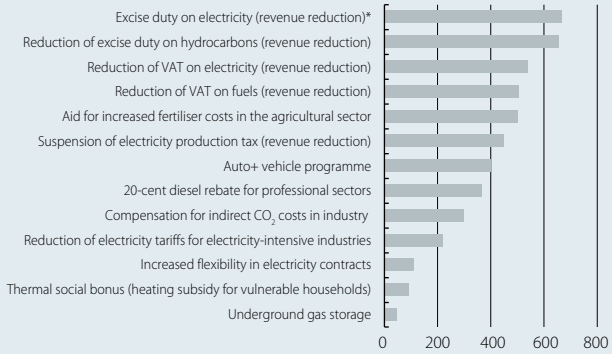
The inflationary channel combines direct and indirect effects. The direct effects are the most visible and the first to appear: a rise in oil prices quickly translates into higher fuel costs, while an increase in gas prices is reflected both in the price of natural gas and in electricity bills, given its key role in electricity generation.

The indirect effects are more gradual but also potentially significant. Energy forms part of the inputs used in multiple production processes, so an increase in its cost, if persistent over time, is passed on, at least in part, to other products. The experience of 2022 and other historical episodes of rising energy prices suggests that this transfer begins to manifest around nine months after the initial shock. Added to this is the potential increase in the cost of other strategic inputs, such as fertilisers, a key component for the agricultural sector in which the Middle East plays a important role as an exporter.

The magnitude of the final impact will depend on the intensity and duration of the energy shock, as well as the response of fiscal policy. Our estimates suggest that a 10% increase in Brent oil in euros raises headline inflation by 0.2 pps, while a 10% increase in gas has a more contained effect of around 0.05 pps. In a scenario with an average oil price in 2026 of around 85 dollars per barrel and a gas price of around 55 euros – figures consistent with data from market futures during March – the combined impact could add as much as 1 pp to our inflation forecast for this year, currently at 2.4%. The package of fiscal measures announced by the government would act as a buffer. Assuming that the measures remain in force until June – a condition that, according to the approved law, depends on fuel and electricity inflation exceeding 15% in April – we estimate that they could reduce the impact of the shock by 0.4 pps and bring average inflation in 2026 to around 3%. The recently announced truce in hostilities, if consolidated, would help limit the rise in inflation, although it could also mean that the fiscal support measures end prematurely.

Spain: key components of the Crisis Response Plan

(EUR millions)



Note: ** Estimates based on similar policies in 2022-2023 following the energy shock triggered by the war in Ukraine.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the Official State Gazette (BOE) and the Ministry of Finance.*

Foreign demand: limited direct exposure, currently contained indirect risk

Spain's direct exposure to the Gulf countries is limited.[1] Exports of goods and services to the entire region accounted for just 2.0% of our total exports, equivalent to 0.7% of GDP in 2025.

To assess what percentage of this exposure may be at risk, we can use the year 2022 as a reference. The war between Russia and Ukraine halved Spanish goods exports to both countries. A 50% drop in goods exports to the region, excluding their import content, would mean around 0.15 pps less GDP growth. However, this threshold seems conservative given the severity of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the imposition of EU sanctions on Russia.

Another risk factor arises from the deterioration of the international environment. Illustratively, we estimate that a 1-pp slowdown in the growth of our export markets would reduce GDP growth by around 0.2 pps. For now, a marked slowdown is not anticipated. For example, the ECB recently cut its forecast for import growth in the euro area – our main trading partner – by 0.3 pps as a result of the conflict in Iran, a revision that would have a limited impact on our economy.[2] In any case, the importance of this channel will depend on how the conflict evolves.

Uncertainty and financial conditions

When uncertainty increases, households and businesses tend to postpone their spending decisions: households delay purchasing durable goods, while businesses defer their investments until they have greater visibility.

1. Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Israel, West Bank/Gaza, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Yemen.
2. The ECB's forecasts were made under the assumption of a Brent oil price of 81.3 dollars/barrel and a price of 46.4 euros/MWh for gas for 2026 as a whole, which is 30% and 47% higher, respectively, than in the previous forecasts.

An increase of one standard deviation in the Bank of Spain's economic uncertainty index during one quarter is associated with a loss of GDP growth of around 0.2 pps in the same year.[3] For now, although March has seen a notable uptick in the index, this has been insufficient to substantially impact Q1 as a whole. If the conflict is resolved relatively quickly, then the impact of this channel should be limited.

On the other hand, the markets are anticipating between two and three rate hikes by the ECB during 2026. A 100-bp increase is generally associated with a cumulative loss of around 0.4 pps of GDP over a two-year period, with most of the impact concentrated in the second year. This means that if monetary tightening does materialise, its effect would be more noticeable in 2027 than in 2026.

Fiscal policy: a cushioning tool

On 20 March, the government presented an emergency plan to mitigate the rising cost of energy triggered by the geopolitical escalation in the Middle East. The measures came into effect on 22 March and were subsequently ratified in the Congress of Deputies.

The government estimates that the package will cost close to 5 billion euros – 0.3 pps of GDP – if it remains in force until 30 June. The final cost will depend both on how long the crisis lasts, and on how energy prices, the associated additional revenues and the reduction in demand evolve. It is estimated that around 60% of the total cost – approximately 3 billion euros – comes from the reduction in tax revenues on energy. As these are temporary measures, the impact on the deficit should also be temporary.

As for the main measures, the decree sets out a wide range of tax reductions and subsidies for electricity, fuels for transport and other fuels. In transport fuels, VAT is reduced from 21% to 10% and the excise duty on hydrocarbons is lowered to the minimum permitted by the EU.[4] The supervisory role of the National Commission on Markets and Competition (CNMC), which is responsible for monitoring prices and margins, is being strengthened to prevent the public subsidies from leading to increased profits.

In electricity, VAT is also reduced to 10% and the excise duty is set at 0.5% instead of 5.11%. In addition, the tax on electricity production (IVPEE) is suspended.[5]

Regarding sectoral measures, the main highlights are the subsidy of 20 cents per litre of diesel for professional use in the agricultural and transport sectors, which is also extended to self-employed workers and operators not entitled to reclaim the tax, together with an exceptional support measure of 500 million euros to offset the increased cost of fertilisers for farmers and a reduction in electricity tariffs for electricity-intensive industries.

The plan immediately reduces household energy bills, partially offsets the negative macroeconomic impact of the war, and has the advantage of being quickly implementable. However, if it were necessary to extend the measures beyond June, it would seem advisable to focus them more on vulnerable groups and sectors in order to increase their effectiveness and limit the fiscal cost.[6]

Spain: illustrative scenarios of the impact on GDP

	Scenario 1		Scenario 2	
	Description	Impact	Description	Impact
Inflation (*ex ante* fiscal measures)	+0.8 pps	–0.3	+2.0 pps	–0.8
Export markets	Drop of 0.3 pps and –10% in goods exports to the region*	–0.1	Drop of 1.5 pps and –50% in goods exports to the region*	–0.6
Uncertainty	Negligible	0.0	+1.5 standard deviations for 1 quarter	–0.4
Monetary policy (depo rate)	+25 bps	0.0	+100 bps	–0.1
Fiscal policy	The measures are withdrawn prematurely **	0.2	The measures are extended until the end of the year	0.9
Impact on 2026 GDP		–0.2		–0.9

Notes: ** See footnote 1. ** The measures are withdrawn at the beginning of June, instead of on 30 June.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research.*

Impact on economic activity: two illustrative scenarios

We present two illustrative scenarios in the table, which should not be interpreted as a precise forecast, but rather as a means of organising the risks and approximating their potential macroeconomic impact.

A first, more benign scenario would be compatible with a conflict that is resolved relatively quickly and with minimal and reversible damage to energy infrastructure. A second, more adverse scenario would envisage a conflict lasting several months, with significant damage to energy infrastructure, and an extension of the fiscal support measures.

Under these assumptions, the impact on annual GDP growth could range between 0.2 pps and less than 1 pp (our pre-war forecast was 2.4%). This is a wide range, but precisely this breadth reflects the magnitude of the uncertainty presented by the current situation.

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3. See the Focus «What do we mean when we talk about uncertainty?» in the MR11/2025.
4. The excise duty on hydrocarbons in Spain is approximately 38 cents per litre for diesel and 47 cents per litre for 95 octane petrol. In accordance with Directive 2003/96/EC, this levy could only be reduced to the EU's harmonised minimums, set at 33 cents per litre for diesel and 35.9 cents per litre for petrol.
5. Direct tax levied on electricity production and its incorporation into the electrical system.
6. See E.G. Miralles (2023). «Support measures in the face of the energy crisis and the rise in inflation: an analysis of the cost and distributional effects of some of the measures rolled out based on their degree of targeting». Economic Bulletin (2023/Q1).

Activity and employment indicators

Year-on-year change (%), unless otherwise specified

	2024	2025	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	01/26	02/26	03/26
Industry									
Industrial production index	0.4	1.3	–0.6	1.5	2.5	1.7	0.3	...	...
Indicator of confidence in industry *(value)*	–4.8	–4.8	–5.1	–5.3	–5.0	–3.9	–2.6	–2.4	–4.3
Manufacturing PMI *(value)*	52.2	50.9	50.0	50.0	52.6	51.1	49.2	50.0	48.7
Construction									
Building permits *(cumulative over 12 months)*	16.7	8.8	20.1	14.8	7.9	8.8	10.6	...	...
House sales *(cumulative over 12 months)*	9.7	11.5	17.0	22.9	18.7	11.5	10.0	...	...
House prices	8.4	12.7	12.2	12.7	12.8	12.9	...	...	...
Services									
Foreign tourists *(cumulative over 12 months)*	10.1	3.2	8.1	6.3	4.3	3.2	3.0	2.7	...
Services PMI *(value)*	55.3	54.5	55.3	52.2	54.2	56.4	53.5	51.9	53.3
Consumption									
Retail sales[1]	1.7	4.3	3.5	5.1	4.4	4.1	3.8	2.2	...
Car registrations	7.2	12.9	14.0	13.7	16.9	8.0	1.1	7.5	11.7
Economic sentiment indicator *(value)*	103.1	103.1	103.3	102.1	102.8	104.4	106.0	106.1	103.7
Labour market									
Employment[2]	2.2	2.6	2.4	2.7	2.6	2.8	...	...	...
Unemployment rate (% labour force)	11.3	10.5	11.4	10.3	10.5	9.9	...	...	...
Registered as employed with Social Security[3]	2.4	2.3	2.3	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.5
GDP	**3.5**	**2.8**	**3.0**	**2.8**	**2.7**	**2.7**	...	...	...

Prices

Year-on-year change (%), unless otherwise specified

	2024	2025	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	01/26	02/26	03/26
General	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.2	2.8	3.0	2.3	2.3	3.3
Core	2.9	2.3	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.7

Foreign sector

Cumulative balance over the last 12 months in billions of euros, unless otherwise specified

	2024	2025	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	01/26	02/26	03/26
Trade of goods									
Exports *(year-on-year change, cumulative over 12 months)*	0.2	0.7	3.3	2.0	0.8	0.7	0.6	...	...
Imports *(year-on-year change, cumulative over 12 months)*	0.1	4.6	4.2	4.1	4.6	4.6	3.3	...	...
Current balance	**50.7**	**49.4**	**47.7**	**48.5**	**48.2**	**49.4**	**49.1**	**...**	**...**
Goods and services	66.3	64.5	63.7	64.0	62.5	64.5	66.7	...	...
Primary and secondary income	–15.7	–15.1	–16.0	–15.5	–14.3	–15.1	–17.7	...	...
Net lending (+) / borrowing (–) capacity	**68.7**	**66.6**	**66.5**	**67.5**	**66.6**	**66.6**	**66.2**	**...**	**...**

Credit and deposits in non-financial sectors[4]

Year-on-year change (%), unless otherwise specified

	2024	2025	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	01/26	02/26	03/26
Deposits									
Household and company deposits	5.1	4.8	4.6	3.9	4.9	4.8	5.1	5.5	...
Demand and notice deposits	2.0	6.7	3.1	5.0	7.2	6.7	7.2	7.2	...
Time and repo deposits	23.5	–4.7	12.6	–1.5	–6.6	–4.7	–4.9	–2.8	...
General government deposits[5]	23.1	4.9	24.4	25.5	7.2	4.9	5.3	3.8	...
TOTAL	**6.3**	**4.8**	**5.9**	**5.4**	**5.1**	**4.8**	**5.2**	**5.4**	**...**
Outstanding balance of credit									
Private sector	0.7	3.5	1.7	2.6	2.8	3.5	3.4	3.7	...
Non-financial firms	0.4	2.9	1.6	2.5	2.3	2.9	2.6	2.9	...
Households - housing	0.3	3.5	1.4	2.3	2.9	3.5	3.7	3.8	...
Households - other purposes	2.3	–276.1	3.1	–261.4	–278.2	–276.1	4.7	5.1	...
General government	–2.6	10.7	–0.3	5.3	12.9	10.7	6.6	5.6	...
TOTAL	**0.5**	**3.9**	**1.6**	**2.7**	**3.4**	**3.9**	**3.6**	**3.8**	**...**
NPL ratio (%)[6]	**3.3**	**2.7**	**3.2**	**3.0**	**2.9**	**2.7**	**2.7**	**...**	**...**

Notes: *1. Deflated, excluding service stations. 2. LFS. 3. Average monthly figures. 4. Aggregate figures for the Spanish banking sector and residents in Spain. 5. Public-sector deposits, excluding repos. 6. Data at the period end.*

Sources: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda (MITMA), the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration (MISSM), the National Statistics Institute (INE), S&P Global PMI, the European Commission, the Department of Customs and Excise Duties and the Bank of Spain.*

Portugal: first signs of the impact of the conflict in the Middle East

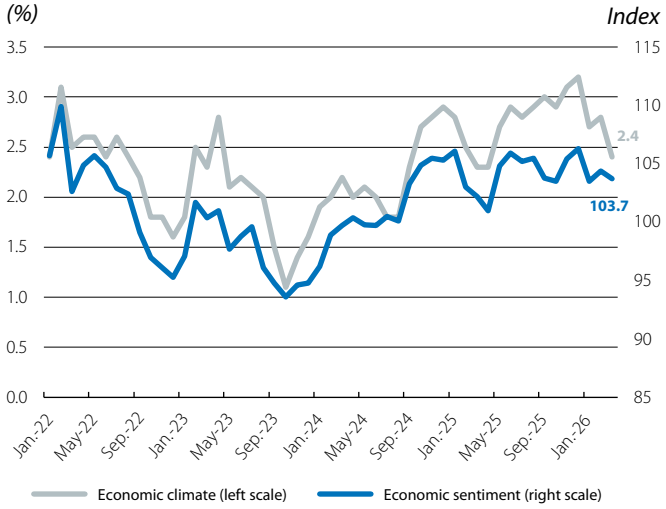
A turbulent first quarter. Household sentiment declined in March, with a significant deterioration in the perceived outlook for their own financial situation and for the state of the country's economy over the next 12 months. On the other hand, the economic climate indicator fell to 2.4% in March (vs. 2.8% in February), with a notable deterioration in the price component, due to the perception that the conflict in the Middle East will cause new inflationary pressures. The European Commission's sentiment indicator, meanwhile, remained above the 100-point threshold (103.7 in March vs. 104.4 in February). However, the events at the beginning of 2026 – the storms and the war in Iran – introduce downside risks to our growth forecast. The Bank of Portugal recently revised its macroeconomic scenario and cut its growth forecast for 2026 by 0.5 percentage points to 1.8%, maintaining a downward bias.

The war in Iran brings inflation close to 3% in March. The energy CPI soared to 5.8% in year-on-year terms. Also, the energy component, which had been negative during the previous months, contributed more than 50% to the increase in headline inflation, which rose to 2.7% (vs. 2.1% in February). Meanwhile, core inflation remained contained and stood at 2.0% (vs. 1.9% in February). Geopolitical developments in the coming months will determine whether the increase in the CPI becomes more persistent.

House prices grew like never before in 2025. The house price index recorded a year-on-year increase of 18.9% in Q4 2025. This places the average growth in house prices for 2025 at 17.6%, a record in the National Statistics Institute's series, while the number of sales transactions approached 170,000. The bank appraisal data available up to February indicate that the housing market remains dynamic, although the persistence of the conflict in the Middle East, particularly its effects on household confidence and disposable income, could moderate this escalation.

The surprising budget surplus of 2025 is overshadowed by the challenges of 2026. The budget balance stood at 0.7% of GDP in 2025 (vs. 0.6% in 2024). As indicated by the monthly data, revenue growth exceeded expenditure growth (6.7% and 6.6%, respectively), largely supported by tax revenues and social security contributions. The amount collected from these two items exceeded the government's latest estimate (included in the 2026 General Government Budget) – a trend that cannot be separated from the strength of the labour market. The increase in expenditure, for its part, is largely explained by personnel expenses and social security benefits, which account for two-thirds of the increase, while investment and the other components of current expenditure, despite having increased, were considerably below expectations. Yet, despite the positive surprise of 2025, the start of 2026 has brought new fiscal challenges.

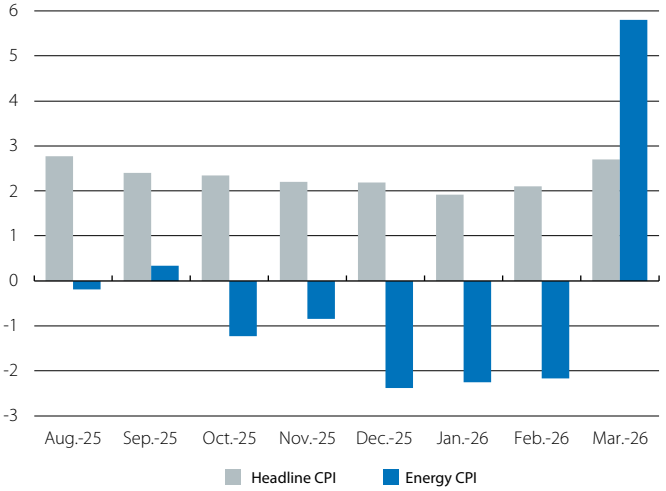
Portugal: economic climate and sentiment indicators



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the National Statistics Institute of Portugal and the European Commission.*

Portugal: CPI

Year-on-year change (%)



Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the National Statistics Institute of Portugal.*

Portugal: house prices and sales

Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the National Statistics Institute of Portugal.*

Activity and employment indicators

Year-on-year change (%), unless otherwise specified

	2024	2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q1 2026	01/26	02/26	03/26
Coincident economic activity index	2.0	2.0	1.8	2.0	2.2	...	2.1	2.1	...
Industry									
Industrial production index	0.8	0.5	1.2	2.8	0.3	...	0.4	–4.4	...
Confidence indicator in industry *(value)*	–6.2	–4.0	–4.8	–3.4	–2.8	–2.0	–1.4	–2.1	–2.4
Construction									
Building permits - new housing (number of homes)	6.5	20.6	20.1	8.9	16.0	...	–16.9	...	...
House sales	14.5	15.5	15.5	3.8	–4.7	...	–	–	–
House prices *(euro / m² - valuation)*	8.5	17.4	17.4	18.2	18.4	...	18.7	17.2	...
Services									
Foreign tourists *(cumulative over 12 months)*	6.3	1.9	4.1	2.6	1.9	...	1.6	1.7	...
Confidence indicator in services *(value)*	5.6	10.1	6.6	12.9	8.4	4.9	4.7	5.0	5.0
Consumption									
Retail sales	3.3	4.8	4.8	5.4	4.4	...	4.4	4.9	...
Coincident indicator for private consumption	2.8	3.4	3.5	3.1	3.1	...	3.2	3.1	...
Consumer confidence index *(value)*	–18.0	–16.2	–17.9	–16.2	–15.2	–16.2	–14.7	–15.3	–18.7
Labour market									
Employment	1.2	3.2	2.9	3.7	3.7	...	2.6	2.0	...
Unemployment rate (*% labour force*)	6.4	6.0	5.9	5.8	5.8	...	5.6	5.8	...
GDP	**2.2**	**1.9**	**1.7**	**2.2**	**1.9**	**...**	**–**	**–**	**–**

Prices

Year-on-year change (%), unless otherwise specified

	2024	2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q1 2026	01/26	02/26	03/26
General	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.6	2.2	2.2	1.9	2.1	2.7
Core	2.5	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.8	1.9	2.0

Foreign sector

Cumulative balance over the last 12 months in billions of euros, unless otherwise specified

	2024	2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q1 2026	01/26	02/26	03/26
Trade of goods									
Exports *(year-on-year change, cumulative over 12 months)*	2.0	0.6	4.2	2.0	0.6	...	–1.6	...	...
Imports *(year-on-year change, cumulative over 12 months)*	2.0	4.0	7.0	6.7	4.0	...	3.1	...	...
Current balance	**6.5**	**3.8**	**3.5**	**3.0**	**3.8**	**...**	**3.4**	**...**	**...**
Goods and services	6.4	3.7	4.0	3.5	3.7	...	3.3	...	...
Primary and secondary income	0.1	0.1	–0.5	–0.5	0.1	...	0.0	...	...
Net lending (+) / borrowing (–) capacity	**9.6**	**8.3**	**6.9**	**7.0**	**8.3**	**...**	**7.8**	**...**	**...**

Credit and deposits in non-financial sectors

Year-on-year change (%), unless otherwise specified

	2024	2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q1 2026	01/26	02/26	03/26
Deposits [1]									
Household and company deposits	7.5	5.4	5.4	6.3	5.4	...	5.0	5.1	...
Sight and savings	–0.3	8.1	5.1	8.6	8.1	...	7.5	8.0	...
Term and notice	15.3	3.1	5.8	4.3	3.1	...	2.8	2.6	...
General government deposits	26.7	28.7	39.6	–0.5	28.7	...	25.3	29.2	...
TOTAL	**7.9**	**6.0**	**6.4**	**6.1**	**6.0**	**...**	**5.6**	**5.9**	**...**
Outstanding balance of credit [1]									
Private sector	1.9	6.6	4.9	5.8	6.6	...	6.7	6.8	...
Non-financial firms	–1.0	2.6	2.0	2.2	2.6	...	2.3	2.7	...
Households - housing	3.0	9.3	6.4	8.0	9.3	...	9.6	9.6	...
Households - other purposes	5.4	7.0	6.6	6.9	7.0	...	7.1	7.2	...
General government	0.6	6.4	3.8	4.8	6.4	...	5.2	4.9	...
TOTAL	**1.9**	**6.6**	**4.8**	**5.7**	**6.6**	**...**	**6.6**	**6.7**	**...**
NPL ratio *(%)* [2]	**2.4**	**2.1**	**2.3**	**2.3**	**2.1**	**...**	**–**	**–**	**–**

Notes: *1. Residents in Portugal. The credit variables exclude securitisations. 2. Period-end figure.*
Source: *CaixaBank Research, based on data from the National Statistics Institute of Portugal, Bank of Portugal and Refinitiv.*

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The Spanish economy is going through a phase of strong and widespread expansion, with balanced growth between sectors and significant resilience in a challenging international context. Moreover, the reduction in temporary employment and the current strength of the manufacturing industry, partly thanks to the competitive advantage it enjoys over Europe in terms of energy prices, act as tailwinds for the current dynamism of Spain's economic sectors.

Through our studies, we help to stimulate debate and the exchange of views among all sectors of society, as well as to promote the dissemination of the major themes of the socio-economic environment of our time. Both the *Monthly Report* and the rest of CaixaBank Research's publications are available at: www.caixabankresearch.com

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