

The Price of a Comfortable Life

Europe's Most and Least Affordable Capitals

Written by [Michael Fisher](#) | Updated May 18, 2025

Whether it's the promise of a better job, access to top-tier education, or simply a healthier place to raise a family, there are countless reasons why people choose to start over abroad. In 2022, **over 5.1 million individuals moved to the EU** from outside Europe, which is a clear indication that the appeal of relocation is only growing. The EU's Schengen Area, which spans **30 European countries** with no internal border checks, makes it easier than ever for citizens to move freely in search of a better future.

Ultimately, one's bank account may have the final say since living costs can swing wildly from one European capital to another. A salary that stretches comfortably in Bucharest might barely cover the basics in Copenhagen.

To shed light on these differences, the team at Tradingpédia analysed the basic monthly expenses in **37 European countries**, focusing on their capital cities. We compared typical expenses for single people and families of four, including food, housing, transport, personal care, and entertainment.

Using this data, we estimated the monthly income needed to live comfortably in each location and how much could potentially be saved by making thoughtful lifestyle adjustments in Europe's most iconic capitals.

The cheapest EU capitals Ranked by basic monthly expenses



Among Europe's capitals, **Minsk** emerges as the most budget-friendly, with average monthly expenses of just **€517** for a single resident. Rent is especially low, with a 45 m² studio costing around **€272**, and basic groceries adding up to approximately **€58**. **Sarajevo** also offers low living costs, with total monthly expenses averaging **€585**, including **€337** for housing and **€89** for staple foods. In **Chisinau**, the capital of Moldova, the basic monthly expenses are **€635**, which exceeds the median wage of **€600**. The breakdown includes **€407** for housing and **€71** for budget food expenses, an example of how low costs don't always equal affordability. **Skopje** provides a similarly modest lifestyle at **€648** per month, though limited savings are possible. **Podgorica**, Montenegro's capital, offers a better balance with total monthly costs of **€753** and a median income of **€904**, with typical outlays including **€440** for housing and **€111** for low-cost kitchen needs.

The most expensive EU capitals Ranked by basic monthly expenses



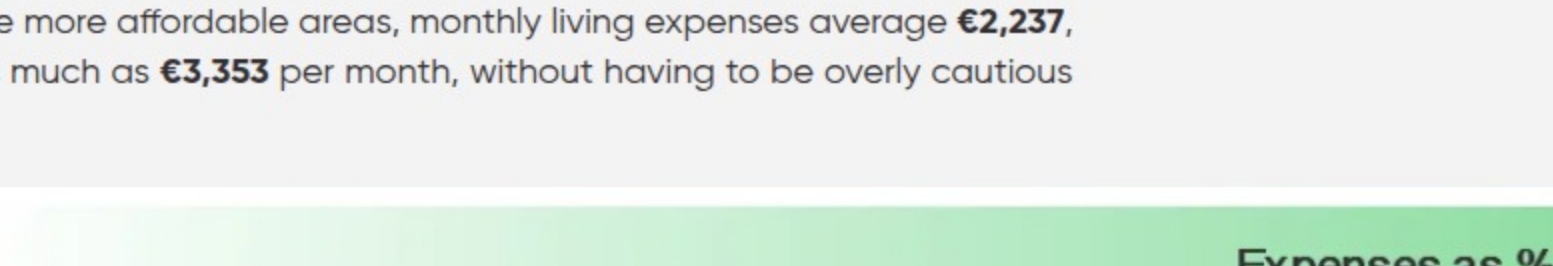
At the other end of the spectrum, life in some of Europe's most prominent capitals comes at a steep cost. **Reykjavik** tops the list with average expenses reaching **€2,899** per month, driven by **€2,042** for housing and **€260** for essential groceries. **London** follows closely with basic monthly expenses of **€2,853**, where a 45 m² studio alone averages **€2,021** and staple food costs come to **€153**, alongside **€193** for a monthly transport pass. In **Amsterdam**, the average basic monthly expenses are **€2,820**, alongside **€173** on common food items. **Bern** is similarly pricey, with monthly expenses totaling **€2,560**, including **€1,570** for housing and **€322** for basic groceries. **Dublin** rounds out the list at **€2,329** per month, consisting of **€1,637** for housing and utilities and **€152** for a low-cost food basket.

The most affordable EU capitals Basic monthly costs as % of monthly income



Luxembourg

Europe's wealthiest country, **Luxembourg**, boasts the most affordable capital. The city of Luxembourg, with a population of just 128,494, is a sought-after destination for expats both from Europe and beyond. Residents there earn an **average net salary of €5,590**, more than enough to live comfortably in this small but prosperous city. For a single person living in one of the more affordable areas, monthly living expenses average **€2,237**, just **40%** of the earned salary. Even with the median wage, it's possible to save as much as **€3,353** per month, without having to be overly cautious with the spending.



Bern

Switzerland may not be the first country that comes to mind when one thinks of affordable living, but it might come as a surprise that its capital, **Bern**, ranks second among European cities. With an average monthly net salary of **€6,262**, even the city's high prices for entertainment and groceries don't bother the average resident. Our estimates show that a single person living alone in the city center would spend around **€2,540** per month, only **40.6%** of their income. This leaves them with **€3,722** to either save or spend freely, without having to cut back on leisure activities or shopping.



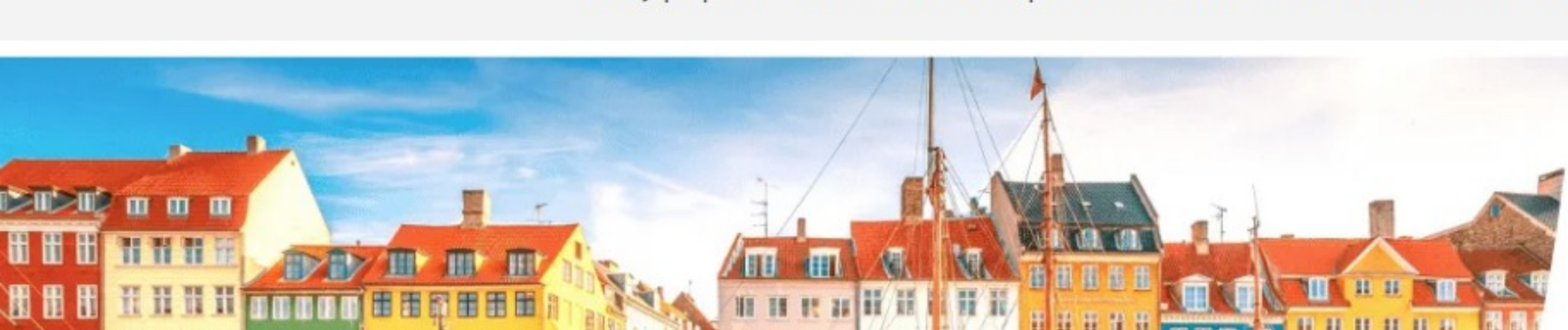
Brussels

Brussels, the heart of European politics and culture, ranks third in affordability among European capitals. A single person living in the city can expect to spend around **€1,376** per month, which represents **49.6%** of the average monthly net salary of **€2,773**. Despite the relatively high basic monthly expenses, those earning the average wage still have **€1,397** left over each month. This gives them the flexibility to spend on leisure, savings, or anything else they choose, making Brussels a city where, despite its political importance, there is still room for financial freedom.



Helsinki

Another country with a substantial basic monthly expenses to wage ratio is **Finland**. Those living and working in the country's capital, **Helsinki**, can expect to earn on average **€2,914** a month. For comparison, an average 45 m² (480 sq ft) furnished studio in the city costs roughly **€829** a month. Adding up food, personal care, and entertainment expenses gives us an estimated amount of **€1,451** monthly expenses (**50.1%** of the salary) to live comfortably in the city. Earning the median wage, you can easily save **€1,455** out of every paycheck while living comfortably. This makes Helsinki a very popular destination for expats from around the world to live and work in.



Copenhagen

Copenhagen, known as one of Europe's most expensive cities, is a prime example of a destination that's costly for tourists but relatively affordable for locals. It's also home to some of the most expensive Michelin-starred meals in Europe. A dinner for two at an Italian restaurant, including appetizers, a main course, wine, and dessert, will cost around **€116**, the highest on our list of EU countries. For those working and living in the city, however, these expenses are manageable. With a median wage of **€4,006**, residents can comfortably cover their costs. For a single person, average monthly expenses amount to **€2,191** (**54.7%** of the salary), leaving **€1,815** at the end of the month to save or spend as they choose.



The least affordable EU capitals Basic monthly expenses as % of monthly income



Warsaw

Poland's capital, **Warsaw**, stands out as the least affordable city among European capitals. Despite an average monthly salary of **€1,701**, residents face high basic monthly expenses, totaling **€2,167**. This means the average those expenses exceed the monthly salary by **127.4%**, leaving individuals struggling to make ends meet. To cover the gap, citizens would need to find additional **€466** each month, which is a significant burden given the already limited income. In such a financial environment, the possibility of saving is virtually non-existent, making Warsaw a challenging city for its residents when it comes to financial comfort and security.



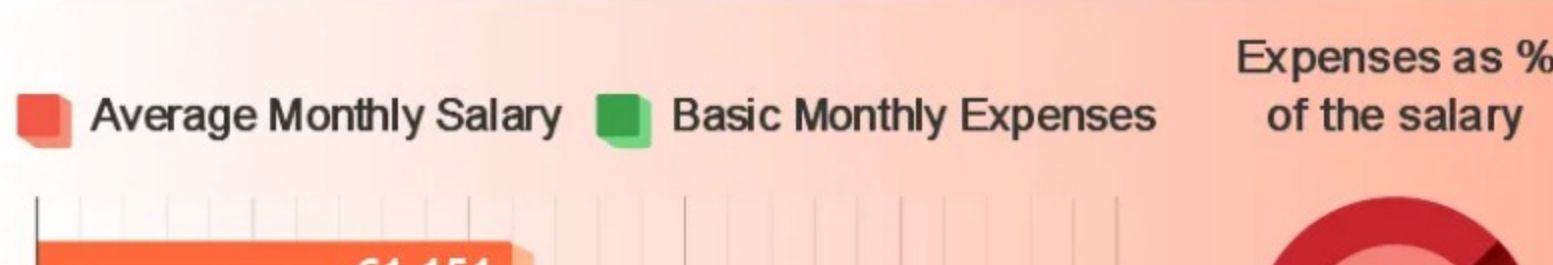
Tirana

Tirana, the capital of **Albania**, ranks among the least affordable cities in Europe due to its exceptionally low wages. With an average monthly salary of just **€673**, the typical living expenses amount to **€818** (**121.6%** of the income). This means that a single person living alone would need to come up with an additional **€145** each month just to cover basic costs. While families fare slightly better thanks to economies of scale, a household of four would still be left with only **€42** after paying for essentials. These figures highlight the financial strain many residents face in trying to meet even modest living standards.



Athens

Athens, Greece, ranks as the third most unaffordable capital in Europe. With an average net salary of **€1,017** and basic monthly expenses reaching **€1,149** and exceeding the income by **€132**. Despite its Mediterranean charm and cultural appeal, life in Athens remains a financial struggle for many residents.



Lisbon

Portugal's capital, **Lisbon**, follows closely, with basic monthly expenses of **€1,364**. Despite its growing popularity among digital nomads and expats, the city remains unaffordable for many locals. The average salary falls short by **€141**, making it difficult for residents to cover everyday expenses without dipping into savings or relying on additional income.

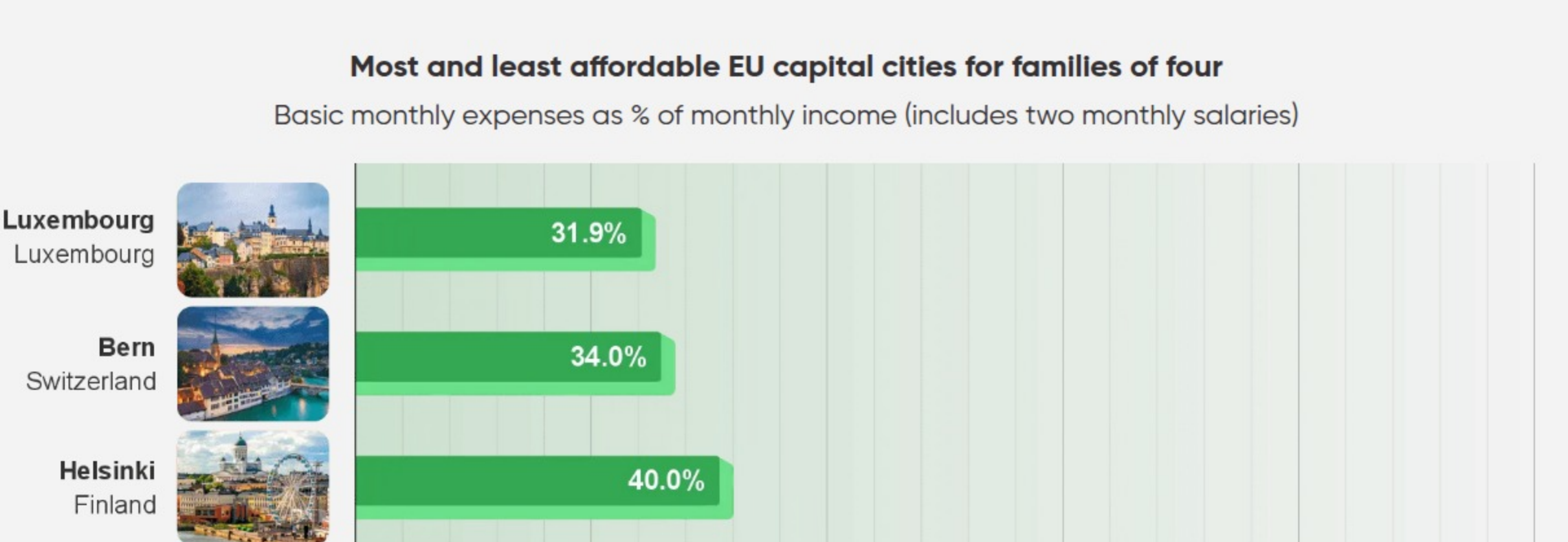


Chisinau

The average net salary in **Chisinau, Moldova** is the lowest on our list at just **€610** per month. Basic living expenses, however, reach **€635**, which is **104.1%** of the monthly income. This means a single person would fall short by **€25** to cover their costs. Interestingly, a family of four fares slightly better, with an estimated **€172** left after covering essential expenses, a rare case where family living proves more manageable than living alone.



Most and least affordable EU capital cities for families of four Basic monthly expenses as % of monthly income (includes two monthly salaries)



Switzerland, Luxembourg, Finland, Norway, and Denmark are among the most family-friendly countries in Europe thanks to high wages and strong public services. In **Luxembourg**, a single salary of **€5,590** can easily cover a family's **€3,562** monthly expenses. **Bern** offers similar comfort, with family costs of **€4,258** and two salaries leaving a surplus of over **€8,266**. In **Helsinki**, two incomes cover **€2,332** in expenses, leaving **€3,695** to save. Oslo families spend around **€3,163** monthly and can save **€3,745** with two salaries. In **Copenhagen**, where costs reach **€3,869**, two incomes make life significantly more comfortable.

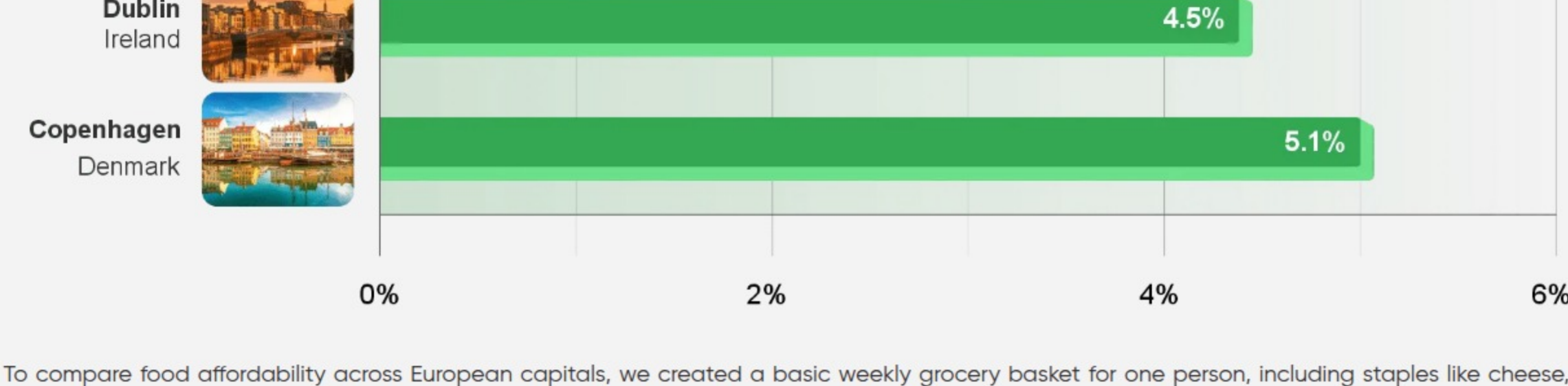
At the bottom of the affordability rankings are several capitals where even two incomes struggle to fully cover monthly costs. **Warsaw** ranks as the least affordable, with basic expenses for a family of four (**€3,473**) exceeding two average wages (**€3,401**), leaving households short by **€71** each month. In **Tirana**, a single parent, earning the average salary is short **€147**, while a dual-income household is left with just **€41**. **Athens** and **Lisbon** also prove difficult for individuals, where families' basic expenses represent 93.2% and 83.3% of their monthly income, respectively. Even in Chisinau, Europe's lowest-paying capital, the average single salary falls short by **€26**, with basic expenses making up **104.3%** of income, though two earners can still manage with a modest surplus of **€172**.

Capitals with the most affordable food Expenses as % of monthly income



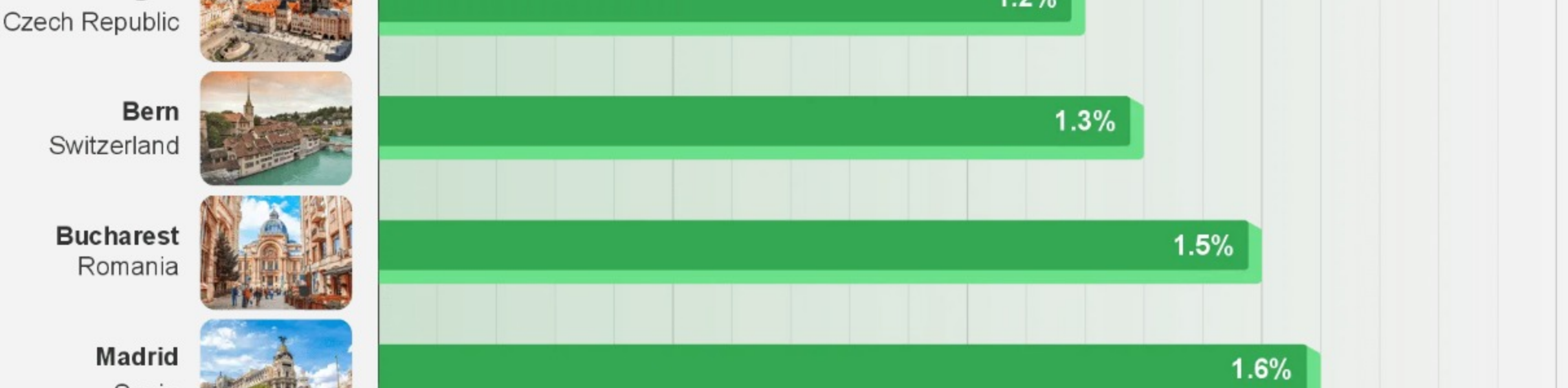
To compare food affordability across European capitals, we created a basic weekly grocery basket for one person, including staples like cheese, chicken, eggs, tomatoes, bread, fruit, milk, and soft drinks. In **Luxembourg**, monthly food costs average **€171**, just 3.1% of the **€5,590** median wage, the lowest ratio in Europe. **London** follows, with groceries costing **€153** per month, or 3.7% of a **€2,877** salary. **Amsterdam** ranks third, with four such baskets at **€175**, making up 4.4% of the average wage. In **Dublin**, food expenses average **€152** per month (4.5% of a **€3,411** salary), while **Copenhagen** residents spend around **€203**, or 5.1% of their **€4,006** income. Looking only at prices, the **cheapest weekly basket** is in **London** at just over **€33**, followed by **Dublin** at **€38**. In **Amsterdam** and **Copenhagen**, the same items cost about **€43**, while **Luxembourg** has the priciest basket at **€51**.

Capitals with the most affordable public transport Expenses as % of monthly income



Public transportation is a daily necessity in most European capitals, especially in vibrant cities like London and Berlin. While travel costs can eat into monthly budgets in many places, that's not the case everywhere. Take **Luxembourg**, for instance, where all buses, trams, and trains are completely free for both residents and tourists. The only exception is for those opting for first-class service, with monthly tickets starting at **€36**, just 0.6% of the city's high median salary. **Prague** also stands out with a monthly transport pass costing just **€21**, or 1.2% of the average income. Even better, residents over 65 can ride all public transport for free. In **Bern**, public transport is an essential part of daily life, with nearly every neighborhood well connected by trains, trams, and buses. However, convenience comes at a cost, since monthly passes average **€82**, which is high by European standards, though still only 1.3% of the local median wage. **Bucharest** claims the lowest public transport fees in the EU, with unlimited monthly travel available for just **€18**. That's just 1.5% of the city's median income, making it a particularly affordable option for locals and tourists alike. Finally, in **Madrid**, where public transport is indispensable in the city, a monthly travel card costs **€31**, which amounts to 1.6% of the median wage.

Capitals with the most affordable entertainment Expenses as % of monthly income



Like most things in **Luxembourg**, entertainment is quite affordable if you're earning the city's generous median wage. On average, the price for two cinema tickets is **€25**, while booking two good seats at a local theatre will cost you roughly **€72**. Monthly entertainment expenses average around **€300**, which is just 5.4% of the city's median salary. Switzerland's capital, **Bern**, has the highest entertainment costs among the European cities on this list. Residents spend an average of **€483** per month on entertainment which might seem high, but it only represents 7.7% of the city's substantial median wage. In **Oslo**, a cocktail at a local pub will set you back around **€33**, and going to the cinema with a friend costs around **€27**, fair prices for a European capital. In total, monthly entertainment expenses average **€332**, or 9.6% of the city's average wage. In **Brussels**, renowned for its fine dining, a typical dinner for two ranges from **€46** to **€86**, depending on the restaurant. Altogether, monthly entertainment spending in the Belgian capital comes to roughly **€284** for a single person, or 10.2% of the standard monthly wage. Entertainment expenses in **Paris** average **€319**. Two cinema tickets cost around **€24**, and a pair of good seats at the theater are roughly priced at **€116**. Monthly gym passes in the city are among the cheapest in Europe, averaging just **€29** per month. If you're living in the city and earning the median salary, your monthly entertainment costs will be about 10.5% of your income.

Methodology

To compare affordability across major European capitals, the team at BestBrokers used the latest data from [Expatriata's](#) cost of living index and average salary figures from Numbeo. We analysed 37 capitals, calculating the average monthly basic monthly expenses for both single individuals and families of four, and compared these figures against local salaries to assess affordability.

We identified the most and least expensive EU capitals based purely on prices. For affordability, we compared median wages to essential living costs, covering food, housing, transportation, personal care, and entertainment, to determine the percentage of income spent in each category.

Food expenses were based on a weekly grocery basket of staple foods, including: 500g local cheese, 1kg boneless chicken breast, 12 large eggs, 1kg tomatoes, 2L Coca-Cola, 1kg apples, 4 loaves of bread, 1kg potatoes, and 1L whole milk. These were multiplied by four to estimate monthly costs per person.

Housing costs for individuals were based on average prices for a 45m² studio and median utility bills. For families, we used data for 85m² apartments and corresponding utility costs.

Transport costs for individuals reflected the average price of a monthly public transit pass. For families, we estimated the cost of driving 10 km per day using current gasoline prices.

To estimate average monthly entertainment expenses for an individual, we used the cost of a basic dinner for two at a neighborhood pub, two cinema tickets, two theater tickets, dinner for two at an Italian restaurant, a cocktail at a downtown club, a cappuccino in the city's expat area, a beer at a neighborhood pub, and a monthly gym membership in the business district. For families, entertainment expenses were based on the price of two cinema and two theater tickets, then doubled to reflect typical monthly spending for a family of four.

This approach enabled detailed comparisons of affordability across all European capitals in our analysis.

Data Sources: Numbeo, Expatriata

Presented by tradingpédia

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