

User guide to the euro area bank lending survey

The bank lending survey (BLS) for the euro area was launched by the Eurosystem in 2003.¹ It is conducted four times a year and addressed to senior loan officers of a representative sample of euro area banks. The sample group of institutions participating in the survey comprises around 160 banks, representing all euro area countries, and takes into account the characteristics of the respective national banking structures. The main purpose of the BLS is to enhance the Eurosystem's knowledge of bank lending conditions in the euro area.²

1 BLS questionnaire

1.1 Standard questions

The BLS contains 22 standard questions on past and expected developments: 18 backward-looking questions and four forward-looking questions. In addition, it contains one open-ended question. The questions focus on developments in loans to euro area residents (i.e. domestic and euro area cross-border loans) and distinguish between three loan categories:

- loans or credit lines to enterprises;
- loans to households for house purchase;
- consumer credit and other lending to households.

For all three categories, questions are asked on credit standards for approving loans, credit terms and conditions on new loans, loan demand, the factors affecting loan supply and demand conditions, and the share of loan rejections. In addition to the factors specified in the questionnaire, banks can refer to further factors having contributed to changes in credit standards.

The survey questions are generally phrased in terms of changes over the past three months or expectations of changes over the next three months. Survey participants are asked to indicate changes on a five-point scale, indicating in a qualitative way the strength of a tightening or easing or the strength of a decrease or increase: (1) tightened/decreased considerably, (2) tightened/decreased somewhat, (3) basically unchanged, (4) eased/increased somewhat, or (5) eased/increased considerably.

¹ The Eurosystem comprises the ECB and all the national central banks (NCBs) of the countries that have adopted the euro.

² For more detailed information on the bank lending survey, see Köhler-Ulbrich, P., Hempell, H. and Scopel, S., "The euro area bank lending survey", *Occasional Paper Series*, No 179, ECB, 2016.

The standard questionnaire and a glossary of BLS terms can be found on the [ECB's website](#).

1.2 Ad hoc questions

In addition to the standard questions, the BLS questionnaire may contain ad hoc questions on specific topics of interest. The ad hoc questions for the respective survey round are available in the Annex to the online BLS report (see Section 4). Compared with the standard questions, the ad hoc questions tend to refer to changes over a longer period of time (e.g. over the past and next six months).

2 Aggregation of banks' replies to national and euro area BLS results

The results of the individual banks participating in the BLS sample are aggregated in two steps to form the euro area results.

In the first step, banks' replies are aggregated to **national BLS results** for all countries by applying an equal weight to the sample banks. To ensure good representation of national bank lending markets, the selected sample banks are either of similar size or their lending behaviour is typical for a larger group of banks. For three countries (Bulgaria, Malta and Slovakia), national results are additionally aggregated by applying a weighting scheme based on the amounts outstanding of loans to non-financial corporations and households of the individual banks in the respective national samples.

In the second step, since the number of banks in the national samples differs considerably and does not always reflect the respective share in lending to euro area non-financial corporations and households, the unweighted national survey results of all countries are aggregated to **euro area BLS results** by applying a weighting scheme based on the national shares in the amounts outstanding of loans to euro area non-financial corporations and households.

3 BLS indicators

The analysis of the aggregate BLS results focuses on the "**net percentage**", which is the difference between the share of banks reporting that credit standards applied to loan approval have been tightened and the share of banks reporting that they have been eased. For all questions, the net percentage is determined based on all participating banks that have business in or exposure to the respective loan categories (i.e. they are included in the denominator when calculating the net percentage). This means that banks that are specialised in certain loan categories (e.g. they only grant loans to enterprises) are only considered in the aggregation for these categories. All other participating banks are included in the aggregation for all questions, even if a bank replies that a question is "not applicable" ("N/A"). This harmonised aggregation method was introduced by the Eurosystem in the April 2018

BLS. It has been applied to all euro area and national BLS results in the current BLS questionnaire, including backdata.³ For the standard BLS questions this has led to small revisions overall, whereas there have been larger revisions for some ad hoc questions, owing to a higher number of “not applicable” replies by banks.

A positive net percentage indicates that a larger proportion of banks has tightened credit standards (“net tightening”) over the past three months, whereas a negative net percentage indicates that a larger proportion of banks has eased credit standards (“net easing”). Likewise, the term “net demand” refers to the difference between the share of banks reporting an increase in loan demand (i.e. in bank loan financing needs) over the past three months and the share of banks reporting a decline. Net demand will therefore be positive if a larger proportion of banks has reported an increase in loan demand, whereas negative net demand indicates that a larger proportion of banks has reported a decline in loan demand.

In addition to the “net percentage” indicator, the ECB also publishes an alternative measure of banks’ responses to questions related to changes in credit standards and net demand. This measure is the weighted difference (“**diffusion index**”) between the share of banks reporting that credit standards have been tightened and the share of banks reporting that they have been eased. Likewise, regarding the demand for loans, the diffusion index refers to the weighted difference between the share of banks reporting an increase in loan demand and the share of banks reporting a decline. The diffusion index is constructed in the following way: lenders who have answered “considerably” are given a weight twice as high (score of 1) as lenders having answered “somewhat” (score of 0.5). The interpretation of the diffusion indices follows the same logic as the interpretation of net percentages.

4 BLS report

The responses to the standard and ad hoc questions in the BLS questionnaire are analysed in the online BLS report, which is published four times a year (usually in January, April, July and October) on the [BLS webpage](#). The report provides an overview of the development of bank lending conditions in the euro area and in the four largest euro area countries (Germany, Spain, France and Italy) based on the standard and ad hoc questions for the respective survey round.⁴

In the assessment of survey balances for the euro area, net percentages between -1 and +1 are generally referred to as “broadly unchanged”. For the country results, net percentages are reported in a factual manner, as different sample sizes across countries imply that answers of a single bank have a different impact on the magnitude of the net percentages.

³ The non-harmonised historical data are different from the harmonised data mainly because of a heterogeneous treatment of “N/A” replies and of specialised banks across questions and countries. Historical non-harmonised BLS data are published for discontinued BLS questions and ad hoc questions.

⁴ Results for the ad hoc questions are reported only for the euro area for confidentiality reasons.

The report also provides detailed tables on the euro area results for each question (see Annex 1 for the standard questions and Annex 2 for the ad hoc questions).

In addition to the ECB publication, some national central banks (NCBs) publish their own national survey results. Links to the national BLS results, as published by the respective NCBs, can be found on the [ECB's website](#).

5 BLS data in the ECB Data Portal

BLS time series data are available on the [ECB Data Portal](#).

They can be accessed from the [BLS webpage](#) via **"BLS data"** in the section **"Analyse the results"**.

BLS data are structured in the ECB Data Portal according to categories: "supply" and "demand" questions for the three loan categories covered by the BLS; and the category "ad hoc" questions, which is divided further into the specific ad hoc questions.

The data are included in the ECB Data Portal at the same time as the BLS report is published on the ECB's website.

Please see the [BLS release calendar](#) for more details.

BLS data are included in the ECB Data Portal for the euro area aggregate and for all euro area countries. For the euro area, detailed aggregate series are available for both the standard and ad hoc questions, generally including net percentages, diffusion indices, frequencies of banks' responses and further BLS aggregation methods (see Table 1, panel a).⁵ For the individual euro area countries, net percentages and diffusion indices are available for the standard questions (see Table 1, panel b).⁶ For most countries, the ECB publishes the unweighted results underlying the euro area aggregation. For Bulgaria, Malta and Slovakia, the ECB publishes instead the weighted national results (see Section 2 and Table 1, panel b).

⁵ For a few questions, which do not ask for both positive and negative developments (two-sided questions), net percentages and diffusion indices are not available.

⁶ For the individual euro area countries, other aggregation methods than net percentages and diffusion indices as well as the results for the ad hoc questions are not published by the ECB.

Table 1
Main BLS aggregation methods

a) Euro area

Indicator	BLS aggregation method
Net percentage	WFNET
Diffusion index	WDINX
Frequencies of banks' responses ⁷	WF1, WF2, WF3, WF4, WF5, WFNA
Mean ⁸	WA
Standard deviation	WSD

b) Euro area countries

Aggregation level	Net percentage	Diffusion index
Country, unweighted results	FNET	DINX
Country, weighted results ⁹	BFNET	BDINX

In addition, the historical BLS dataset containing data for discontinued BLS standard and ad hoc questions can also be found in the ECB Data Portal.

6 BLS series keys

BLS series keys are used to describe the underlying data in a compact way. Each dimension of a series key is separated by a dot "." in ECB series keys and has a specific meaning. For example, the series key shown below represents the net percentage of banks reporting a change (over the past three months) in credit standards for the approval of loans to euro area enterprises:

BLS.Q.U2.ALL.O.E.Z.B3.ST.S.WFNET

The detailed **coding structure** for the BLS series keys can be found in Table 2 and in the [ECB Data Portal](#). In addition, Table 1 provides information on changes in the series codes when using alternative aggregation methods. Detailed BLS **metadata** information can be found in the [ECB Data Portal](#). The historical BLS dataset follows the same coding structure.

The **time period** of the quarterly results in the ECB Data Portal refers to the publication date of the BLS, for example both backward-looking and forward-looking

⁷ "Frequencies" are the percentages of banks' responses on the five-point scale in the questionnaire (see Section 1), for example WF1 refers to "tightened considerably", and WF5 refers to "eased considerably" for the questions on credit standards. "WFNA" denotes the frequency of banks responding "not applicable". The national results of the frequencies are aggregated to euro area results by applying a weighting scheme, as described in Section 2.

⁸ The "mean" of the banks' responses is calculated for the national results based on the five possible response options in the questionnaire and aggregated to the euro area level by applying a weighting scheme, as described in Section 2.

⁹ For [Bulgaria](#), Malta and Slovakia, a weighting scheme is applied at the national level (see Section 2).

data for the January 2023 BLS are published in the ECB Data Portal as “Q1 2023” data.

The BLS series keys can be entered in the ECB Data Portal [search field](#) to obtain BLS time series data on euro area net percentage series for the standard questions (see Table 2). You may replace any of the BLS series code dimensions with “.*” to obtain a larger selection of data.

The example shown below can be used to extract data on credit standards for loans to enterprises for all euro area countries and the euro area, together with all possible aggregation methods (i.e. net percentages, frequencies and diffusion indices):

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BLS.Q.*.ALL.O.E.Z.B3.ST.S.*
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Alternatively, to obtain BLS time series data via the search field in the ECB Data Portal, you may use a [text search](#), for instance for net percentage data on credit standards for loans to enterprises:

BLS, euro area, enterprise, credit standards, net percentages

To obtain data on the [ad hoc BLS questions](#), you may search for data on a specific ad hoc question via the [Data categories](#) in the ECB Data Portal, for instance to obtain data on banks’ access to retail and wholesale funding based on the ad hoc question 111:

Data Portal Home >> Browse data >> Data categories >> Surveys >> Bank lending survey (BLS) >> Ad hoc >> Q111 Funding

Table 2

Series codes for main euro area net percentage BLS series for standard questions

Series key	Short description
Loans to enterprises	
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.O.E.Z.B3.ST.S.WFNET	Change in credit standards for loans to enterprises (past 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.O.E.Z.F3.ST.S.WFNET	Change in credit standards for loans to enterprises (next 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.*.E.Z.B3.ST.S.WFNET	Factors contributing to changes in credit standards for loans to enterprises and breakdown of loans across firm sizes and maturities
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.O.E.Z.B3.TC.S.WFNET	Change in overall terms and conditions for new loans to enterprises (past 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.O.E.Z.B3.RA.D.WFNET	Change in the share of rejected applications for loans to enterprises (past 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.O.E.Z.B3.ZZ.D.WFNET	Change in demand for loans to enterprises (past 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.O.E.Z.F3.ZZ.D.WFNET	Change in demand for loans to enterprises (next 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.*.E.Z.B3.ZZ.D.WFNET	Factors contributing to changes in demand for loans to enterprises
Loans to households for house purchase	
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.Z.H.H.B3.ST.S.WFNET	Change in credit standards for loans to households for house purchase (past 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.Z.H.H.F3.ST.S.WFNET	Change in credit standards for loans to households for house purchase (next 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.*.H.H.B3.ST.S.WFNET	Factors contributing to changes in credit standards for loans to households for house purchase
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.O.H.H.B3.TC.S.WFNET	Change in overall terms and conditions for loans to households for house purchase (past 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.Z.H.H.B3.RA.D.WFNET	Change in the share of rejected applications for loans to households for house purchase (past 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.Z.H.H.B3.ZZ.D.WFNET	Change in demand for loans to households for house purchase (past 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.Z.H.H.F3.ZZ.D.WFNET	Change in demand for loans to households for house purchase (next 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.*.H.H.B3.ZZ.D.WFNET	Factors contributing to changes in demand for loans to households for house purchase
Consumer credit and other lending to households	
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.Z.H.C.B3.ST.S.WFNET	Change in credit standards for consumer credit and other lending to households (past 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.Z.H.C.F3.ST.S.WFNET	Change in credit standards for consumer credit and other lending to households (next 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.*.H.C.B3.ST.S.WFNET	Factors contributing to changes in credit standards for consumer credit and other lending to households
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.O.H.C.B3.TC.S.WFNET	Change in overall terms and conditions for consumer credit and other lending to households (past 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.Z.H.C.B3.RA.D.WFNET	Share of rejected applications for consumer credit and other lending to households (past 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.Z.H.C.B3.ZZ.D.WFNET	Change in demand for consumer credit and other lending to households (past 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.Z.H.C.F3.ZZ.D.WFNET	Change in demand for consumer credit and other lending to households (next 3 months)
BLS.Q.U2.ALL.*.H.C.B3.ZZ.D.WFNET	Factors contributing to changes in demand for consumer credit and other lending to households

Please submit a [statistical information request](#) if you have any further questions about the BLS.