

Which EU country is cheapest to hire in?

Employer cost, country by country

The salary is only part of the bill. Employer social security runs from about 20% in the Netherlands to over 30% in Spain, and holiday pay plus a 13th month change the order. Here is the employer load, country by country.

Published 2026-07-01 · A Mue guide

A salary offer is the same everywhere: a number. What sits on top of it is not. Employer social security, holiday pay and a 13th month are set by the country, and the gap between the lightest and the heaviest is large enough to change where a role should sit. Here is the employer load across the five countries the calculator models, and why the cheapest one is not always the one with the lowest percentage.

The employer social-security load, lightest first

- Netherlands: roughly 20% employer premiums on gross, plus an 8% holiday allowance owed on top by law. No statutory 13th month, though some sectors add one.
- Germany: around 21% employer share of social insurance. Paid leave, but no separate statutory holiday allowance and no statutory 13th month (frequent in collective agreements).
- Belgium: around 25% employer NSSO on gross, plus statutory double holiday pay (about 8%). A 13th month is very common, set by sector agreement rather than federal law.
- France: roughly 25 to 42% employer charges, about 30% mid-range after the reductions an employer qualifies for. A 13th month is common by collective agreement, not by law.
- Spain: roughly 31 to 32% employer social security, the heaviest of the five. Two extra payments (pagas extra) are mandatory, but they sit within annual gross rather than adding on top.

(Indicative 2026 planning averages, reviewed against each country social-security body. They move, and they depend on the salary band and the reductions a role qualifies for.)

Why the percentage is not the ranking

Reading that list top to bottom is tempting, but the social-security line is only one of the meters, and the other two do not line up with it. Belgium sits mid-table on social security, yet its statutory double holiday pay is added on top of gross, so the all-in multiple lands around 1.33x. Spain looks heaviest on the percentage, but its two extra payments are counted within annual gross, so they do not stack the same way a Belgian 13th month does. And France carries the widest band of all: the same role can cost meaningfully more or less depending on the branch agreement and the reductions it qualifies for, before a collective 13th month is added.

The same salary, three worked numbers

Put a 50,000 euro gross base salary through the calculator and the country does the rest. In Belgium it is about 66,500 euro all-in, roughly 1.33x, once the about 25% employer social security and the roughly 8% double holiday pay are added. The same gross in Germany, where the load is lighter, lands nearer 60,500 euro. In France it can run to about 65,000 euro or well above once a collective 13th month applies. That is a five-figure swing on an identical offer, decided entirely by where the person sits.

We deliberately do not print a single headline total for the Netherlands and Spain here, because their totals assemble differently: the Dutch 8% holiday allowance and the Spanish pagas extra within gross change how the stack builds, so a like-for-like number would mislead more than it helps. Run your real gross through the calculator, pick the country, and read the exact breakdown for each.

Hiring where you have no entity

Knowing the country load is the first half of the decision. The second is whether you can even run local payroll. For a first hire in a new country, opening a legal entity is slow and expensive, so most teams use an employer of record, which hires the person on its own local payroll for a flat monthly fee while they work for you. The EOR does not lower the employer burden the country sets, it just spares you the entity, and it stops being the cheaper option once you have roughly five to six people in one country. If you are weighing that route, see how much an employer of record costs and whether a contractor or an EOR is the right way to hire abroad.

See your own number

Pick a country, enter the annual gross, and the calculator shows the real cost to employ, the breakdown, and the multiple, using rates reviewed against each country social-security body. For the full Belgian worked example, including what a 13th month adds, read the real employer cost of a 60k euro Belgian hire. These are planning averages, not legal or tax advice, so confirm the live figures with the relevant authority or your accountant before you commit.

Frequently asked questions

Which EU country is cheapest to hire in?

On the employer social-security load alone, the Netherlands (about 20%) and Germany (about 21%) are the lightest of the five we model, with Belgium around 25%, France around 30% mid-range (a wide 25 to 42% band), and Spain the heaviest at about 31 to 32%. But the social percentage is not the whole bill: holiday pay and a 13th month change the order, so run the same gross salary through the calculator country by country before you decide.

How much more does France cost to hire in than Germany?

On the same 50,000 euro gross, Germany lands nearer 60,500 euro because its employer load is lighter (about 21%), while France can run to about 65,000 euro or well above once a collective 13th month applies, on a wide 25 to 42% charge band (about 30% mid-range after reductions). So France is meaningfully heavier, but exactly how much depends on the branch agreement and the reductions the role qualifies for.

Does the country or the salary matter more for hiring cost?

Both move the bill, but the country sets the multiple. The same 50,000 euro gross is about 66,500 euro all-in in Belgium (1.33x) and nearer 60,500 in Germany, purely because the employer load differs. Raising the salary scales the whole stack, so pick the country with your eyes open first, then size the offer.

Can I hire in another EU country without opening a local entity?

Yes. An employer of record (EOR) hires the person on its own local payroll on your behalf and carries the social security, contract and compliance, while the person works for you. It is the usual route for a first hire in a new country, for a flat monthly fee per employee, until you have roughly five to six people in one country and your own entity starts to win.

Are these employer rates exact?

No, they are indicative 2026 planning averages reviewed against each country social-security body. Real employer cost depends on the sector or collective agreement, the salary level and band, the region, the employee age and the contribution reductions an employer qualifies for. Confirm live rates with the relevant authority or your accountant before you commit to a budget.

Calculate your real cost per country

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