

Note: The following is a redacted version of the original report published Jan. 7, 2022 [14 pgs].

European Economics Analyst

10 Questions for 2022 (Stehn)

- Although the renewed surge in Covid infections is likely to weigh on services activity over the winter, we expect a more manageable hit to economic activity than last year. Given greater immunity levels, lower intrinsic virus severity and a lower sensitivity of activity to Covid restrictions compared with previous waves, we look for subdued but still positive Q1 growth in the Euro area and the UK. The near-term risk to our growth forecast, however, is to the downside in the case of a return to nationwide lockdowns.
- That said, we see significant pent-up demand in services spending across Europe—especially in Spain—and expect strong consumption growth as saving rates normalise this year. Moreover, we look for persistent fiscal support, given additional public investment by the new government in Germany, a strong investment boost via the Recovery Fund in Southern Europe, and recent expansionary budgets in the UK. We therefore project 2022 GDP growth of 4.4% in the Euro area (slightly above consensus) and 4.7% in the UK, both meaningfully above our forecast for the US.
- Although the Euro area unemployment rate has fallen back to pre-Covid levels and supply bottlenecks persist, we still see significant area-wide labour market slack, especially in the South. We look for a significant increase in German pay growth particularly in H2—due to wage negotiations and the agreed increase in the minimum wage—but expect wage pressures to build more slowly elsewhere in the Euro area as slack is absorbed gradually.
- Inflation has surged across Europe—fuelled by higher energy prices, base effects and bottlenecks—and we expect core inflation to have peaked at 2.6% in the Euro area in December and look for a peak of 4.7% in April in the UK (with headline inflation near 7%). But the speed of the decline will differ notably across the Channel given contrasting labour market pressures. We expect Euro area core inflation to fall back to 1.3% in December, while UK core inflation is likely to remain around 2.5% at the end of 2022, with risks skewed to the upside across Europe.
- We therefore look for continued divergence in monetary policy. The ECB raised its inflation projections notably in December and decided to begin the step-down of QE, but we believe that a 2022 hike is highly unlikely. We do not expect lift-off until 2024 given our inflation outlook, but see risks skewed towards earlier if

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inflation decelerates less than expected and wage growth accelerates more strongly this year. Given the hawkish surprise on the BoE’s reaction function at the December MPC Meeting, combined with strong labour-market and inflation data, we look for continued tightening in the UK this year. While the uncertainty remains significant, we expect 25bp hikes in February, May and November.

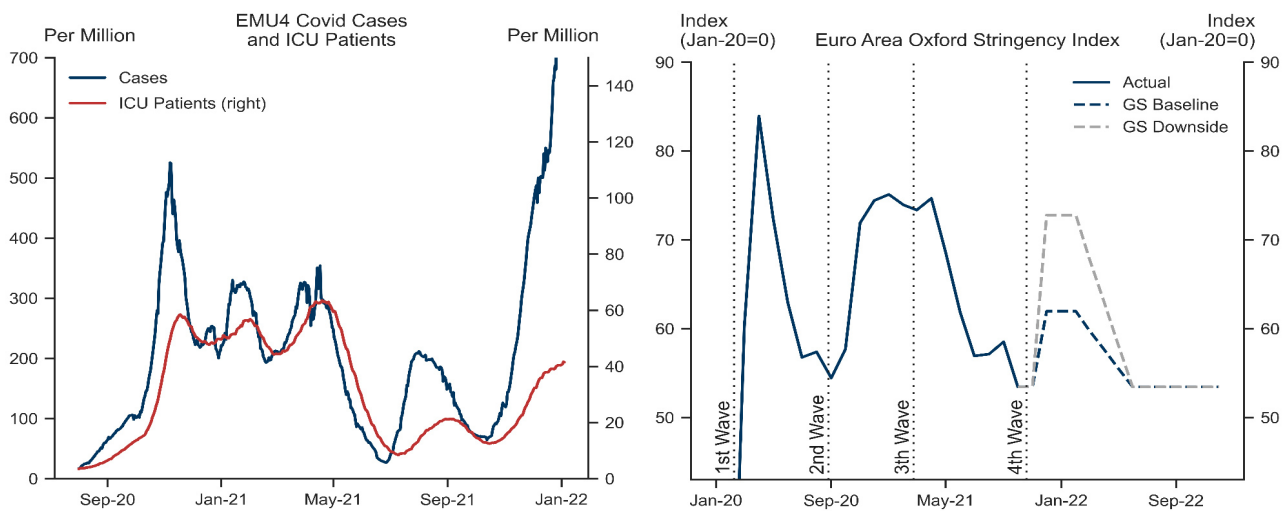
- Three risks could reignite Euro area institutional concerns this year. Our baseline is that Mario Draghi remains Italian Prime Minister, but his election to the Presidency could imply delays in the implementation of the Recovery Fund. In France, the latest opinion polls suggest that President Macron will face the centre-right candidate Valérie Pécresse in the second round, but much can happen in coming months. Finally, disappointing execution of the Recovery Fund, or tensions around the reinstatement of the EU fiscal rules, could bring fiscal risks—including debt sustainability and austerity—back into focus.

10 Questions for 2022

1. Will the winter virus wave push Europe into another recession?

No, but we look for weak growth over the winter. Covid infections have risen sharply across Europe as the Omicron variant has spread, and continued upward pressure on case growth seems likely in coming weeks given the high infectiousness of the new variant and cold winter weather (Exhibit 1, left). Euro area countries have adopted renewed Covid restrictions, and we expect these to remain in place through the winter, which is likely to weigh on services activity in coming months (Exhibit 1, right).

Exhibit 1: This Time is Different

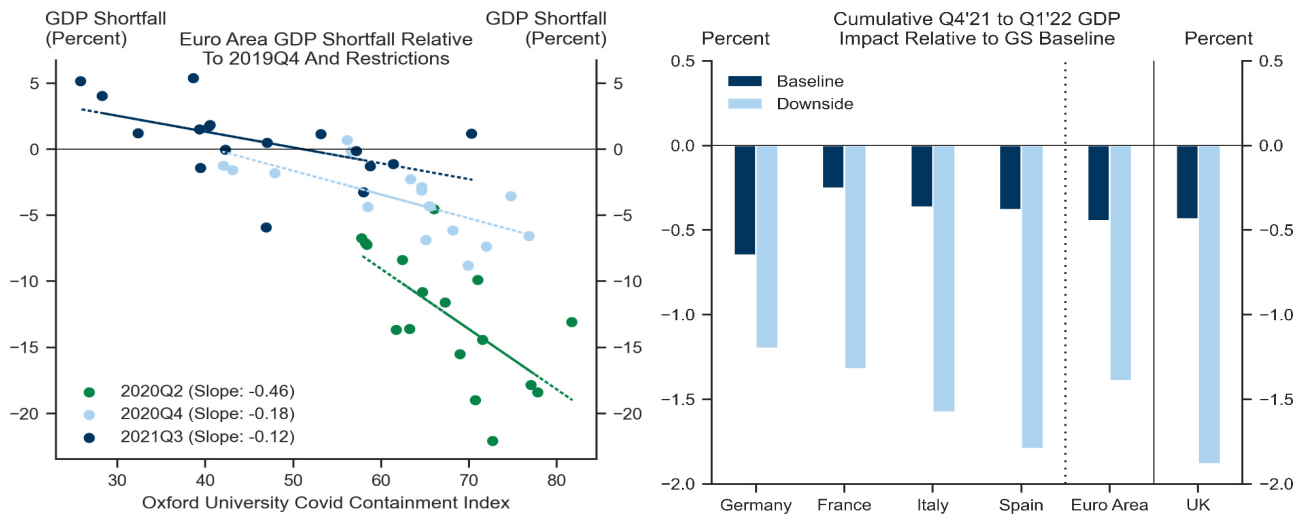


Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, ECDC, Oxford University Blavatnik School of Government

That said, we see a number of reasons why the economic hit should be more manageable than during the last winter. The Omicron variant looks less severe than earlier variants and Europe has greater immunity, which has helped protect hospital capacity. We therefore expect the containment measures to remain targeted and

regional, and do not look for a return to blanket national lockdowns. Moreover, the sensitivity of activity to Covid restrictions has fallen with each wave (Exhibit 2, left).

Exhibit 2: A More Manageable Hit

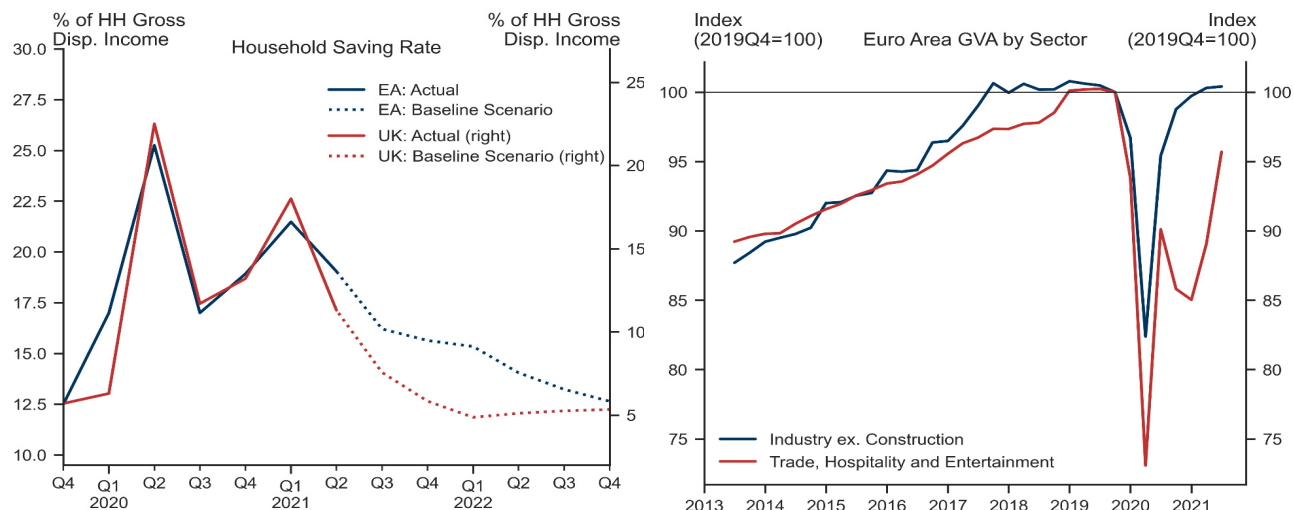


Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, Haver Analytics

We therefore look for a cumulative hit of about ½% to activity during the winter, with non-annualised growth of 0.6% in Q1 in both the Euro area and the UK. The risk to our Q1 forecast, however, is to the downside and we estimate that a return to nationwide lockdowns would reduce area-wide activity by around 1½%.

2. Will the savings rate continue to fall?

Yes, and this should provide a significant boost to services spending. The household saving rate has remained significantly higher than before Covid in both the Euro area and UK, and consumers have accumulated significant ‘excess’ savings since the start of the pandemic. Our model for household saving—which incorporates confidence and wealth effects—points to a steady decline in saving rates, which should return to their pre-pandemic levels in late 2022 (Exhibit 3, left).

Exhibit 3: More Consumer Normalisation in the Pipeline

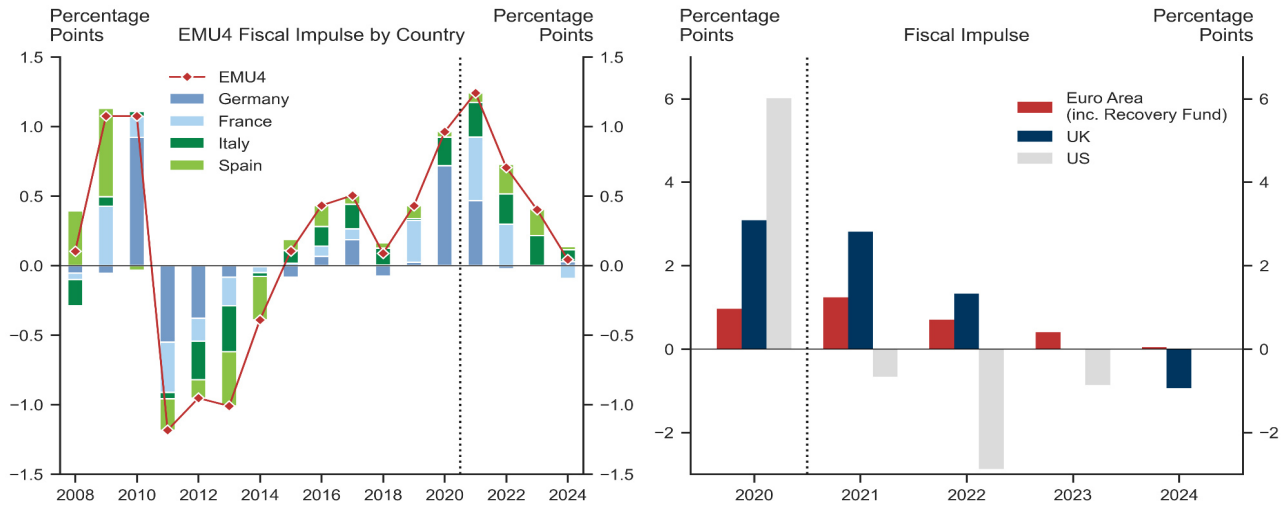
Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, Haver Analytics

The flip side of the normalisation of saving should be a continued rebound in household consumption as real disposable incomes continue to be shielded by income support measures, such as short-time work. While consumer spending on goods has largely recovered to pre-Covid levels, services spending (particularly in Covid-sensitive parts) remains depressed in large parts of Europe (Exhibit 3, right). While much of this shortfall clearly reflects the importance of Covid-sensitive activity (such as tourism) in Southern Europe, the magnitude of the remaining shortfall is surprising in light of Europe's high vaccination rate.

3. Will fiscal policy remain expansionary?

Yes, we look for persistent fiscal support in both the Euro area and the UK. In the Euro area, we estimate that the fiscal impulse will remain expansionary in 2022-23 given additional public investment by the new government in Germany, an extension of fiscal support in France ahead of the presidential election and a strong investment boost via the Recovery Fund in Italy and Spain. We specifically look for a growth impulse of 0.7pp in 2022 and 0.4pp in 2023, before turning neutral in 2024 (Exhibit 4, left).

Exhibit 4: Sustained Fiscal Support



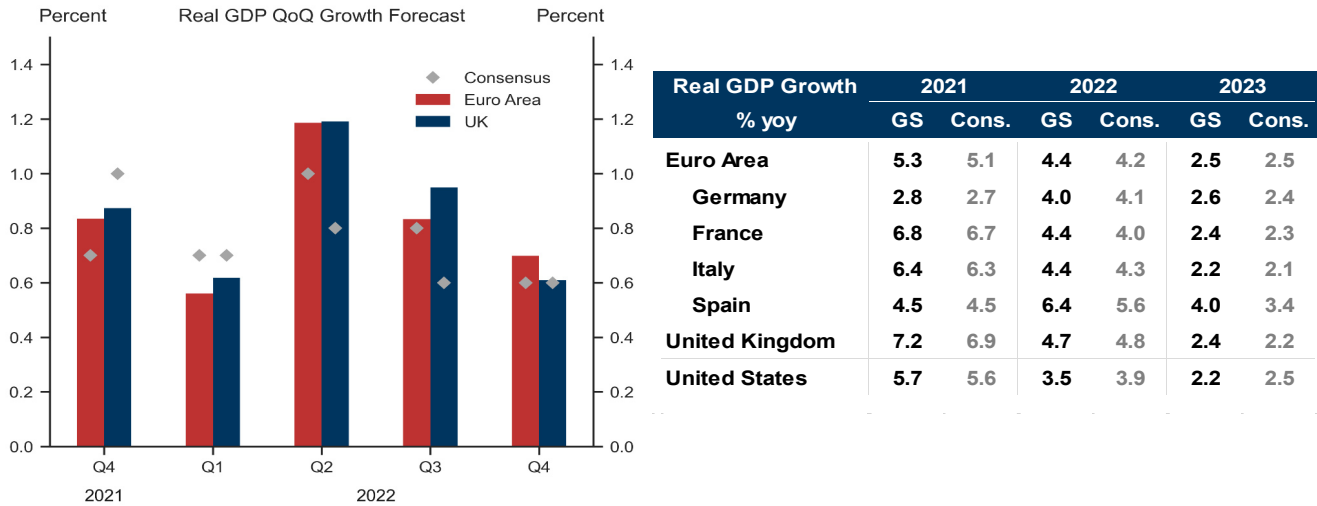
Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

In the UK, we look for continued fiscal support in 2022—helped by the expansionary October budget—but then expect the fiscal impulse to turn negative from 2024. In addition, we expect additional fiscal support to both businesses and households to help with the surge in energy prices. The backloaded nature of the fiscal support across Europe is thus striking compared with the sharp turn in the fiscal impulse in the US (Exhibit 4, right).

4. Will Europe outgrow the US?

Yes. For the Euro area as a whole, we look for growth of 4.4% in 2022 and 2.5% in 2023, only slightly above consensus but notably above our US growth forecasts of 3.5% and 2.2%. Looking across the EMU, we are relatively cautious on Germany in 2022 (given the importance of slower growth in China and industrial bottlenecks) but above consensus for 2023 (when we expect investment spending by the new government to support growth). We are more clearly above consensus in Italy and (especially) Spain, where we see substantial room to grow and strong fiscal support through the Recovery Fund.

Exhibit 5: A Robust Recovery



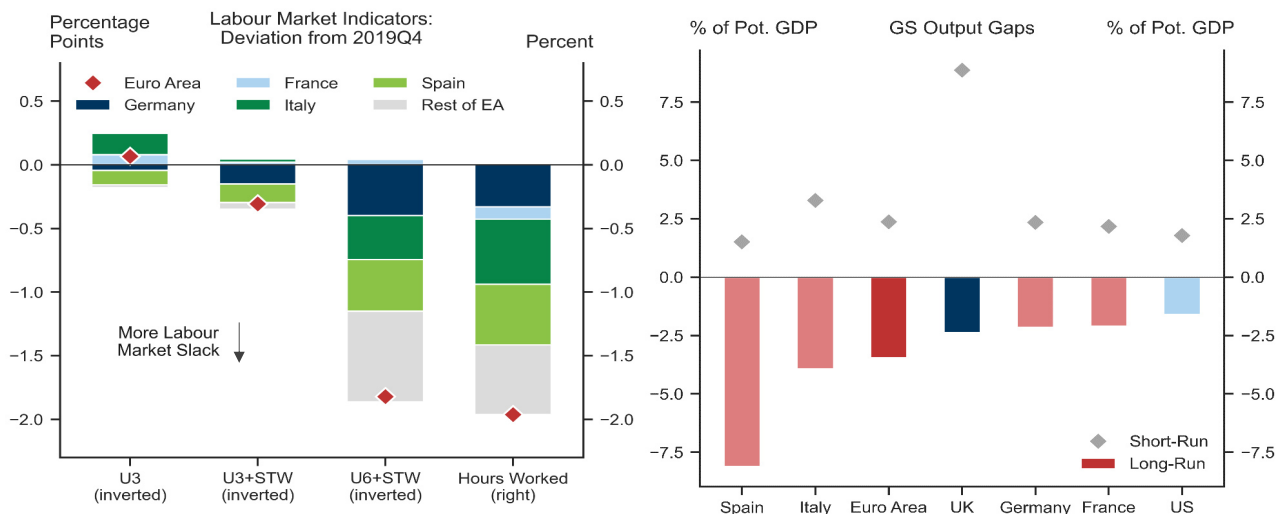
Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, Bloomberg

We hold a similar view for growth in the rest of Europe. In the UK, we look for 4.7% in 2022 and 2.4% in 2023, given room to grow (once the severe short-term bottlenecks have eased) and continued fiscal support. We likewise look for strong growth in Sweden, Norway and Switzerland over the next couple of years.

5. Will the Euro area return to full employment?

No, given significant labour market slack in Southern Europe. Although the Euro area unemployment rate has fallen back to pre-pandemic levels, we still see significant broader labour market slack. Taking into account people in short-time work schemes, workers on the fringes of the labour market and reduced hours worked suggests that plenty of labour market slack remains relative to pre-Covid levels, especially in Spain (Exhibit 6, left).

Exhibit 6: Lots of Spare Capacity in Europe's South



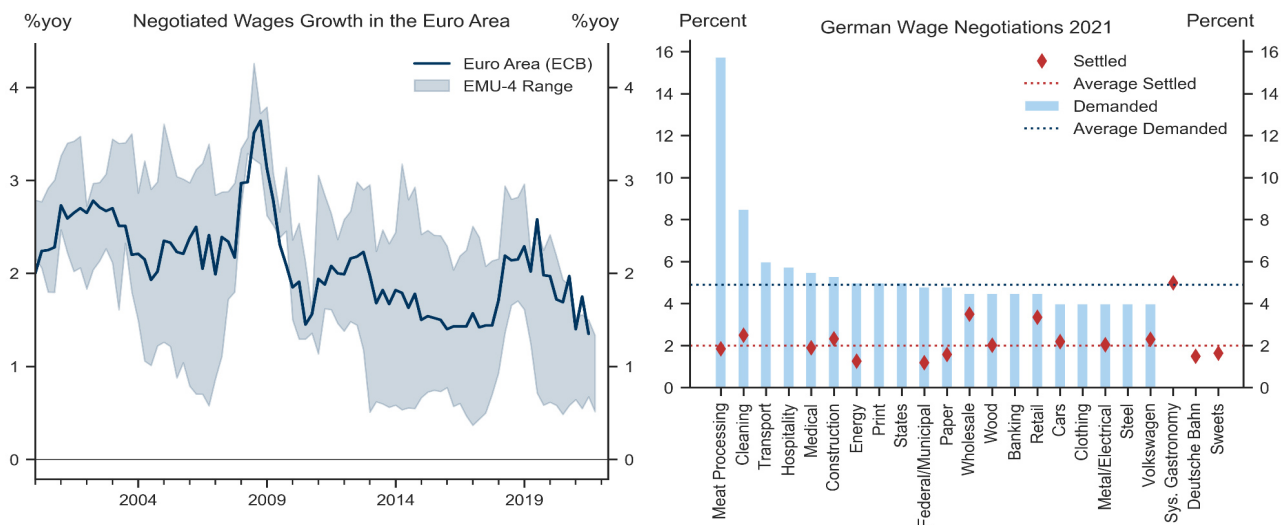
Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, Haver Analytics

Bottlenecks in the goods sector point to little economy-wide spare capacity in the short run and these frictions could be amplified by restrictions associated with the Omicron wave (Exhibit 6, right). But looking beyond the near term, we estimate that the Euro area still has notable spare capacity because the South entered the Covid crisis with plenty of slack, and we see limited scarring from the pandemic. Our models point to an area-wide long-run output gap of about -4%, which we do not expect to approach zero until late 2024.

6. Will underlying wage growth return to pre-Covid levels in the Euro area?

No, but we do expect a pickup in pay growth during 2022. Although various pandemic distortions complicate the assessment and cross-country comparison, Euro area wage growth remains notably below pre-pandemic rates, in contrast to the acceleration seen in the US and the UK. Negotiated wage growth—probably the cleanest measure of underlying wage growth at the moment—stands at about 1 ½%, well below the pre-pandemic rate due to remaining spare capacity in the labour market (Exhibit 7, left).

Exhibit 7: A Gradual Increase in Wage Growth

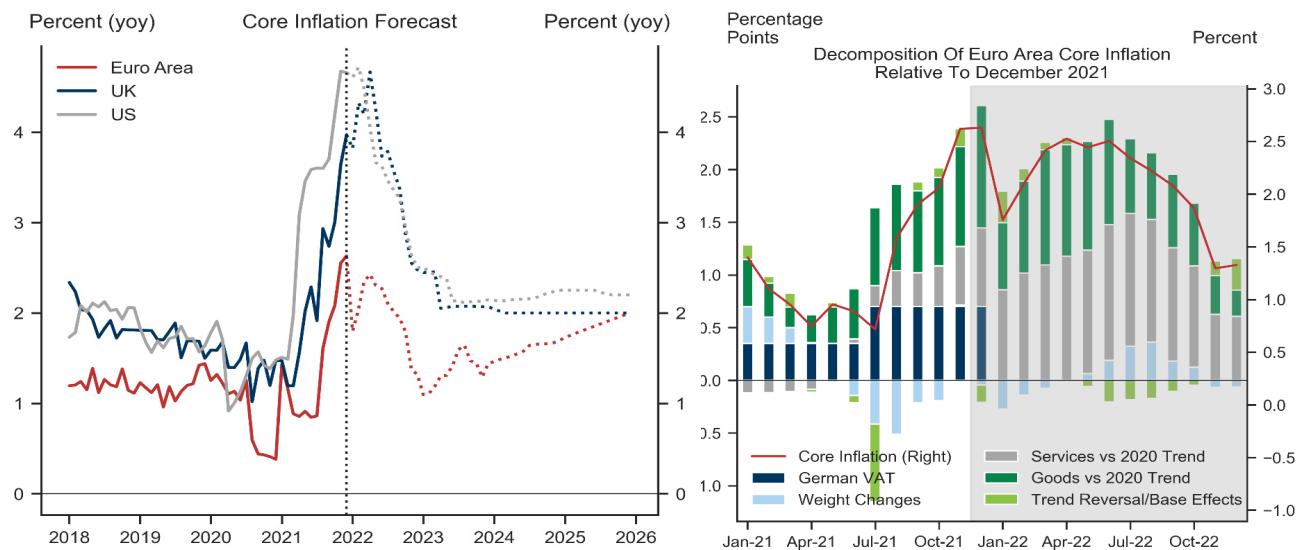


Source: Haver Analytics, Data compiled by Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

Looking ahead, we expect wage growth to build gradually over the course of the year. In Germany, we look for a significant increase in pay growth in H2 due to ongoing wage negotiations (which have come in at 2% on average for 2022) and the agreed increase in the minimum wage to EUR 12/hour. But wage pressures are likely to build more gradually elsewhere in the Euro area as the recovery proceeds and slack is absorbed.

7. Will inflation fall below 2% across Europe?

Yes, in the Euro area, but not in the UK. While the activity outlook looks quite synchronised across Europe, notable differences emerge on the inflation side. Inflation has surged everywhere—fuelled by similar factors, including higher energy prices, base effects and bottlenecks—and we expect core inflation to have peaked at 2.6% in the Euro area in December and look for a peak of 4.7% in April in the UK.

Exhibit 8: Different Degrees of Transitory

Note: The right panel December value is a model forecast. The final HICP print, which contains the component breakdown, has not yet been released.

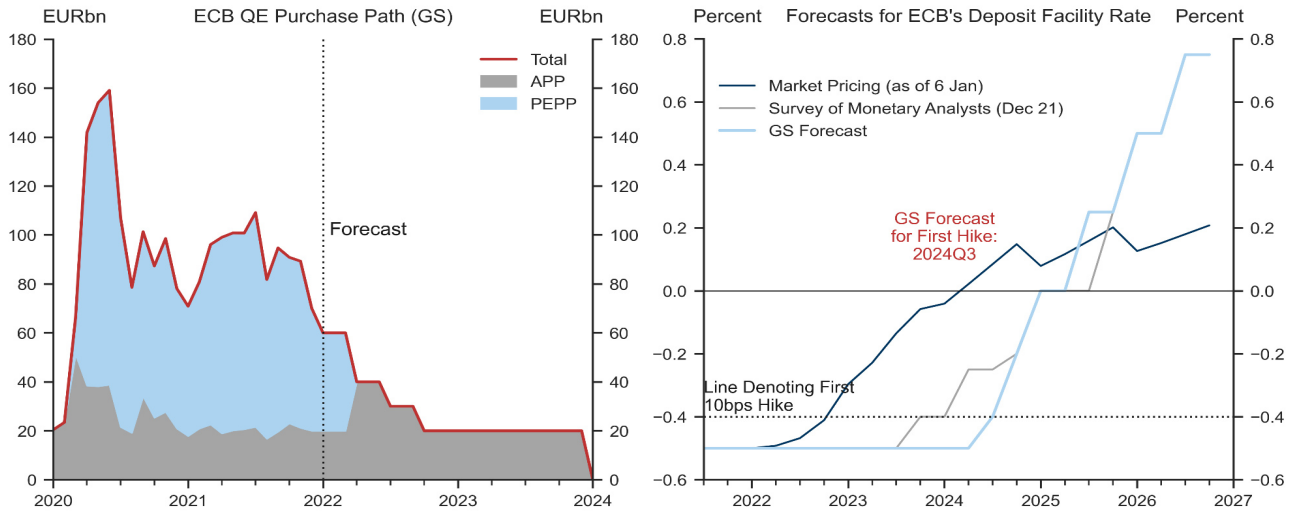
Source: Haver Analytics, Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

But the speed of the decline will differ notably across the Channel. In the Euro area, we see strong distortions from temporary factors (such as the reversal of the German VAT cut and HICP weight changes) with core inflation falling back to 1.3% in December 2022. While uncertainty around the unwind of energy price inflation and supply-chain disruptions poses upside risks, we expect sequential inflation pressures to ease from now onwards as goods price inflation slows. In the UK, inflation pressures have strengthened on a more persistent basis, and we expect headline inflation to reach almost 7% in April and look for core inflation of around 2.5% at the end of 2022.

8. Will the ECB hike the deposit rate?

No. Although the ECB raised its inflation projections notably at the December meeting and decided to begin the step-down of QE, we believe that the Governing Council will look through the current inflation surge and keep the deposit rate on hold. The Governing Council's new forward guidance sets a high hurdle for the first Deposit Rate hike—requiring that the one-year-ahead inflation projection reaches 2% and measures of underlying inflation firm sufficiently—and we think it is very unlikely that ECB officials would renege on this guidance and hike while conducting net asset purchases. Given our inflation projections, we believe that a 2022 hike is highly unlikely and expect APP purchases to run until the end of 2023, followed by the first 10bp Deposit Rate hike in 2024Q3.

Exhibit 9: The ECB Keeps its Nerve



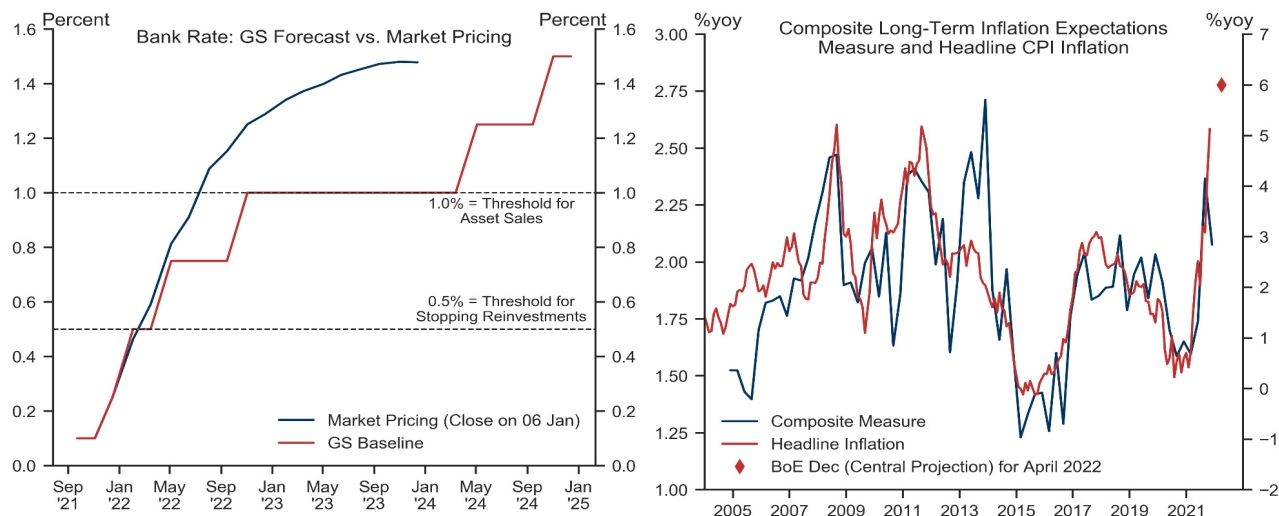
Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, ECB, Bloomberg

That said, the ECB’s recent projections and communication suggest that it does not take a lot to flip the baseline towards a 2023 hike. The December staff projections end 2024 at 1.9% (just a touch below target) and core inflation is projected at 1.7% in 2023. We therefore see risks skewed towards a 2023 hike should inflation decelerate less in the course of 2022 than we currently expect and should wage growth accelerate more strongly than we anticipate.

9. Will the BoE raise Bank Rate by at least 75bp?

Yes, although the near-term outlook is highly uncertain given the Omicron

outbreak. Given the hawkish surprise on the BoE’s reaction function at the December MPC Meeting, combined with strong labour-market and inflation data, we expect 25bp hikes in February, May and November (Exhibit 10, left). However, significant risks remain, particularly given the uncertainty over the path of the virus. If Omicron turns out to cause more severe infections with hospital capacity under threat, then we think the BoE would likely keep Bank Rate on hold in February, as the meeting is likely to coincide with peak NHS pressures. Alternatively, if Omicron is seen as net inflationary and wage growth firms further, then there is the risk of an additional hike in March, taking Bank Rate to 1.0% by the May MPC Meeting (Exhibit 10, right).

Exhibit 10: BoE Tightening Continues

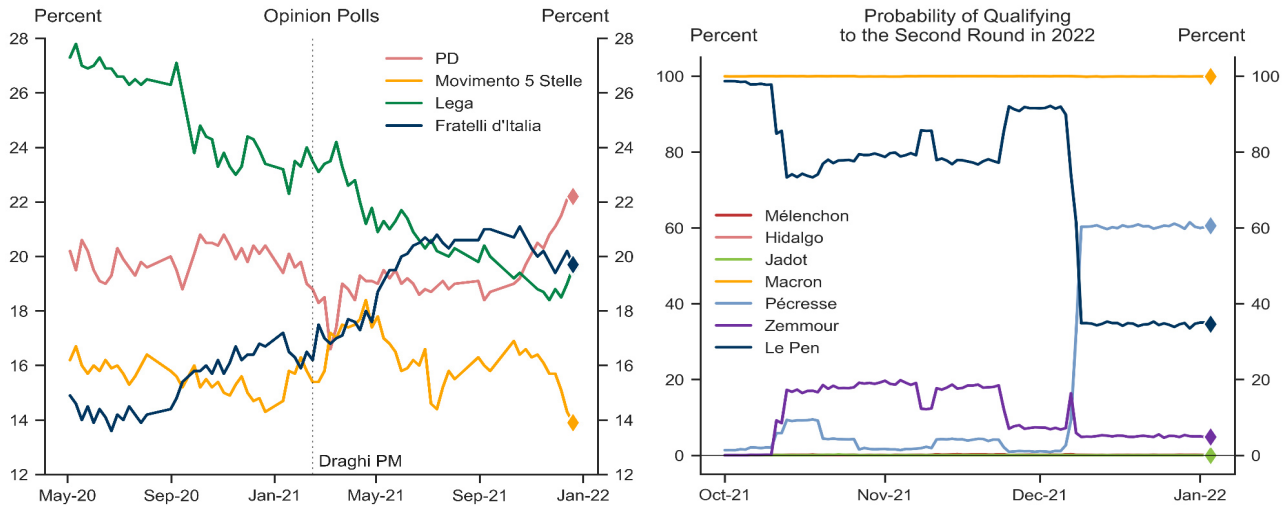
Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, Bloomberg, Bank of England, Haver Analytics

Turning to the BoE's balance sheet, we expect reinvestments to cease following the February meeting as Bank Rate reaches 0.5%. We think the BoE is likely to announce a fixed and gradual schedule of asset sales in 2022Q4, after hitting the stated 1.0% threshold, of around £20 billion per quarter.

10. Will Euro area sovereign risk re-emerge?

No, although 2022 brings a number of political and institutional risks. First, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi could be elected President in late January, triggering his resignation as PM and the need to appoint a new cabinet. Although the consensus view is that Mr Draghi will be the next President, recent shifts in political momentum suggest that Draghi will stay on as PM and oversee speedy implementation of the Recovery Fund (Exhibit 11, left). While PM Draghi's election to the Presidency would strengthen Italy's ties to Europe, this election would likely entail a delay to the implementation of the Recovery Fund and related reforms. Moreover, in the unlikely event that Draghi's presidency triggers an early general election, policy continuity would be severely affected, weakening Italy's commitment to the Recovery Fund.

Exhibit 11: Italian-Franco Political Risk



Source: SWG, Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

Second, France will hold Presidential elections on April 10 (first round) and 24 (second round). Although political fragmentation remains similar to that at the time of the 2017 election, the campaign is likely to take a different tack given new candidates on the right of the political spectrum. The latest opinion polls suggest that President Macron will face centre-right candidate Valérie Pécresse in the second round, as the far-right candidates split the vote in the first round (Exhibit 11, right). Recent market predictions imply a 67% probability that President Macron will be re-elected but a lot can happen in the run-up to the election over the coming months.

Finally, risks remain around the implementation of the Recovery Fund and overhaul of the fiscal rules. Our central view is that (1) the Recovery Fund will promote investment and structural reform in Southern Europe; and (2) the EU fiscal rules will be interpreted more flexibly from 2023, affording Southern European countries time to adjust gradually. Inefficient use of the Recovery Fund and/or tensions around the tweaking of the EU fiscal rules, however, could reignite worries about sovereign risks in the South.

Sven Jari Stehn

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Reg AC

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