ARTICLE

Non-payment trends across Europe

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Business bankruptcies in Europe have risen for four years in a row. Eurostat's quarterly figures show where the rise is strongest, by sector and by country, and what that means for companies that sell on credit.

At a glance

- Bankruptcy declarations in the European Union have risen every year since 2021. In the second quarter of 2026 they were close to twice their 2021 level and 45% above the same quarter of 2019.
- Accommodation and food services, and education, health and other services, saw about twice as many bankruptcies over the last four quarters as in 2019.
- In Belgium, cafés and restaurants go bankrupt about four times as often as the average business.
- France, Austria, Germany and Spain are well above their 2019 level, while several countries in Central and Eastern Europe are below it.
- For a supplier, more bankruptcies mean more customers that stop paying altogether, usually after months of paying later.

01

What the data measures

Eurostat publishes a quarterly index of bankruptcy declarations for each member state and each main sector. The index is seasonally and calendar adjusted and set to 100 for the average of 2021.

Bankruptcy is the last stage of non-payment. Before a company is declared bankrupt, it has usually paid its suppliers later and later for months. The European Commission links one in four bankruptcies in the EU to invoices not paid on time, so the two move together.

Because each series is indexed to its own 2021 level, the index compares a country or a sector with itself over time. It does not show whether one country has more bankruptcies than another.

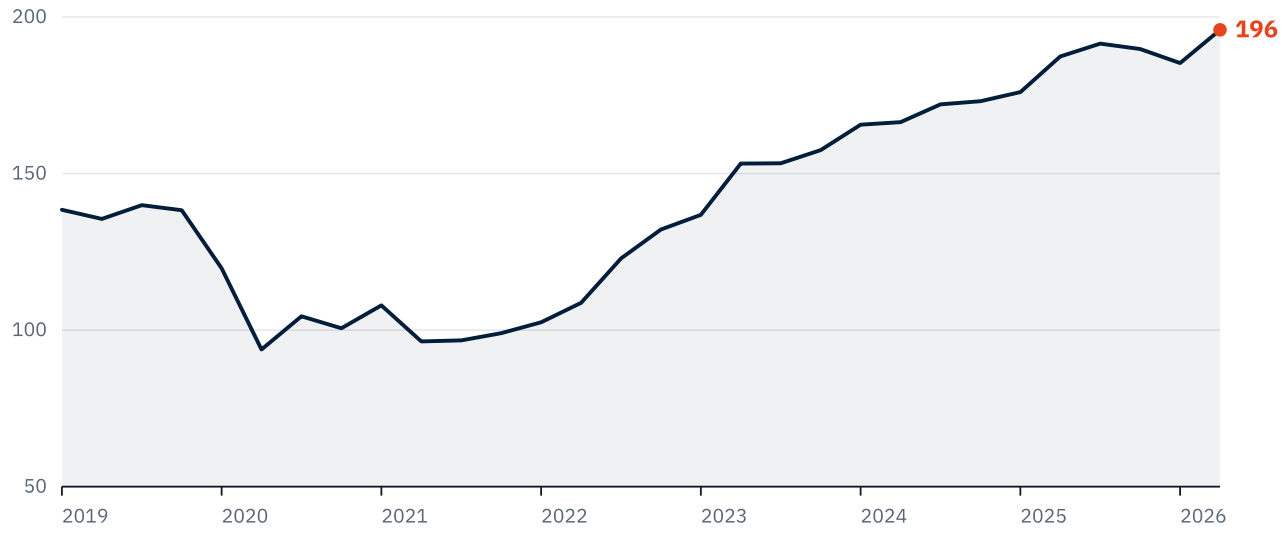
02

Europe as a whole

Bankruptcies fell sharply in 2020 and 2021, when governments supported companies through the pandemic. Since then they have risen in every year.

EXHIBIT 1

Bankruptcy declarations in the EU are at their highest level in the period shown



Source: Eurostat, sts_rb_q; seasonally and calendar adjusted. Index, 2021 = 100.

The rise has outlasted the end of the support measures by several years. Higher interest rates, higher wage and energy costs and weaker demand in parts of industry have all added to it, and the latest quarter is the highest in the series shown.

03

Sectors

The rise is uneven across sectors. Consumer-facing services and transport are well above their 2019 level; industry is only slightly above it.

EXHIBIT 2

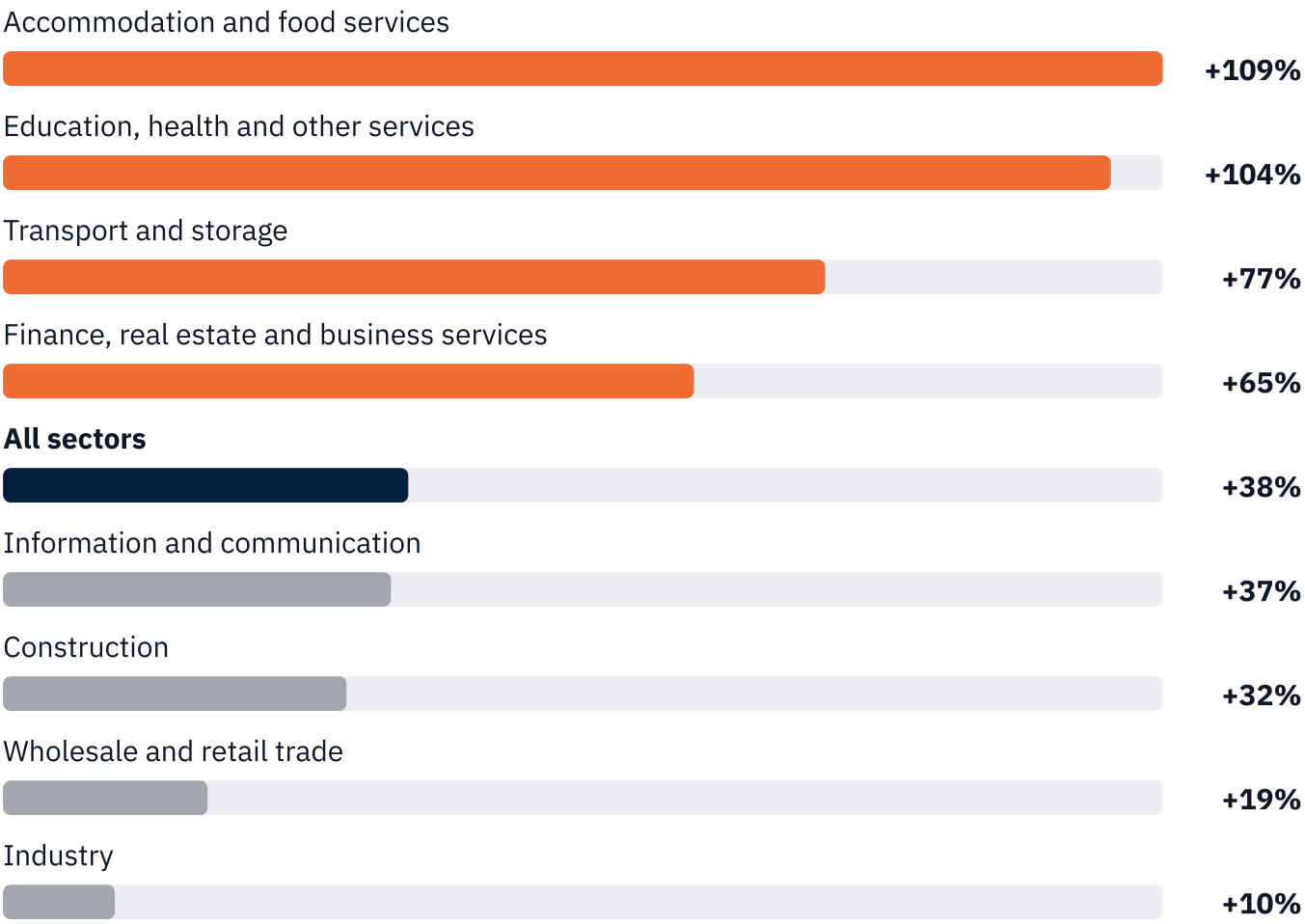
Bankruptcies have risen fastest in consumer-facing services



Source: Eurostat, sts_rb_q; seasonally and calendar adjusted. Index, 2021 = 100.

EXHIBIT 3

Hospitality and personal services lead the rise in bankruptcies



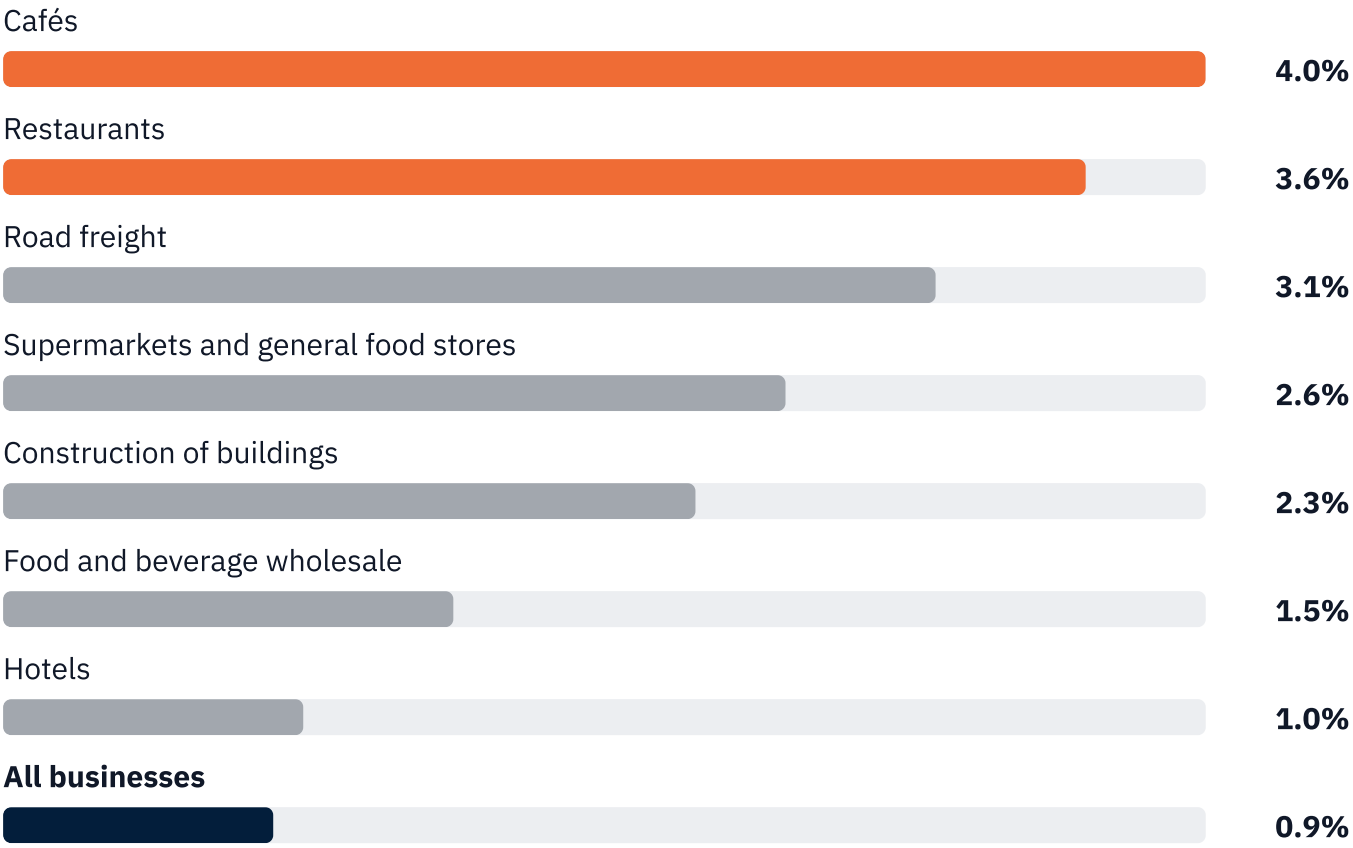
Source: Eurostat, sts_rb_q; seasonally and calendar adjusted. Average of the last four quarters (Q3 2025 to Q2 2026) compared with the 2019 average, European Union.

For suppliers to these sectors, the change is large. A food wholesaler, a linen service or an equipment lessor selling to restaurants and hotels sees about twice as many customers fail as before the pandemic. Construction and trade are closer to the European average, but they carry long payment terms and large orders, so each failure costs more.

The index shows how fast bankruptcies rise, not how often companies in a sector fail. Belgian figures answer that second question. Statbel publishes bankruptcies by sector and the number of VAT-registered businesses. From 2023 to 2025, about 0.9% of Belgian businesses went bankrupt each year. For cafés it was 4.0% and for restaurants 3.6%: about four times the average.

EXHIBIT 4

In Belgium, cafés and restaurants fail about four times as often as the average business



Source: Statbel, bankruptcies by sector (yearly average 2023–2025) divided by VAT-registered businesses (2024).

04

Countries

National trends differ more than sector trends. They reflect each country's economy, but also its insolvency law and how quickly courts process cases.

EXHIBIT 5

Bankruptcies are well above 2019 in several large economies and below it in much of Central and Eastern Europe

Country	Compared with 2019	Compared with a year earlier
European Union	**+38%**	**+8%**
Spain	**+173%**	**–5%**
France	**+39%**	**+5%**
Austria	**+37%**	**–1%**
Germany	**+33%**	**+8%**
Belgium	**+13%**	**+5%**
Luxembourg	**–2%**	**0%**
Estonia	**–3%**	**–17%**
Netherlands	**–7%**	**–13%**
Portugal	**–7%**	**+3%**
Bulgaria	**–9%**	**–1%**
Italy	**–11%**	**+3%**
Cyprus	**–15%**	**+62%**
Slovenia	**–16%**	**+4%**
Croatia	**–25%**	**–9%**
Denmark	**–26%**	**–6%**
Poland	**–30%**	**+4%**

Lithuania	**−40%**	**−13%**
Romania	**−41%**	**+4%**
Slovakia	**−49%**	**−4%**
Latvia	**−53%**	**0%**
Malta	**−84%**	**−88%**
Czechia	**–**	**+13%**
Greece	**–**	**+66%**
Hungary	**–**	**−14%**
Finland	**–**	**+8%**
Sweden	**–**	**−4%**

Source: Eurostat, sts_rb_q; seasonally and calendar adjusted. Average of the last four quarters compared with the 2019 average and with the four quarters before. Countries without a 2019 value show only the yearly change.

France, Austria and Germany, three of the largest trading economies in the EU, are between a third and two fifths above their 2019 level. Spain's rise follows the 2022 reform of its insolvency law, which made proceedings easier to open. Poland, Romania, Slovakia and the Baltic states are below their 2019 level.

For a company that sells across borders, these differences matter more than the European average. The same customer profile carries a different risk in a market where bankruptcies are rising fast.

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What it means for credit teams

A bankruptcy is rarely a surprise for the suppliers who were paid late in the months before it. The question is whether the credit team saw those months in time to change the terms of the next order.

Three steps follow from these figures. Review payment terms first for customers in the sectors and countries where bankruptcies rise fastest. Watch how those customers pay, and not only whether they pay. And, where the customer agrees, follow its cash flow directly, which shows a slowdown months before it reaches a payment record.

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About the data

All figures come from Eurostat's quarterly bankruptcy index as published on 7 November 2026. The latest quarter differs by country; the comparisons use the last four quarters to smooth out one-off movements. Some countries report no 2019 value, and Ireland reports none for the period shown.

The Belgian rates in Exhibit 4 divide Statbel's yearly average of bankruptcies from 2023 to 2025 by the number of VAT-registered businesses in 2024, sole traders included.

Sources

1. Eurostat, Business registration and bankruptcy index by NACE Rev. 2 activity, quarterly data (sts_rb_q), updated 7 November 2026
2. European Commission, Late Payment Regulation proposal: questions and answers, September 2023
3. Statbel, Bankruptcies by NACE activity (TF_BANKRUPTCIES), 2023–2025
4. Statbel, VAT-registered enterprises by NACE activity and employee class (TF_VAT_NACE_EMPL_2024)