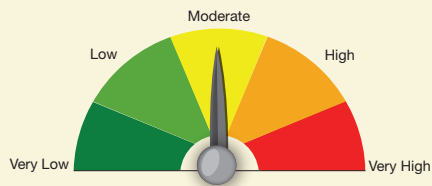


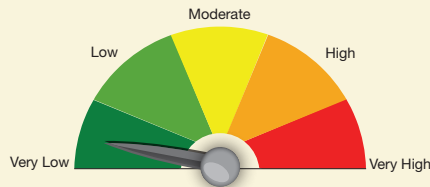
Country Risk Tier

CRT-2

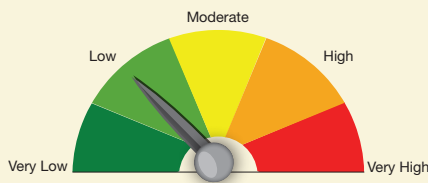
Economic Risk



Political Risk



Financial System Risk



[For information on companies followed](#)

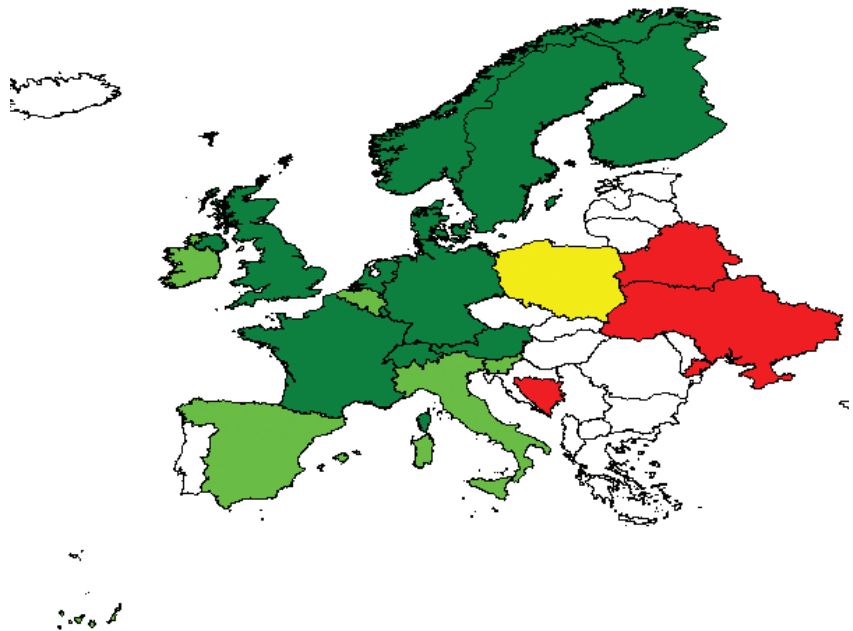
[Market Outlooks](#)

Ireland

- The Country Risk Tier (CRT) reflects A.M. Best's assessment of three categories of risk: Economic, Political and Financial System Risk.

- Ireland is a CRT-2 country with moderate levels of economic risk and low levels of political and financial system risk. Following years of robust growth, Ireland's economy began to slow sharply in early 2008. A dramatic decline in residential construction and a banking system facing falling asset quality as real estate prices dropped combined to put the Irish economy in a severe recession. The economy contracted in 2008, will contract a further in 2009 and positive growth is not expected to resume until 2011.

- A.M. Best considers the majority of countries pictured below to be categorized as CRT-1 and CRT-2. The exceptions are the Eastern European countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus, Ukraine and Poland.



CRT 1 2 3 4 5



Regional Summary: Western Europe

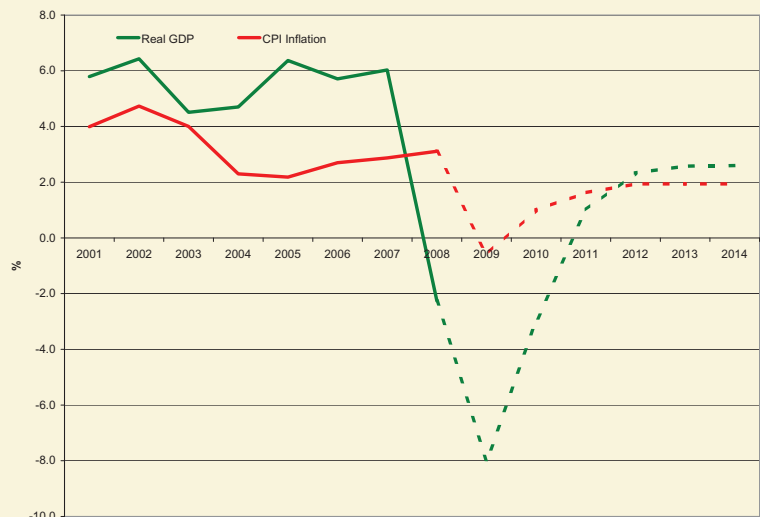
- Western Europe is a highly developed and affluent region. The European Union (EU) is an economic and political union of 27 countries that accounts for 30% of world gross domestic product (GDP). The EU is facilitating a single European market with standardized regulatory systems and free movement of people, goods, services and capital.
- The euro-zone is made up of the 16 EU members that have adopted the euro as their currency.
- Most, if not all, of Western Europe is experiencing a severe economic slowdown and many countries are, or soon will be, in an official recession. While the European Central Bank has cut interest rates to spur demand, economic growth in the region has stagnated.

Economic Risk: Moderate

- Ireland’s economy depends heavily on foreign trade and investment. Beginning in the 1990s, the Irish economy evolved into one of the wealthiest countries in Europe as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, with the country becoming known as the “Celtic Tiger.”
- The Irish economy entered a very serious recession in 2008. The housing market has experienced a significant market correction and the financial sector has come under tremendous pressure. The economic contraction has been severe and is expected to last until 2011.

Vital Statistics 2008		
Nominal GDP	USD bn	273.33
Population	mil	4.4
GDP Per Capita	USD	61,810
Real GDP Growth	%	-2.3
Inflation Rate	%	3.1
Premiums Written (Life)	USD mil	34,055
Premiums Written (Non-Life)	USD mil	10,863
Premiums Growth (07-08)	%	-28.8
Regional Comparison		
	Country Risk Tier	
Ireland	CRT-2	
France	CRT-1	
Spain	CRT-2	
Germany	CRT-1	
Italy	CRT-2	
United Kingdom	CRT-1	

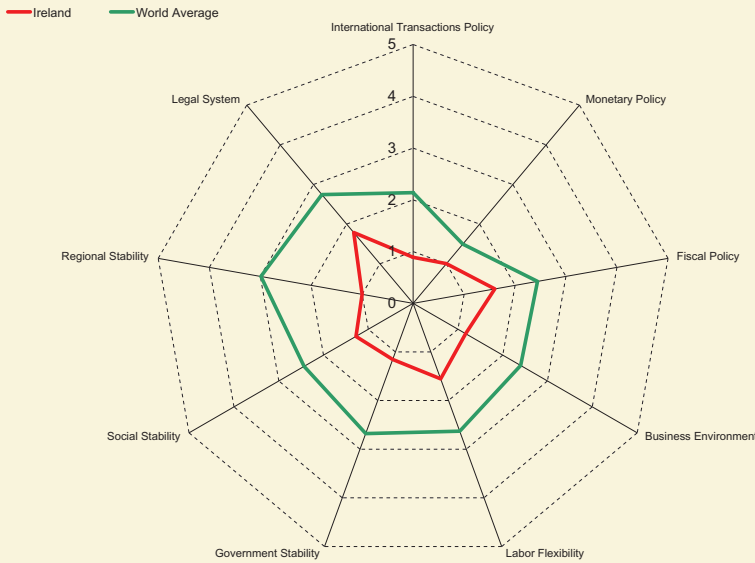
Source: IMF, Swiss Re and A.M. Best



Source: IMF World Economic Outlook (10/08) and A.M. Best

Political Risk Summary

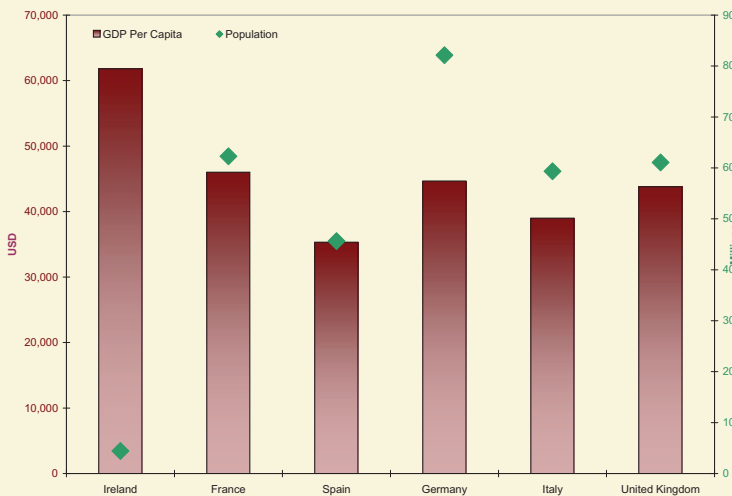
Score 1 (best) to 5 (worst)



Source: A.M. Best

Political Risk: Very Low

- Ireland is a member of the European Union and one of the original 11 countries to adopt the euro as its currency in 1999.
- While the economy has been declining Ireland's fiscal position has been worsening (including having their sovereign credit rating downgraded). The government has passed a budget that includes spending cuts and some tax increases to try and improve the government's fiscal position.



Source: IMF and A.M. Best

Financial System Risk: Low

- The Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority's (IFSRA) Insurance Section oversees Ireland's insurance industry. Ireland's regulation is largely consistent with EU directives.
- The Irish banking sector has been experiencing crisis conditions and the Irish government has been forced to take action to protect depositors and the banking system in general.

GUIDE TO BEST'S COUNTRY RISK TIERS

A.M. Best defines country risk as the risk that country-specific factors could adversely affect the claims paying ability of an insurer. Country risk is evaluated and factored into all Best's Credit Ratings. Countries are placed into one of five tiers, ranging from "CRT-1" (Country Risk Tier 1), denoting a stable environment with the least amount of risk, to "CRT-5" (Country Risk Tier 5) for countries that pose the most risk and, therefore, the greatest challenge to an insurer's financial stability, strength and performance.

A.M. Best's Country Risk Tiers are not credit ratings and are not directly comparable to a sovereign debt rating, which evaluates the ability and willingness of a government to service its debt obligations.

Country Risk Tiers

Country Risk Tier	Definition
CRT-1	Predictable and transparent legal environment, legal system and business infrastructure; sophisticated financial system regulation with deep capital markets; mature insurance industry framework.
CRT-2	Predictable and transparent legal environment, legal system and business infrastructure; sufficient financial system regulation; mature insurance industry framework.
CRT-3	Developing legal environment, legal system and business environment with developing capital markets; developing insurance regulatory structure.
CRT-4	Relatively unpredictable and nontransparent political, legal and business environment with underdeveloped capital markets; partially to fully inadequate regulatory structure.
CRT-5	Unpredictable and opaque political, legal and business environment with limited or nonexistent capital markets; low human development and social instability; nascent insurance industry.

Country Risk Reports

A.M. Best Country Risk Reports are designed to provide a brief, high level, explanation of some of the key factors that determine a country's Country Risk Tier assignment. It is not intended to summarize A.M. Best's opinion on any particular insurance market, or the prospects for that market.

Categories of Risk

Country Risk Reports provide "scores" for three categories of risk for each country. These "scores" are: (1) Very Low; (2) Low; (3) Moderate; (4) High and (5) Very High.

Category of Risk	Definition
Economic Risk	The likelihood that fundamental weaknesses in a country's economy will cause adverse developments for an insurer. A.M. Best's assessment of economic risk evaluates the state of the domestic economy, government finances and international transactions, as well as prospects for growth and stability.
Political Risk	The likelihood that government or bureaucratic inefficiencies, societal tensions, inadequate legal system or international tensions will cause adverse developments for an insurer. Political risk comprises the stability of the government and society, the effectiveness of international diplomatic relationships, the reliability and integrity of the legal system and of the business infrastructure, the efficiency of the government bureaucracy and the appropriateness and effectiveness of the government's economic policies.
Financial System Risk	Financial system risk (which includes both insurance and non-insurance financial system risk) is the risk that financial volatility may erupts due to inadequate reporting standards, weak banking system or asset markets and/or poor regulatory structure. Along with the risk that the insurance industry's level of development and public awareness, transparent and effective regulation and reporting standards and sophisticated regulatory body will contribute to a volatile financial system and compromise the ability of an insurer to pay claims.

Political Risk Summary

To provide additional detail on the political risk in a given domicile the Country Risk Reports include the Political Risk Summary. The Political Risk Summary is a radar chart that displays scores for nine different aspects of political risk scored on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the least amount of risk and 5 being the highest amount of risk.

Category	Definition
International Transactions Policy	Measures the effectiveness of the exchange rate regime and currency management.
Monetary Policy	Measures the ability of a country to effectively implement monetary policy.
Fiscal Policy	Measures the ability of a country to effectively implement fiscal policy.
Business Environment	Measures the overall quality of the business environment, and ease of doing business.
Labor Flexibility	Measures the flexibility of the labor market, including the company's ability to hire and fire employees.
Government Stability	Measures the degree of stability in a government.
Social Stability	Measures the degree of social stability including human development and political rights.
Regional Stability	Measures the degree of stability in the region
Legal System	Measures the transparency and level of corruption in the legal system.

Country Risk Tier Disclosure

A Country Risk Tier (CRT) is not a credit rating, rather it represents a component of A.M. Best's credit rating methodology that is applied to all insurers. A CRT is not a recommendation to purchase, hold or terminate any security, insurance policy, contract or any other financial obligation issued by a government, an insurer or other rated issuer, nor do they address the suitability of any particular policy, contract or other financial obligation for a specific purpose or purchaser.

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