Technical Article

Cash acceptance regulations in Europe

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Hansjörg Stützle and Hakon von Holst are the initiators of the petition to preserve cash as a means of payment in Europe. Information about the initiative can be found at www.Bargelderhalt.eu.

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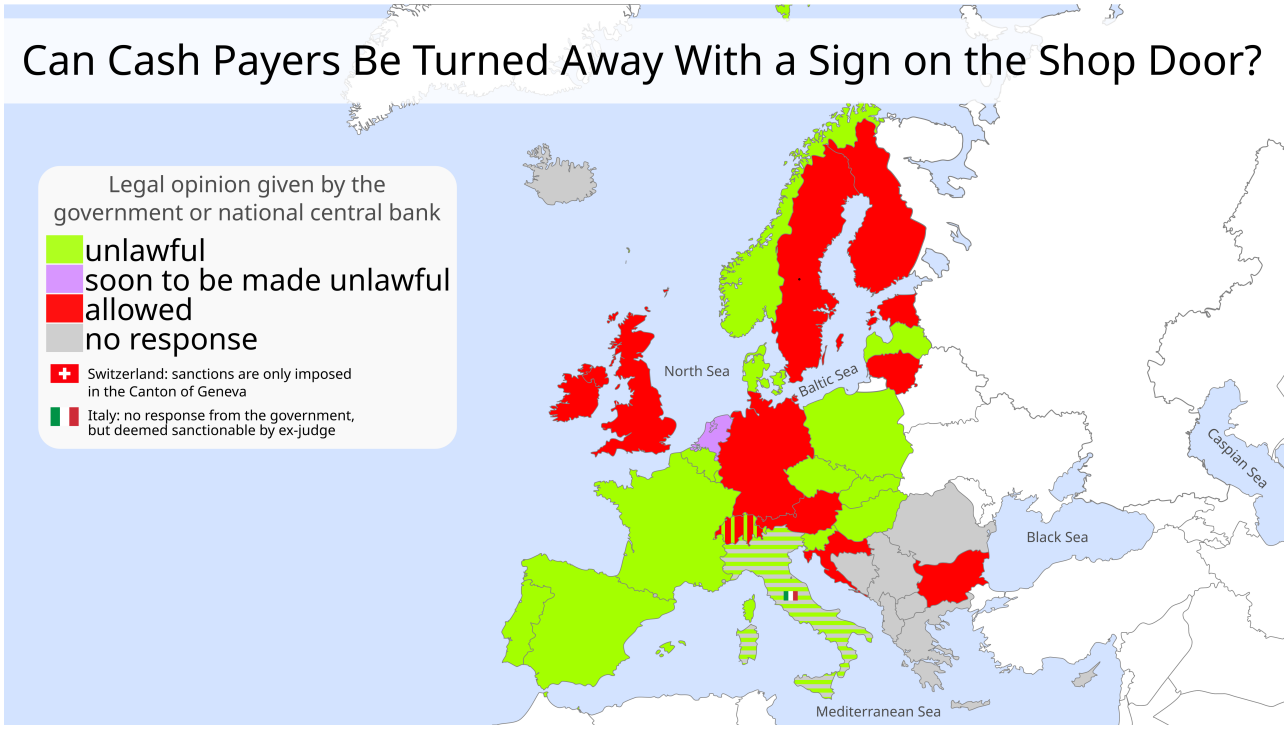
1 Introduction

In which countries can cash payers be turned away with a no-cash sign on the shop door? Our research provides an overview. Finance ministries and national central banks across Europe responded to our question as to whether retailers or service providers such as restaurants and hairdressers can *permanently* refuse cash with a sign on the shop door.

2 Overview map



The legal situation in Europe regarding the obligation to accept cash

Source: own research. Copyright: CC BY-SA 3.0. The monochrome map of Europe is based on work by CrazyPhunk and Spiky1984 and can be found on Wikipedia.

3 Country by country

Albania

The Albanian Ministry of Finance did not share its legal opinion with us upon request.

Austria

The Austrian Ministry of Finance stated that the law does not provide for penalties for businesses that refuse cash. When asked whether it is generally lawful to refuse cash with a sign on the shop door, the ministry answered cautiously: "A shop sign excluding cash could, under certain circumstances, especially if it is made transparent, be interpreted as an effective contractual provision." Reports of cashless bakeries are also coming from Austria.[1]

Belgium

As the national government stated in response to our enquiry, Belgium has required the acceptance of at least one digital payment method since 1 July 2022. On 30 March 2024, a requirement to accept cash was added.[2] Businesses must accept banknotes and coins when the buyer and seller are physically present. No-cash signs on shop doors are ineffective. According to the government, penalties of up to €10,000 are possible for refusing digital means of payment and up to €5,000 for refusing cash.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Ministry of Finance of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not provide us with its legal opinion upon request.

Bulgaria

The Bulgarian Ministry of Finance stated that there is no explicit prohibition on shopkeepers refusing cash: "There is no explicit prohibition in the effective Bulgarian legislation to provide for the possibility for non-cash payment in retail stores and not to allow payment in cash, respectively" (original quote).

Cyprus

The Central Bank of Cyprus did not provide us with its legal opinion upon request.

1 See, for example, https://www.kleinezeitung.at/steiermark/graz/5693113/Stadtbummel_Martin-Auer_Zweite-bargeldlose-Filiale-in-Graz-eroeffnet.

2 This law, designated the "Code de droit économique", can be found at https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=en&la=F&cn=2013022819&.

Croatia

The central bank and government stated that service providers and retailers had the option of refusing cash: "The choice of payment method is left to individual businesses" (original quote).

Czechia

The obligation to accept cash is enshrined in Law 136/2011. On inquiry, the Czech National Bank wrote that although retailers are generally obliged to accept cash, national laws do not provide for sanctions if companies fail to comply with the regulation. The central bank sends warning letters to cashless retailers to remind them of their obligations, but has no further powers.

Denmark

Shops are obliged to accept cash between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m., and until 8 p.m. in unsafe locations, according to the government's website.[3] Chapter 10 of the law also provides for penalties for refusing cash.[4] Unstaffed sales outlets and festivals are exempt from these regulations.

Estonia

The national central bank and the Ministry of Finance of Estonia unanimously responded that the refusal of cash with a sign on the shop door is lawful. Customers are deemed to have agreed to the exclusion of cash if they see the sign and then enter the shop. Unlawful refusal to accept cash, on the other hand, could result in a fine of up to €40,000, the Ministry of Finance wrote.

Finland

A survey conducted by the Finnish central bank in 2022 shows that the population is already confronted with businesses that refuse to accept cash. The most likely to refuse to accept cash, however, are public institutions.[5] Upon inquiry the Finnish Ministry of Finance stated that it is lawful for restaurants, hairdressers or retailers to refuse cash by putting up a sign on the shop door: "Yes, the payer and the payee are free to agree on the means of payment (the freedom of contract), meaning that payees can also refuse to accept cash. However, customers must be informed in advance if cash is not accepted, e.g. by displaying a no-cash sign on the door" (original quote).

3 See https://www.finanstilsynet.dk/finansielle-temaer/betalingstjenester-og-e-penge/kontantreglen.
4 The law can be found at https://www.elov.dk/lov-om-betalinger/.
5 See https://www.eurojatalous.fi/fi/2022/artikkelit/digitalisaatio-muuttaa-maksamistapoja-suomessa/.

France

Acceptance of cash is mandatory in France. The French central bank actively enforces compliance with the law. Merchants who refuse cash first receive a warning letter. This is followed by an inspection visit. If cash is still not accepted, the company must pay a fine of €150.[6] If cash continues to be refused, the fine is imposed again.

Germany

In Germany, an increasing number of cafés, restaurants, ice cream parlours, hotels, and even swimming pools and bakeries are refusing cash. Does the federal government really want to change this? A research assistant to Anja Karliczek, rapporteur for the digital euro in the German Bundestag's finance committee, wrote us on 30 June 2025:

> "The coalition agreement does not provide for penalties and sanctions for merchants. Entrepreneurial freedom applies here. However, social pressure to accept cash is enormous due to the increasing circulation of cash. It is therefore wise from the proprietor‘s point of view to continue accepting cash, as they would otherwise lose customers, which would certainly not be in their commercial interest."

A member of the Bundestag asked the Ministry of Transport whether the refusal to accept cash in Deutsche Bahn's ICE on-board bistros violated current law. Parliamentary State Secretary Sören Bartol replied on 17 March 2025:

> "Under EU law, there is a fundamental obligation to accept euro cash as legal tender. However, the parties involved may agree on a different means of payment or effectively exclude the acceptance of cash. Under German civil law, this requires a contractual agreement. If such an agreement is to be concluded by way of general terms and conditions (GTC), it falls under the general rules governing the review of GTC."[7]

Public broadcaster MDR also inquired about the legal situation, specifically asking Burkhard Balz, a member of the Executive Board of the Bundesbank:

> "'So what right do retailers have to refuse cash?' we ask a lawyer and member of the Executive Board of the Deutsche Bundesbank here in Frankfurt am Main. (Balz:) "We have the fundamental legal principle of freedom of contract, which allows payment terms to be negotiated. The buyer is of course free to refuse a contract and choose not to buy something."[8]

6 See explanations from the French government at https://www.service-public.gouv.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F10999.
7 Printed paper 20/15135, page 80, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/151/2015135.pdf#page=80.
8 MDR, Umschau, 5 November 2024.

Greece

The national central bank and Ministry of Finance of Greece did not share their legal opinion with us upon request.

Hungary

In 2025, parliament passed a law making it compulsory to accept cash.[9] The consumer protection authority is to take action in the event of violations. According to media reports, MPs voted 143 to 7 in favour of the law.[10]

Iceland

The Icelandic government did not provide us with its legal opinion upon request.

Ireland

The Irish central bank states on its website that retailers may refuse cash if this is clearly indicated by a sign.[11]

Italia

The central bank and government were unwilling to explain their legal position upon request. However, in article published on 23 March 2025 former judge Paolo Remer wrote that a sign on the shop door could not justify the refusal to accept cash and would result in a fine of €30.[12,13]

Latvia

The Latvian Ministry of Finance responded that it is not legal to permanently refuse cash by way of a sign on the shop door: "Retailers in Latvia are not allowed to refuse cash permanently with a sign on the shop door if there is no legitimate excuse for the refusal. Displaying a label or posters indicating that the retailer refuses payments in cash, or payments made in certain banknote denominations, is not enough. The retailer must provide a legitimate excuse, such as difficulty maintaining sufficient cash reserves to provide change, or concrete physical security risks due to the presence of large amounts of cash" (original quote).

9 See Act at https://www.parlament.hu/irom42/11680/11680.pdf.
10 See https://www.portfolio.hu/uzlet/20250611/hivatalos-magyarorszagon-alkotmanyos-jognak-tekintjuk-a-keszpenzhasznalatot-767327.
11 See https://www.centralbank.ie/consumer-hub/notes-and-coins/eurosystem-cash-strategy.
12 See https://www.laleggepertutti.it/724331_si-puo-rifiutare-un-pagamento-in-contanti.
13 See also Article 693 of the Codice penale at https://www.altalex.com/documents/news/2014/08/25/delle-contravvenzioni-di-polizia.

Liechtenstein

The government of Liechtenstein did not provide us with its legal opinion upon request.

Lithuania

The Central Bank of Lithuania considers the refusal of cash with a sign on the shop door to be legally unproblematic. In response to our enquiry, it wrote: "It should be noted that refusal to accept euro cash is considered acceptable if the parties have agreed on other means of payment or the potential customer has been informed in advance and in a clear manner about the means of payment available" (original quote).

Luxembourg

The Luxembourg Ministry of Finance replied that, in its opinion, the permanent refusal of cash by retailers and service providers was contrary to the EU Treaties (Article 128 TFEU). The Ministry added: "Permanent non-acceptance of euro cash may be prosecuted. Under Article 556 of the Luxembourg Criminal Code (Code pénal), anyone who, in the absence of an agreement to the contrary, refuses to accept genuine, unaltered money that is legal tender in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg will be punished with a fine of between €25 and €250."

Macedonia

The Macedonian Ministry of Finance did not provide us with its legal opinion upon request.

Malta

The Maltese Ministry of Finance did not provide us with its legal opinion upon request.

Netherlands

The Dutch Ministry of Finance considers the refusal of cash by retailers to be permissible. A ministry spokesperson wrote to us: "There are no rules specifically prohibiting this. The means of payment for a retail transaction is governed by the principle of contract freedom under private law. If a customer enters a shop that clearly states on its door or window that it does not accept cash, the customer is assumed to agree with these terms" (original quote).

In 2025, the Dutch central bank published a survey showing that 21 per cent of pharmacies already refuse cash.[14] When asked, a spokesperson for the central bank confirmed that only traditional pharmacies were included in the survey, not online pharmacies.

14 See https://www.dnb.nl/algemeen-nieuws/nieuws-2025/iets-minder-winkels-accepteren-cash/.

In 2024, the Dutch House of Commons passed a law making it compulsory to accept cash.[15] However, the House of Lords has not yet approved it.

Norway

In May 2024, the Norwegian Parliament passed a detailed regulation enforcing acceptance of cash.[16] Retailers and service providers are not allowed to refuse cash with a sign on the shop door and risk a fine if they do so. The rules do not apply to vending machines or self-service shops. Exceptions in public transport (bus, train) remain possible.[17] The regulation came into force in October 2024. Newspapers reported that not all cashless companies (chains) had restored cash acceptance by the deadline.[18]

Poland

The Polish Ministry of Finance has announced that, since 2021, retailers are explicitly prohibited from refusing cash by unilateral declaration (e.g. with a sign on the shop door).[19]

Portugal

In Portugal, the mandatory acceptance of cash is very popular. One media outlet quoted a survey stating that this is supported by 92 per cent of the Portuguese population. The majority also support penalties for cashless businesses.[20]

The national central bank replied: "A refusal can only be possible if grounded on reasons related to the 'good faith principle'" (original quote). This would mean that refusal with a sign on the door is illegal. The consumer protection organisation DECO concurs with this, pointing out, however, that there is no law to penalise non-compliance.[21]

Romania

The Romanian Ministry of Finance did not provide us with its legal opinion upon request.

Serbia

The Serbian Ministry of Finance did not provide us with its legal opinion upon request.

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15 See https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/ad59de2d-d83d-4842-9aa9-e2focc728766/file.
16 See https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Saker/Sak/?p=98066&target=case-status.
17 See the wording of the law at https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Vedtak/Beslutninger/Lovvedtak/2023-2024/vedtak-202324-066/.
18 See https://www.aftenposten.no/okonomi/i/VzGjrd/forbrukerne-har-naa-rett-til-aa-betale-med-kontanter-ny-lov-innfoeres.
19 See also Article 59ea of the relevant law: https://lexlege.pl/ustawa-o-uslugach-platniczych/art-59ea/.
20 See https://www.noticiasaominuto.com/economia/2754127/maioria-dos-portugueses-usa-dinheiro-vivo-e-quer-lei-para-aceitacao.
21 See https://www.deco.proteste.pt/dinheiro/contas-ordem/noticias/nao-deixam-pagar-notas-moedas-pagamento-dinheiro-nao-pode-ser-recusado.

Slovakia

The Slovakian Ministry of Finance informed us that retailers, restaurants, hairdressers and other consumer service providers are not allowed to refuse cash: "Retail stores, restaurants, hairdressers, and other B2C service providers in Slovakia are not allowed to refuse cash permanently with a sign on the store door" (original quote). Penalties by the supervisory authority for refusing cash are possible, the ministry wrote. Refusal could even constitute a criminal offence.

Slovenia

The Slovenian government wrote to us stating that permanently refusing cash with a sign on the door is unlawful. The supervisory authority can impose penalties of between €2,000 and €25,000.

Spain

Since 2022, the Consumer Protection Act has recognised a right to cash payment.[22] Fines for violating the law are possible.[23]

Sweden

On 10 March 2025, the Swedish Riksbank published a study on cash acceptance.[24] According to the study, 85 per cent of retailers still accept cash for essential goods. In fashion shops and restaurants, acceptance is between 70 and 80 per cent, while hairdressers accept cash in just over 60 per cent of cases. Only a minority of DIY stores accept cash.

A draft bill proposed by the government stipulates that pharmacies and food retailers will be required to accept cash payments in future.[25] The Swedish Riksbank supports the proposal.[26]

22 See Article 47.1 of the Act: https://boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2007-20555.
23 See Article 49 ibid.
24 See https://www.riksbank.se/en-gb/payments—cash/payments-in-sweden/payments-report-2025/trends-on-the-payments-market/many-small-retail-businesses-have-stopped-accepting-cash-/cash-acceptance-differs-widely-between-sectors/.
25 See https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/e0e985e1e90047b9965f110cc03595eb/kontantutredningen.pdf.
26 See https://www.riksbank.se/en-gb/press-and-published/notices-and-press-releases/press-releases/2025/introduce-obligation-to-accept-cash-and-strengthen-banks-responsibility-for-cash/.

Switzerland

The Swiss federal government rejects the introduction of a cash acceptance obligation. According to a media report from September 2025, Finance Minister Karin Keller-Sutter described the proposal as a "major encroachment on freedom of contract".[27,28]

On 3 October 2025, the canton of Geneva became the first to adopt a legal obligation for hotels and restaurants to accept cash. 53 members of parliament voted in favour, 35 against.[29,30]

United Kingdom

In a report dated 30 April 2025, the Treasury Committee of the British House of Commons states: "The existing law allows retailers to decide whether to accept cash or to only accept digital payments."[31] Retailers are therefore allowed to refuse cash. According to media reports, Junior Minister Emma Reynolds said the government had no plans to change the law.[32]

27 See https://www.20min.ch/story/muenz-statt-twint-bargeld-annahmepflicht-wird-im-bundeshaus-zum-streitthema-103410695.

28 The state government had already expressed its opposition in 2022, see the Federal Council report "The acceptance of cash in Switzerland" in fulfilment of postulate 18.4399 by Prisca Birrer-Heimo dated 14 December 2018, https://www.newsd.admin.ch/newsd/message/attachments/74344.pdf.

29 See parliamentary video recording from 16:56 or 17:22: https://ge.ch/grandconseil/sessions/video/030304/25/.

30 An exemplary media report on this subject can be found at https://www.bluewin.ch/fr/infos/economie/le-grand-conseil-autorise-le-paiement-en-esp-ces-2900807.html.

31 See https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmtreasy/324/report.html.

32 See https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20gevkx8gyo.