



WELFARE TO WARFARE

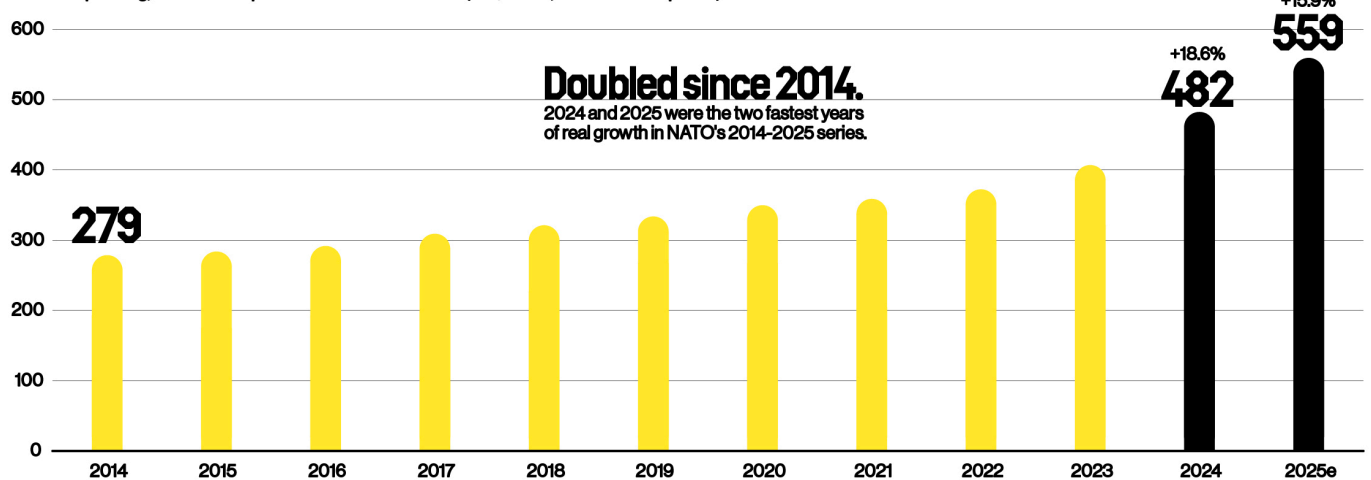
Military Spending and Austerity
Across the NATO Bloc

INTRODUCTION

Governments of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are carrying out the largest sustained military build-up since the Cold War, one comparable in scale to the arms race that preceded World War I.

The rearmament drive is accompanied not only by a historic assault on the social democratic arrangement that promised better public services, higher pay, and better living conditions for Europe's workers. It is also a symptom of a renewed assault on the countries of the Global South — and, unmistakably, preparations for a wider global war.

Defence spending, NATO's European members and Canada (US\$ billion, constant 2021 prices)



Source: NATO, Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2025), Tables 2 and 5 (June 2025). 2025 is a NATO estimate.

"The imperialist war in the Middle East is spreading," said the Istanbul Declaration, a document signed in May 2026 by unions from over 35 European ports:

"The genocide of the Palestinian people by the murderer-state of Israel continues with the support of the USA, NATO and the EU. The US-Israeli attack

against Iran, the war flare-up in the Strait of Hormuz, the attacks on ships, the blockades, the militarization of maritime passages, all show that peoples and workers are being pushed deeper into the abyss of war." [1]

These interlinking policies — imperialism beyond Europe's borders and increasing reaction within them — are once again giving rise to the specter of fascism on the European continent. These issues are connected because, historically, the wealth and political power of the Western ruling classes have their origins in imperialism: the capacity to cheapen the resources and labor of the global periphery through economic and military coercion. In 2021 alone, the rich economies received through trade the product of 826 billion more hours of work from the Global South than they gave in return, worth €16.9 trillion at Northern wages. [2] That capacity is now being eroded by a renewed drive towards economic sovereignty, and pockets of military resistance, across the Global South. Having exhausted political and economic tools to maintain their power, the old colonial states are increasingly responding with violence. The genocide in Gaza is the starkest symptom of this tendency, and offers a warning to workers everywhere.

At NATO's Hague summit in June 2025, member states committed to spending 5 per cent of GDP annually on "core defence requirements as well as defence- and security-related spending" by 2035. This is more than double the two-decade-old 2 per cent guideline. [3] The European Union's ReArm Europe plan, announced in March 2025 and quickly rebranded Readiness 2030, aims to mobilise €800

billion for armaments, financed in part by an 'escape clause' in the Stability and Growth Pact — the EU fiscal rulebook that caps member states' deficits and debt — exempting military borrowing from the rules that have long constrained social spending. Seventeen member states had activated it by early 2026. [4]

This move represents a license to dismantle the postwar social democratic settlement. It is a plan to undo the concessions that decades of militant labor organizing had painstakingly extracted from capital, and to tie countries' growth trajectories to war. Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz declared in August 2025 that "the welfare state that we have today can no longer be financed with what we produce in the economy". [5] Spain's Pedro Sánchez, the only NATO leader to refuse the five per cent target, set out what the increases would cost if implemented: going from 2 to 5 per cent of GDP would require an additional €350 billion, achievable only by raising taxes on each worker by around €3,000 a year; eliminating unemployment, sickness and maternity benefits; cutting all pensions by 40 per cent; or halving state investment in education. [6]

This report traces the relationship between these two tendencies — rising military expenditure and the retrenchment of social provision — across NATO Europe. It then considers the response from progressive forces: dockworkers, union confederations, strike movements and other groups that have contested the substitution of welfare with warfare.

THE REARMAMENT DRIVE IN NUMBERS

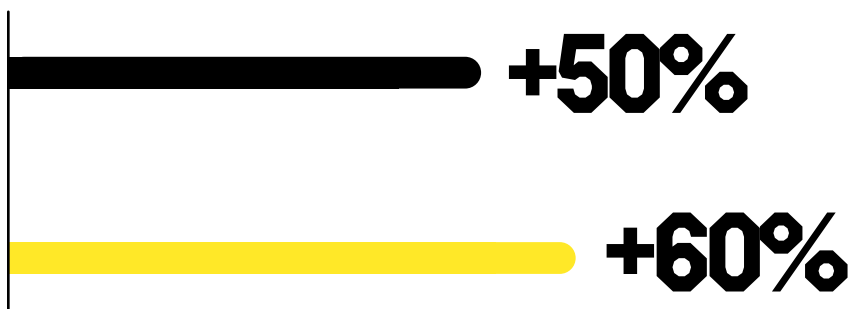
World military expenditure rose for the tenth consecutive year in 2024, to \$2,718 billion, the highest ever recorded by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). This represents a 9.4 per cent increase in a single year. Europe saw the fastest regional growth of the decade: +83 per cent between 2015 and 2024, or +17 per cent in 2024 alone. [7] All 32 NATO members increased their spending and the alliance totalled \$1,506 billion in spending in 2024, or 55 per cent of the world total. That year, eighteen members met the 2 per cent guideline, up from eleven in 2023, the fastest expansion since the guideline was first set at NATO's Wales summit in 2014. [8] The largest single-year increases were seen in Romania (+43 per cent), the Netherlands (+35), Sweden (+34), Poland (+31) and Germany (+28). [7] The increases are dramatic. NATO's European members and Canada increased their defence spending by about 60 per cent in real terms between 2020 and 2025, a number that exceeds the increases in spending by the six European great powers between 1908 and 1913, the years immediately preceding World War I. [9]

1908 TO 1913

The six European great powers
Nominal spending, Stevenson (LSE)

2020 TO 2025

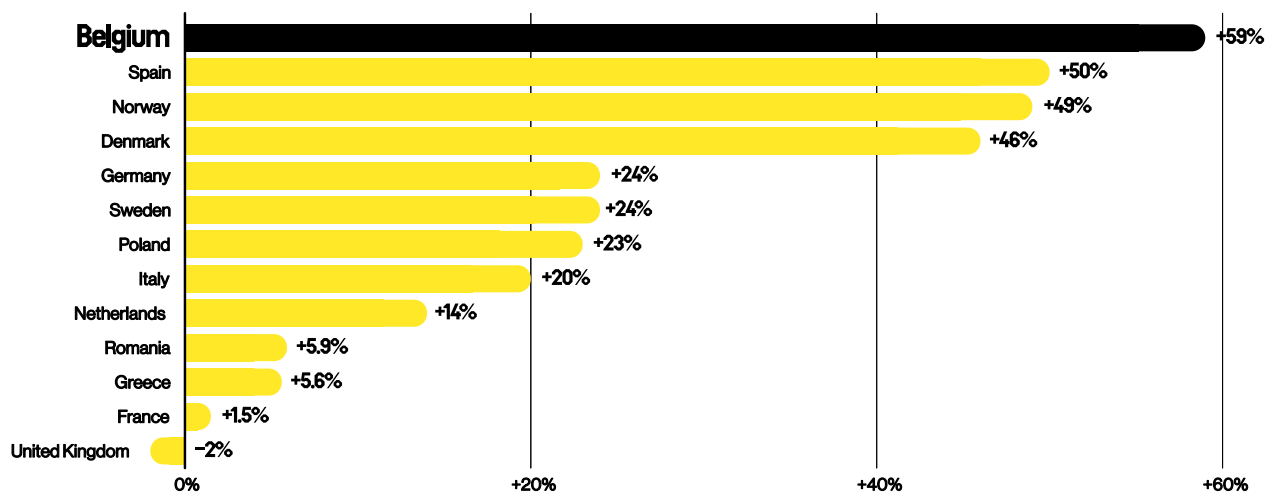
NATO's European members and Canada
Real terms, NATO



Growth in military spending over five years. The two measures are not identical: pre-1914 figures are nominal, but prices were broadly stable before the war, so the comparison of scale holds.

The Hague Declaration of 25 June 2025 secured further increases in spending. It committed member states to spending at least 3.5 per cent of GDP for core defence plus up to 1.5 per cent for loosely defined 'defence- and security-related' outlays — infrastructure, cyber, civil preparedness, the arms-industrial base — with progress to be reviewed in 2029. [3] If the 1.5 per cent is directed primarily towards arms-production capacity, SIPRI warns, the societal benefits will be limited and the military burden will approach the full five per cent. [10] All 32 allies signed the declaration, but Spain declared it would not meet the target, capping itself at 2.1 per cent. Poland (4.5 per cent of GDP) and Lithuania (4.0) already exceeded the core benchmark in 2025, with Latvia at 3.6. [11] [6] [12]

Change in military spending, 2024 to 2025, real terms (selected European NATO members)

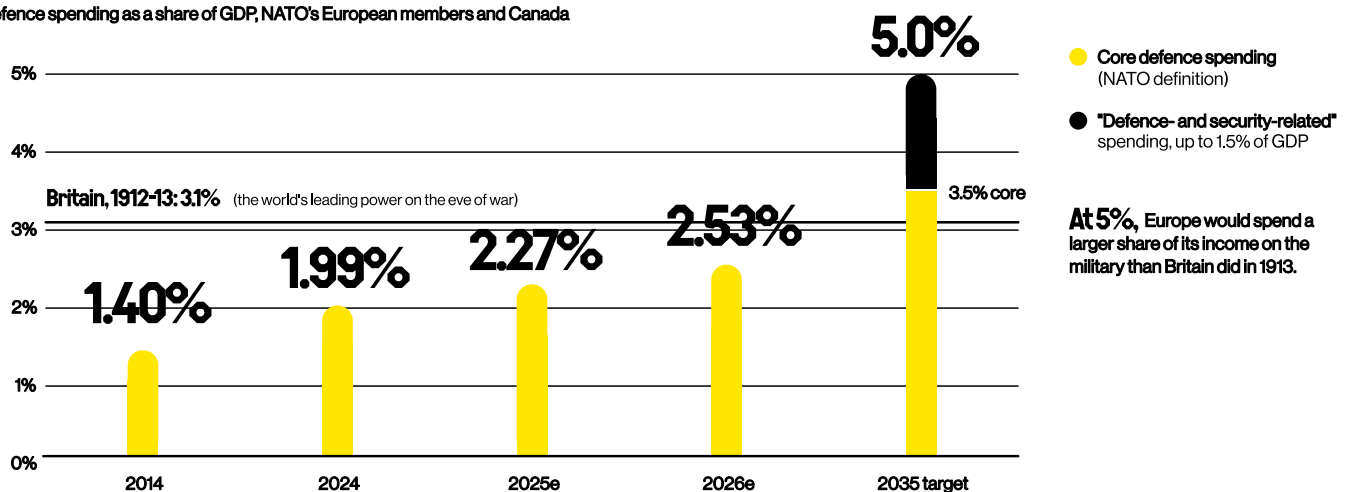


Source: SIPRI, Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2025 (April 2026). Real-terms change at constant prices.

The financing mechanisms have done away, selectively, with Europe's limits to public spending, which have kept the continent on the path of austerity for over a decade now. In March 2025, the Bundestag, the lower house of the German

parliament, amended the constitution so that all defence spending above 1 per cent of GDP is permanently exempt from the 'debt brake' (*Schuldenbremse*), the constitutional rule that had capped federal borrowing at 0.35 per cent of GDP since 2009 and had long served as the basis of German austerity. It also created a €500 billion off-budget infrastructure fund. [13] Italy reached the 2 per cent NATO floor in 2025 largely through creative accounting, reclassifying military pensions and other budget items tangential to military spending. This raised the figure reported to NATO to €45.3 billion against a defence budget of €35.5 billion. The Brookings Institution, a Washington-based pro-war think tank, estimates that closing the gap with real spending would cost €3–4 billion a year for a decade. [14] [15]

Defence spending as a share of GDP, NATO's European members and Canada



Sources: NATO, Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2025), Table 3; NATO 2026 estimates as reported by Reuters (7 July 2026); NATO, The Hague Summit Declaration (25 June 2025); Ellison, Sargent and Scott, CEPR DP13848 (2019).

WELFARE UNDER THE KNIFE

With few exceptions, considered at the bottom of this section, the dramatic increase in military budgets is being financed by a major erosion of social spending across the NATO bloc. In many states, that erosion is only beginning, but the overall tendency is clear and points to an escalation in the austere tendency of the past few decades. Nonetheless, many of the more draconian policies have been abandoned as a result of popular mobilization, suggesting that labor retains some leverage in the struggle against further austerity in Europe.

United Kingdom. The Labour government has legislated the deepest cuts to disability support in over a decade while raising defence spending (~£60 billion in 2024–25). [16] The March 2025 package — tighter eligibility for Personal Independence Payment (PIP), the main non-means-tested disability benefit, and a reduced health element of Universal Credit (UC), the working-age benefit system — will cut incapacity and disability benefit spending by £4.5 billion a year by 2029/30, according to the government's own impact assessment. [17] (the PIP eligibility element was dropped in July 2025 pending further review, though the UC health-element cut remains in place for new claimants from April 2026). Citizens Advice, the national advice charity, estimated that over a million current claimants could be affected by the proposed reforms, should they be implemented in full. [18] The overseas aid budget was cut in the same period, explicitly to free up funds for spending on war. [19]

France. In July 2025, Prime Minister François Bayrou unveiled €43.8 billion in savings for 2026. This included freezes in welfare and pension payments; €5 billion from health; two public holidays proposed for abolition; and tighter unemployment insurance. Defence was the single exempted domain, with its 2017 budget doubling to €64 billion by 2027. [20] Bayrou fell to a confidence vote in September 2025 amid the 'Block Everything' (*Bloquons tout*) protest movement and an 18 September union strike day. Although many of the proposals put forward remain, so far popular mobilization has arrested the implementation of large-scale cuts. The 2026 budget grants defence an extra €6.7 billion while reducing public spending only by a marginal amount. [21]

Germany. The constitutional exemption for military borrowing has been paired with an offensive against social entitlements: the 2026 budget cut *Bürgergeld*, the basic unemployment benefit, as well as pensions and *Bafög*, the federal student-support scheme, even as defence spending rose towards the 3.5 per cent core target. Based on current projections of state spending in 2029, that target would imply spending roughly a third of the federal budget on war. [5] [22] Germany's infamous debt brake was simply suspended for war while remaining in force for social spending, perhaps the clearest example of the reordering of political priorities in Europe.

Romania offers the starkest case in the bloc's east. After the EU's highest deficit in 2024 (9.3 per cent of GDP), an omnibus decree issued in December 2024 froze pensions and public-sector wages,

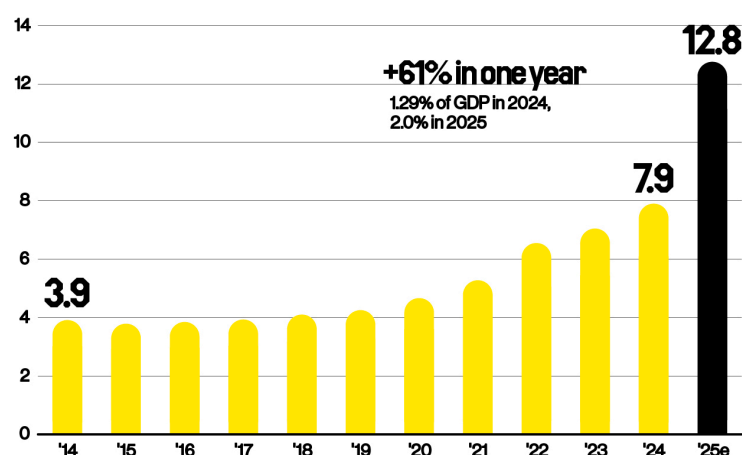
halved vacation vouchers and cut teacher allowances. In addition, an August 2025 package raised value-added tax (VAT) from 19 to 21 per cent (on food and medicine, 9 to 11), extended the freeze through 2026 and made pensioners pay health contributions. [23] "Workers are once again being sacrificed", said the National Trade Union Bloc (BNS), Romania's largest union confederation, as it marched on Bucharest on 12 November 2025, after September teacher strikes and an October rally of the four main confederations. Cartel Alfa, another leading confederation, counts 600,000 public employees hit by bonus caps. [23] [24]

Finland. The coalition government of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo has pushed through a €9 billion fiscal consolidation that runs parallel to rising defence outlays (~2.9 per cent of GDP in 2025 on the NATO definition, pledged to reach at least 3 per cent by 2029; the 2025 defence budget rose by over €500 million to €6.5 billion). From January 2025, housing allowance was asset-tested and abolished for owner-occupiers, benefit indexation was frozen, earnings-related unemployment benefit was cut after two months and child supplements were scrapped. [25] A law in force since mid-2024, passed over union opposition, limits political and sympathy strikes to 24 hours and fines individual strikers €200. [25]

Belgium. Until 2024, Belgium was one of NATO's lowest spenders, at 1.29 per cent of GDP. Within months of Bart De Wever's 'Arizona' coalition taking office in February 2025, it jumped to the 2 per cent floor: defence spending rose from €7.9 billion in 2024 to an estimated €12.8 billion in 2025 [26], a 59

per cent rise in real terms and one of the sharpest in Europe that year. [27] At The Hague, Belgium signed up to 3.5 per cent by 2035, though it now plans to hold at 2 per cent until 2029. [28]

Belgium: defence spending, € billion (current prices)



MEANWHILE

103,000

people cut off unemployment benefits by mid-2027

€4,000

gross a month: wage indexation capped above it
(€2,000 for pensions and benefits)

2027

pension 'malus' for careers short of 35 full years

3% → 2.5%

health spending growth norm, plus higher co-payments

-25%

development aid

Sources: NATO, Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2025); Brussels Times (27 Dec 2025, 21 Mar 2025); Belga (Nov 2025, May 2026); VRT NWS (29 May 2026). 2025 is a NATO estimate.

The first leap was paid for partly with one-offs, including an exceptional dividend from the state-owned bank Belfius [29]; the rest was borrowed under the EU escape clause [30], and the deficit rose to 5.2 per cent of GDP in 2025, the third highest in the EU. [31] For every other purpose, the deficit is treated as an iron law. Unemployment benefits, until now unlimited in time, are being cut off after at most two years, and around 103,000 people will have lost them by mid-2027. [32] Automatic wage indexation now applies in full only to the first €4,000 of gross monthly pay, and to the first €2,000 of pensions and benefits, and a pension 'malus' from 2027 penalises those who retire early without a full career. [33] The November 2025 budget lowered the health sector's growth norm from 3 to 2.5 per cent [34], and development aid was cut by a quarter. [35]

Belgian workers have answered with the most sustained union mobilization in decades. The three confederations, ABVV-FGTB, ACV-CSC and ACLVB-CGSLB, have acted as a common front [36], from a general strike on 31 March 2025 [37] to a national demonstration of at least 80,000 on 14 October that grounded every departing flight at Brussels Airport [38], a three-day strike in November [39] and a further national strike on 12 March 2026. [40]

Netherlands. The right-wing cabinet of Dick Schoof cut development aid by €2.4 billion a year from 2027 — the largest aid cut in Dutch history — while military spending rose 35 per cent in 2024. [41] The incoming coalition of Rob Jetten, formed in early 2026, went further, putting forward proposals for €7.9 billion in healthcare cuts, unemployment benefit duration halved from two years to one, and cuts to the WIA, the Dutch incapacity-benefit scheme. The three main Dutch union federations — FNV, CNV and VCP — issued a strike ultimatum in May 2026. A wave of action followed. 18,000 marched in Amsterdam on May Day and seaport workers struck on 4 September. By the end of the month, the cabinet gave in to union demands and dropped the proposals to cut social spending altogether. At the time of writing, only the development aid cut was implemented in full. [41]

Denmark. Denmark voted in May 2025 to raise the pension age to 70 by 2040, the highest in Europe, the same year it created a DKK 50 billion defence Acceleration Fund and lifted military spending 46 per cent in real terms to 3.3 per cent of GDP. 3F, the country's largest union, reports three-quarters of members doubt they can work into their seventies. [42]

Sweden. An agreement between Sweden's governing parties and the far-right Sweden Democrats, on whose support the minority government rests, targets 3.5 per cent of GDP by 2030, financed by loans. At the same time, a new Unemployment Benefit Act (October 2025) cuts benefit levels and duration and at least SEK 10 billion in aid was redirected to Ukraine for 2026. [43]

Greece. Defence spending stood at 2.85 per cent of GDP in 2025 on NATO's estimate. In 2026 NATO expects Greece to be one of only five allies spending more than 3.5 per cent of GDP, at 3.65 per cent. [44] In July 2026 the government approved a €4.2 billion arms package centred on the 'Achilles Shield' air- and drone-defence system, bought from Israel. [45][46] It is part of a €25 billion, twelve-year overhaul of the armed forces announced in April 2025. [47] The 2026 budget, passed in December 2025, won a wider cross-party majority for its defence chapter than for the budget as a whole. [48] Meanwhile, public spending on education is the second-lowest in the EU after Romania: 3.3 per cent of GDP in 2023, against an EU average of 4.7. [49] And inflation is wiping out pensioners' nominal pension increases. [50]

Exceptions. Poland and the Baltic states have so far financed rearmament through debt, off-budget funds and loans from the European Union's €150 billion Security Action for Europe (SAFE) fund rather than social cuts. Poland spent 4.5 per cent of GDP on defence in 2025 with a 7.3 per cent deficit. Lithuania's record 5.4 per cent budget for 2026 even raised public wages and pensions. [12] [51] Estonia opted for wide-ranging tax increases,

including by raising VAT to 24 per cent, a move explicitly framed as security financing. [52] Norway, drawing on its oil fund, raised military spending 49 per cent in real terms in 2025 with no welfare retrenchment at all. [53] This can be explained in part by political choice, and in part by the significant net benefits that some of these countries receive from the EU (e.g., Poland remains a major beneficiary of EU structural funding).

**TABLE 1. THE WELFARE-WARFARE TRADE-OFF IN
SELECTED NATO COUNTRIES, 2024-26**

	Military escalation	Concurrent social retrenchment	Status (as of Oct 2026)
UK	~£60bn (2024-25); path to 3.5% core by 2035	Original £4.5bn/yr disability-cut plan abandoned; UC health cut for new claimants from Apr 2026; aid cut in force	Partially adopted
FR	+€6.7bn defence in 2026; 2017 budget doubled by 2027	€43.8bn savings package abandoned after Bayrou's fall (Sept 2025); pension reform suspended – large-scale austerity averted through popular mobilisation	Largely abandoned
DE	Debt brake lifted for defence >1% of GDP; €500bn fund	2026 cuts to basic income support, federal pension contributions, Bafög; stricter basic security scheme	Adopted (Mar 2026) – in force from Jul 2026
RO	~2.5% of GDP (2025); +43% in 2024	Pension/wage freezes, VAT 19→21%, health contributions for pensions above RON 3,000	Adopted – in force
FI	~2.9% of GDP (2025) → ≥3% by 2029	Housing/unemployment cuts, indexation freeze, anti-strike law	Adopted – in force
NL	+35% (2024); 3.5% core target	€2.4bn/yr aid cut stands; proposed social security cuts (unemployment, pension age, health deductible) scrapped after strike wave	Largely abandoned
DK	DKK 50bn fund; +46% in 2025 to 3.3% of GDP	Pension age to 70 by 2040	Adopted (May 2025)
SE	3.5% of GDP by 2030; +34% in 2024	Unemployment benefit cuts; SEK 10bn aid redirected	Adopted – in force Oct 2025
GR	2.85% of GDP (2025); 3.65% expected in 2026; €4.2bn package incl. Achilles Shield (Jul 2026); €25bn/12-year overhaul	Education spending second-lowest in EU (3.3% of GDP vs 4.7% EU average, 2023); inflation eroding pension increases; sustained austerity since the 2010s	Structural – ongoing
BE	Hague 5% trajectory	Unemployment benefits time-limited; indexation capped above €4,000; pension malus from 2027; health norm cut; aid cut by 25%; national strikes	Adopted – in force Mar 2026
IT	2% via reclassification; procurement doubled since 2020	No direct cuts yet – fiscal room absorbed; ~39% oppose rearmament [14]	No cuts adopted
ES	Refused 5%; capped at 2.1%	Defended welfare state as incompatible with 5%	5% target rejected

WORKER ORGANIZATIONS AGAINST WAR

The most consequential resistance to the rearmament agenda has come from workers at the points of production and logistics, above all in the ports, the choke points of the arms trade. Their struggle is directed not only against the substitution of welfare with warfare at home, but against their own forced complicity in violations of international law abroad. The cargoes that European dockworkers refused to load were bound, in most cases, for Israel as it continued to perpetrate genocide in Palestine.

These mobilizations emerged against a backdrop of a major escalation of global violence. In 2025, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program recorded 65 state-based armed conflicts — the highest number since its records began in 1946. This includes eight interstate conflicts, double the previous year and the most on record. Only one of these conflicts is fought in Europe. The rest are concentrated in West Asia, the Sahel, Sudan, Myanmar. [54]

In other words, the majority of these conflicts are being waged in the Global South. These wars are being supplied in large part by NATO members. Indeed, members of the bloc are increasingly among the belligerents: many European states are direct participants in the wars on Iran and Yemen, for example by deploying naval forces to the region or providing airports for the launch of US bombing raids. This cuts against arguments that the current rearmament drive is defensive in nature.

The dockworkers' front. Since November 2023 — when the European Dockworkers Council, a

network of fourteen rank-and-file port unions across twelve countries, held a day of action against war and Barcelona dockers refused arms bound for Israel — the tactic has spread. Piraeus dockers stopped an ammunition shipment in October 2024, declaring that “we will not dye our hands with people's blood”. The Swedish Dockworkers Union boycotted military cargo to and from Israel for six days in February 2025 (its deputy chair Erik Helgeson was sacked in retaliation). Tangier Med workers refused a Maersk ship suspected of carrying F-35 parts in April 2025. [55] [56] [57]

The movement peaked in the summer of 2025. On 4 June, dockers of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), France's historically militant union confederation, at the port of Fos-sur-Mer near Marseille refused to load fourteen tonnes of weapons components bound for a subsidiary of Elbit Systems, Israel's largest arms manufacturer, forcing the vessel to depart without the weapons cargo. [56] In Italy, the Genoa port workers' collective CALP and the rank-and-file union Unione Sindicale di Base (USB) escalated from port blockades to a 20 June general strike under the slogan “Lower the weapons, raise the wages”, with rallies outside the plants of Leonardo, the state-controlled aerospace and arms manufacturer, in five cities. [55] USB's 'Labour Rejects War' manifesto grounded the strike in Italian law, including Law 185/1990 on arms exports, the Law 146/1990 strike framework and the constitutional repudiation of war. On 26–27 September 2025, Genoa hosted an international dockworkers' assembly as Italian unions mounted a general strike. That week,

dockers blocked an Israel-bound vessel of Zim, the Israeli shipping line. [58]

The coordination has since institutionalised. On 6 February 2026, dockworkers struck simultaneously across 21 Mediterranean ports — Italy, Greece, the Basque Country, Morocco, Turkey — against 'the war economy and port militarisation'. Six dockworker unions — from France, Greece, the Basque Country, Turkey, Morocco and Italy — then announced a day of action for 30 October 2026 across 40 ports. Their slogan is: "Public resources must be used to meet people's social needs, not to finance war." [59]

The union confederations. At the 2025 Congress of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the British union federation, held in Brighton on 9 September, delegates narrowly carried motion 37 of the University and College Union (UCU), "Wages not Weapons", by 2,871,000 to 2,291,000 in a card vote — a ballot in which each union's votes are weighted by its membership — reversing the TUC's 2022 policy of campaigning for increased military spending. [60] UCU's Jo Grady contrasted "crumbling classrooms, patients abandoned in hospital corridors" with a military budget of £59.8 billion. [61] At European level, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which brings together the national union centres, has set four principles: defence spending cannot replace social spending; social conditionalities must attach to defence investment; security includes public services; unions must shape the investments. [4] The Public Services Agenda (May 2025) of EPSU, the European public-service union federation, demands

suspension of the Stability and Growth Pact — "no preparedness without strong public services" — and CESI, the European confederation of independent unions, resolved that defence increases "must not come at the expense of cuts to public services, social security, education, healthcare, pensions". [62]

Select demands across the European labor movement:

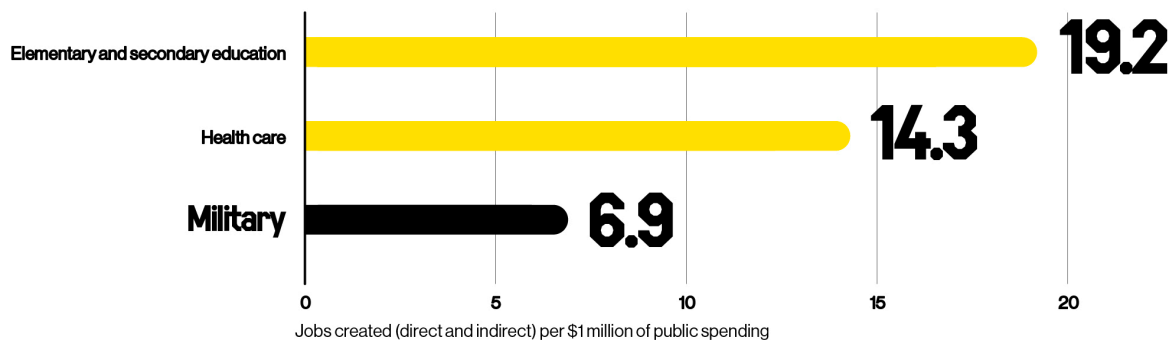
No social cuts to fund rearmament — defence budgets must not be financed from pensions, disability benefits, health or unemployment insurance.

- Arms embargoes enforced by workers — refusal to produce, load or transport weapons for wars judged illegal or genocidal, backed by national law and the 40-port Mediterranean network.
- Wages and services first — redirect military allocations to public investment, pay and staffing, as codified in the TUC's reversal.
- Social conditionality and union voice — the ETUC/EPSU argued that security spending must carry collective-bargaining and social standards, with unions at the table.
- Fiscal equality — if escape clauses exist for bombs, they must exist for social spending; the ETUC and EPSU demand suspension and revision of the EU fiscal framework on this basis. [4] [62]
- Redirection of military into civilian jobs — diversifying arms-industry jobs into civilian production. [63]

The most forceful set of demands emerged from the Istanbul Declaration, a statement signed in May 2026 by a coalition of dockworkers' unions from over 35 European ports. [1]

CHALLENGES

The jobs argument, or the problem of the 'labor aristocracy'. The European trade union movement remains heavily dominated by institutions that are unwilling to fundamentally challenge the militarist status quo. The TUC motion discussed above passed very narrowly. Prospect, the GMB and Unite — three unions with large defence-industry memberships — spoke against, Prospect's general secretary insisting that "Prospect is proud to be a defence union". [60] The 2023 congress of IG Metall, the German metalworkers' union, explicitly backed equipping the Bundeswehr. [64] Governments exploit this fault line in the labor movement, selling rearmament as an industrial and social policy — "the next generation of good, secure, well-paid jobs", as Britain's prime minister promised. [5]



European evidence points the same way: in Germany, Italy and Spain, health, education and environmental spending has a greater effect on employment than arms procurement (Stamegna, Bonaiuti, Maranzano and Pianta, 2024).

Sources: H. Garrett-Peltier, Job Opportunity Cost of War, Costs of War project, Brown University (2017); M. Stamegna et al., MPRA Paper 120608 (2024).

Europe's defence industry employs around 633,000 people directly [65], and their concern for secure work is real. But public money spent on health, education or the environment creates more jobs

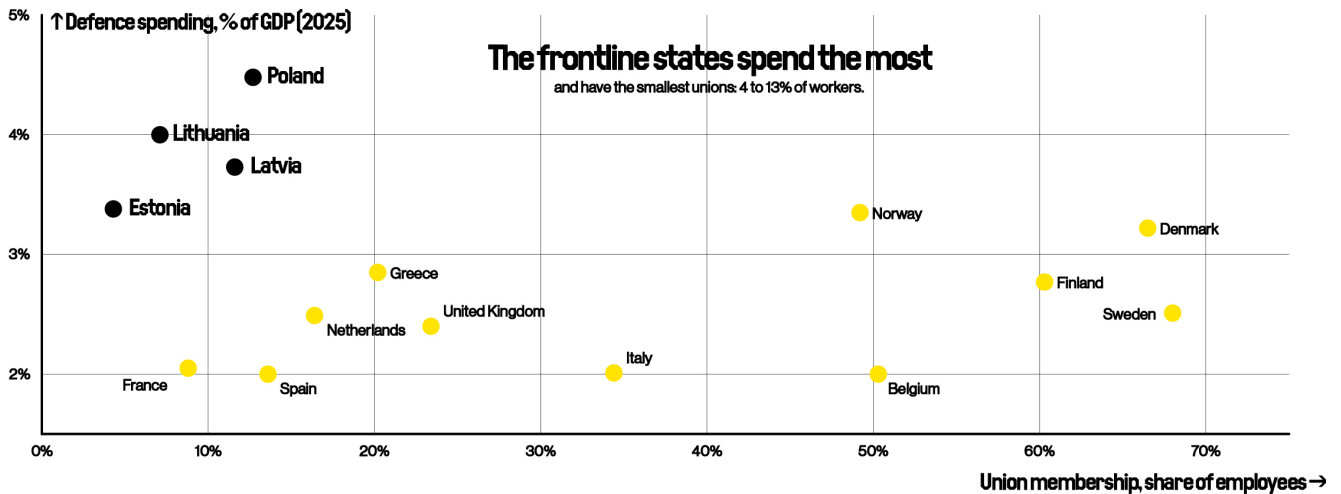
than the same money spent on arms [66], and conversion to arms production is no guarantee of employment: when the historic rail works in Görlitz passed to the tank maker KNDS, only around half of its 700 jobs were kept. [67]

Retaliation and legal constraint. There are many examples of workers and unions facing retribution for anti-militarist and anti-imperialist organizing, see, e.g., the sacking of the Swedish Dockworkers' deputy chair, Finland's 2024 law restricting political strikes. [55] [25] In Italy, the ports' designation as military infrastructure sets a precedent for curtailing the bargaining power of labor in the services of militarization. The case of Nathan Hennebry, who faces expulsion from GMB in Britain for his anti-war views, shows that retaliation is also a threat within unions. [68]

Institutional conservatism in the international trade union confederations. The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), the Communist-aligned trade union federation, endorsed the dockers' actions. Many other union confederations are openly opposed to such actions. [69]

Accounting fog. A lot of the funds being diverted from social spending to military spending are obscured by unclear accounting, as some are run outside regular budgets. For example, the 1.5 per cent 'defence-related' category remains obscure, as are Italy's reclassifications and off-budget vehicles like Germany's special fund or Poland's Armed Forces Support Fund, which runs through the state development bank BGK. These make it

difficult to track the true scale of the problem. [10]
[15] [51]



Sources: NATO, Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2025), Table 3 (2025 estimates; Germany not published); OECD/AIAS ICTWSS union density, latest comparable year (2018; Greece and Poland 2016).

Uneven terrain. Unions are divided geographically in ways that prevent coordinated international action across the entire bloc. Poland and the Baltics, where rearmament and war enjoy broad support and social spending has been protected, are a different organising environment from Italy, where two in five oppose rearmament, or Romania, where austerity has deepened significantly. [4] [14] [24] This likely constrains the geographic scope of any anti-war labor alliance.

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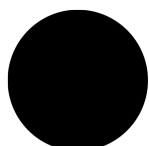
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