

04 April 2024

Executive Briefing

Economies standing at the crossroads

We are still in a phase of transition in the big economies. We continue to expect that we will see slightly weaker labour markets, inflation moving towards the 2% target and interest rates being slowly cut in both the US and the euro area, combined with slightly higher economic growth in Europe but somewhat lower growth in the US. None of these things have clearly materialised yet, but data releases and central bank comments during March continue to point in that direction.

US inflation was higher than the target again in February, with the core PCE prices (the Fed's preferred measure) increasing 0.3% m/m following 0.5% m/m in January. **The Fed still expects inflation to decline, and the indication from the March meeting was that we should still expect three rate cuts of 25bp during 2024**, and that the Fed Funds rate should over time move towards 2.6% from the current up to 5.5%. The US labour market continues to show robust job growth but not as robust as previously thought, as the very high January number was revised down. The job growth is supported by a growing work force and indicators still point to a slightly easing pressure in terms of job vacancies.

The European Central Bank is clearly signalling an intention to cut rates in June. The bank seems confident that inflation is moving in the right direction, and that impression was largely supported by the preliminary March figures. However, it is still concerned that wage growth could be a hindrance for sufficiently low inflation, and the euro area wage data for Q1 will not be available before the ECB rate decision on April 11. Hence the comment from ECB President Lagarde that "we will know a little more in April but we will know a lot more in June."

One European central bank, namely the Swiss, did cut its policy in March, from 1.75% to 1.5%. Swiss inflation is leading the rest of Europe lower, reaching 1.0% y/y in March on both headline and core measures. On the other hand, **Japan delivered its long-expected rate hike**, ending the last negative-interest rate policy in the world. Japanese inflation has been slower to increase than in many other countries, but finally seems to be firming around the 2% level. Importantly, inflation is now supported by high wage growth of above 5% among large companies which gives confidence that there will not be a rapid return to stagnating or declining prices, as has often been the case in previous inflation episodes in Japan.

China published a GDP growth target of 5.2% for 2024. That is the same growth rate as last year but in reality quite ambitious as that growth rate came on the background of a very weak 2022 with extensive COVID lockdowns. Hence, we expect to see significant policy stimulus to Chinese growth this year. It seems that the decline in housing sales has stopped but at a low level, and it remains unclear what the effect on the overall economy from housing will be. March data indicate that there has been a decent recovery in manufacturing also supported by indicators from other countries, not least the US. Higher commodity prices, including for oil, also support the **impression that manufacturing is doing better**. However, some leading indicators from elsewhere in Asia suggest that the recovery could be shallow and short-lived.

Key points

- Major and Nordic central banks maintain their outlook for interest rate cuts later this year even though inflation remains somewhat too high.
- Globally, manufacturing is recovering, leading to higher commodity prices and improving the economic outlook not least in China – however, the manufacturing recovery is not strong.
- Financial markets are in general pricing in fewer rate cuts and stronger economic growth compared than earlier this year.

Denmark

GDP growth was revised up to a very high 2.6% q/q in Q4 and full-year 2023 growth of 1.9%. Excluding the pharmaceutical industry there was zero growth last year. Private sector wage growth was 5.3% y/y in Q1, the highest in 35 years but the central collective agreements indicated that it would be above 6%. Hence, there still seems to be modest wage pressure in local negotiations. Real wage levels have still not quite caught up to the pre-inflation high, but total household income is supported by growing employment. Employment growth continues despite the stagnating economy outside of pharma, but as the work force is also growing, unemployment continues to edge up month for month. House prices are broadly stable, but prices and trading activity for owner-occupied apartments seem to have declined a bit following taxation changes this year.

Sweden

At the March meeting, the Riksbank signalled a first rate cut in May or June and thereafter a cautious cutting cycle. The export sector has been very strong in Sweden but has in recent months experienced some setbacks. However, the weakness is driven by export in services and minerals where exports of iron ore decreased 52% in volume in January. This happened after supply chains disruptions caused by a severe train derailment in the northern parts of Sweden. Exports in machinery continues to be strong. Consumer confidence has been quickly increasing for six straight months in a row. However, the indicator published by NIER is still at a low level and shows weaker sentiment than normal. The unemployment rate is slightly increasing, but it is important to note that it is mainly due to an increase in the labour force that is not matched by people being hired. The increases in unemployed people and redundancy notices have flattened out and even though bankruptcies are record high, they are mostly in micro companies that have a modest effect on the labour market.

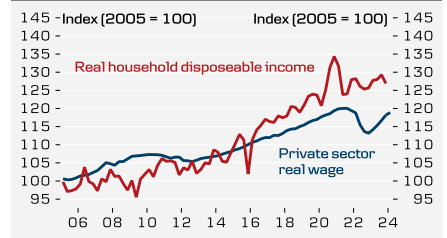
Norway

Growth has surprised to the upside lately and the recession risk seems a bit lower, although still present. According to the companies in the Regional survey, growth is expected at -0.1% q/q in Q1, up from -0.3% in the latest survey. Growth is expected to remain at -0.1% in Q2. Mainland-GDP grew surprisingly strongly in January, up 0.4% m/m, but some of the effect was probably one-offs. The labour market remains tight, with a moderate increase in unemployment, and employment growth seems to have picked up again in late 2023/early 2024. The disinflationary trend continues, core inflation dropped to 4.9% in February. Norges Bank kept the policy rate unchanged at 4.5% in March and signals that the first cut likely will be delivered in September. Another sign of increasing optimism can be found in the housing market where prices have surprised strongly to the upside in Q1.

Finland

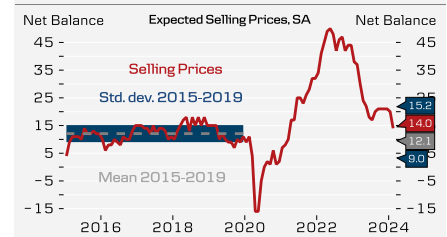
The Finnish economy is in a shallow recession. 2024 has gotten a weak start and strikes set back production in February and March. The government plans new expenditure cuts to balance the budget. Unemployment rises in some industries, like construction, while others, like healthcare, suffer from labour shortage. Wages rise nearly 4% are expected in 2024. Consumer confidence was below average and purchase intentions low in March. The outlook should gradually brighten with lower inflation and interest rates. Improving global manufacturing cycle supports Finnish exports. Housing construction is going to stay low in 2024, which has repercussions in other industries like transportation and wholesale trade. Housing market has remained quiet but stable. There exists plenty of pent-up demand for apartments and lower interest rates should help to activate the housing market in 2024.

Real wages are recovering



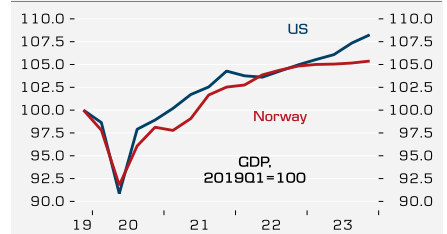
Source: DA, Statistics Denmark, Macrobond Financial, Danske Bank. Seasonally adjusted.

Expected selling prices almost consistent with inflation at 2%



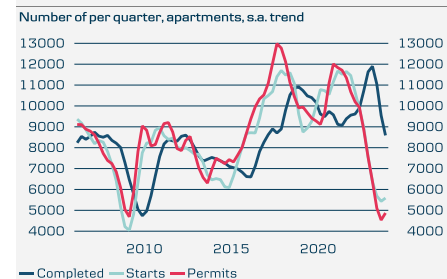
Source: NIER, Macrobond Financial

No signs of a US-style growth pick-up in Norway



Source: Macrobond Financial

Construction downturn not over yet



Source: Macrobond Financial, Statistics Finland

Currency markets

The last month in FX markets has been characterised by a general outperformance of PLN and the dollars incl. the AUD, the CAD and the USD. EUR/USD started March on a positive tone but after having reached a peak of close to 1.10 in the first week of the month the cross subsequently declined steadily and at the time of writing is trading below the 1.08 mark. The Scandies have been the last month's clear underperformers with EUR/SEK and EUR/NOK moving above 11.50 and 11.60, respectively. While the SEK has lost more than 3% vs the EUR (and DKK) the NOK's underperformance has been the most notable given the coinciding rise in oil prices and widening rate spreads. SNB's 25bp rate cut has weighed on the CHF sending EUR/CHF to the highest levels since June. Finally, EUR/DKK has edged modestly higher during the March dividend-season and is now trading just south of the 7.46-mark.

Bond markets

Since start of March, yields have moved slightly lower across the yield curve, but with both increases and decreases in yield during March and start of April. Markets continue to price out cuts from central banks in the light of still some inflation pressure and better than expected US macro data. 10Y German government bond yields traded within a range of 2.25-2.45% and across the yield curve, levels are now 5-9bp lower than 1 March and mostly in the short end of the yield curve. German government bonds have again seen some performance vs. swaps to a small degree after a long period of cheapening to other yield metrics. Overall, credit spreads in Danish mortgage bonds have remained somewhat stable with a small widening of spreads for flex bonds and only small changes to OAS6M levels for callable bonds (and marginally lower during March). Reinvestments of April payments have supported Danish bonds mortgage bonds lately, whereas Danish government bonds have seen a bit of underperformance to German government bonds.

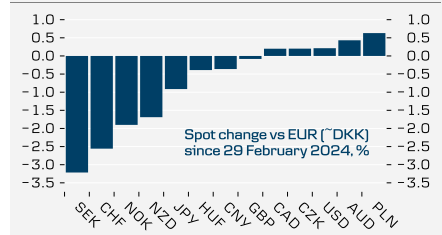
Credit markets

Credit markets saw mixed performance in March. iTraxx Xover tightened 11bp, but this is due to a technicality around the roll of the CDS index (we rolled from series 40 to 41 on 20 March). Adjusting for the roll, Crossover actually widened 3bp while Main tightened 5bp. The same pattern was visible for cash bonds where HY bonds widened around 10bp while IG bonds tightened 6bp. Issuance volume was relatively normal, but issuance of HY bonds was quite high, which is a testimony to the solid sentiment in the market despite the muted spread performance. For Q1 overall, it is noteworthy that funding costs – which have been more or less unchanged since Q3-22 – saw the first meaningful decline in more than a year. Though all-in funding costs remain very high compared to recent years, this development should be supportive for corporates.

Equities

Global equities experienced another robust month in March, but dynamics are shifting as the risk of overheating infiltrates the investment narrative. An excessively hot economy would sideline central banks, enforcing ongoing tight monetary policies, mirroring the scenario observed for most of Q3 last year. Historically, this translates to energy and materials emerging as relative winners, with long-duration growth stocks and small caps lagging. We caution against excessive negativity, as the primary issue appears to be data slightly hotter than anticipated. Equity markets tend to stall or modestly decline when yields surge too swiftly due to brighter growth prospects.

FX. Sorted spot returns vs EUR



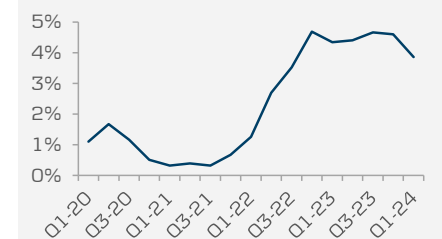
Past performance is not a reliable indicator of current or future results. Source: Macrobond Financial

More stability in yields



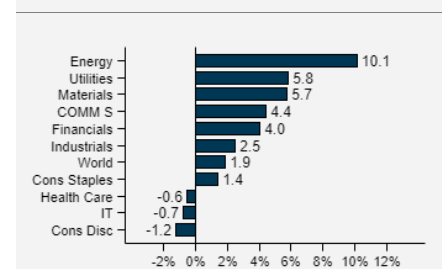
Past performance is not a reliable indicator of current or future results. Source: Danske Bank

Lower average funding cost for BBB-rated entities



Past performance is not a reliable indicator of current or future results. Source: Bloomberg

Sector performance last month



Past performance is not a reliable indicator of current or future results. Source: Macrobond Financial

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Macroeconomic forecast

Macro forecast. Scandinavia

	Year	GDP ¹	Private cons. ¹	Public cons. ¹	Fixed inv. ¹	Ex-ports ¹	Im-ports ¹	Infla-tion ¹	Wage growth ¹	Unem-ploym ²	Public budget ³	Public debt ³	Current acc. ³
Denmark	2023	1.9	1.0	0.0	-5.0	13.4	8.6	3.3	4.1	2.8	3.5	29.7	13.2
	2024	2.1	2.2	1.3	-1.9	8.8	6.3	2.0	5.3	3.0	1.9	28.0	12.5
	2025	2.0	1.7	1.8	2.4	1.9	1.7	1.9	3.6	3.1	1.1	26.7	12.5
Sweden	2023	0.2	-2.5	1.8	-1.2	3.7	-0.6	8.6	3.8	7.7	-0.4	29.0	5.8
	2024	1.5	1.7	0.7	-0.5	3.0	2.9	2.5	3.3	8.3	-0.8	30.0	5.9
	2025	2.0	2.4	1.5	2.7	3.2	3.8	1.0	2.5	8.1	-0.8	30.0	5.6
Norway	2023	1.1	-0.7	3.6	0.3	1.4	0.7	5.5	5.3	1.8	-	-	-
	2024	1.1	1.3	2.0	4.0	3.5	1.5	3.8	4.7	2.3	-	-	-
	2025	2.1	2.5	1.6	4.0	2.0	1.8	2.0	3.5	2.5	-	-	-

Macro forecast. Euroland

	Year	GDP ¹	Private cons. ¹	Public cons. ¹	Fixed inv. ¹	Ex-ports ¹	Im-ports ¹	Infla-tion ¹	Wage growth ¹	Unem-ploym ²	Public budget ³	Public debt ³	Current acc. ³
Euro area	2023	0.5	0.6	0.7	1.4	-0.9	-1.4	5.4	4.5	6.5	-3.2	90.6	2.5
	2024	0.5	0.7	0.9	1.8	1.2	1.9	2.4	4.3	6.6	-2.9	89.9	2.0
	2025	1.3	1.5	1.0	1.2	2.9	3.1	2.1	3.4	6.6	-2.7	89.0	2.0
Finland	2023	-1.0	0.4	4.5	-4.2	-1.7	-7.1	6.3	4.2	7.2	-2.7	75.8	-1.4
	2024	-0.4	0.2	0.1	-1.5	-2.0	-1.0	2.0	3.5	7.9	-3.6	78.0	-0.4
	2025	1.9	1.2	0.2	4.0	3.0	2.5	1.6	2.5	7.4	-2.8	78.7	0.0

Macro forecast. Global

	Year	GDP ¹	Private cons. ¹	Public cons. ¹	Fixed inv. ¹	Ex-ports ¹	Im-ports ¹	Infla-tion ¹	Wage growth ¹	Unem-ploym ²	Public budget ³	Public debt ³	Current acc. ³
USA	2023	2.5	2.2	4.1	0.6	2.6	-1.7	4.1	4.3	3.6	-5.8	124.6	-3.0
	2024	2.0	1.6	3.5	2.1	2.3	2.8	3.0	3.2	3.9	-5.8	126.8	-2.8
	2025	1.4	1.1	2.0	3.6	2.9	4.4	2.5	2.5	4.2	-5.8	128.6	-2.6
China	2023	5.2	6.6	-	4.6	-	-	0.2	-	5.2	-7.1	83.0	1.5
	2024	4.5	5.5	-	3.8	-	-	0.7	-	5.2	-7.0	87.4	1.4
	2025	4.5	5.5	-	3.8	-	-	1.5	-	5.2	-7.3	91.8	1.1
UK	2023	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	7.3	-	4.0	-	-	-
	2024	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	2.5	-	4.5	-	-	-
	2025	1.0	-	-	-	-	-	1.9	-	4.9	-	-	-

Source: OECD and Danske Bank. 1) % y/y. 2) % of labour force. 3) % of GDP.

Financial forecast

Bond and money markets

		Key interest rate	3m interest rate	2-yr swap yield	10-yr swap yield	Currency vs EUR	Currency vs USD	Currency vs DKK	Currency vs NOK	Currency vs SEK
USD*	03-Apr	5.50	-	4.64	4.02	0.92	-	6.89	10.75	10.66
	+3m	5.25	-	4.21	3.90	0.92	-	6.84	10.73	10.46
	+6m	5.00	-	3.98	3.90	0.93	-	6.96	11.21	10.84
	+12m	4.50	-	3.80	3.90	0.95	-	7.10	11.52	10.95
EUR	03-Apr	4.00	3.85	3.16	2.68	-	1.08	7.4594	11.63	11.53
	+3m	3.75	3.62	3.02	2.65	-	1.09	7.4550	11.70	11.40
	+6m	3.50	3.42	2.77	2.65	-	1.07	7.4500	12.00	11.60
	+12m	3.00	2.95	2.50	2.65	-	1.05	7.4500	12.10	11.50
JPY	03-Apr	0.10	-	-	-	0.006	0.007	4.54	7.08	7.02
	+3m	0.10	-	-	-	0.006	0.007	4.72	7.40	7.21
	+6m	0.20	-	-	-	0.007	0.007	4.87	7.84	7.58
	+12m	0.20	-	-	-	0.007	0.007	5.07	8.23	7.82
GBP*	03-Apr	5.25	-	4.44	3.78	1.17	1.08	8.70	13.56	13.45
	+3m	5.00	-	4.32	3.70	1.14	1.24	8.47	13.30	12.95
	+6m	4.75	-	4.12	3.70	1.12	1.20	8.37	13.48	13.03
	+12m	4.50	-	3.90	3.70	1.12	1.18	8.37	13.60	12.92
CHF	03-Apr	1.50	-	-	-	1.02	1.10	7.61	11.86	11.76
	+3m	1.25	-	-	-	1.02	1.11	7.61	11.94	11.63
	+6m	1.00	-	-	-	1.03	1.10	7.68	12.37	11.96
	+12m	0.50	-	-	-	1.04	1.09	7.76	12.60	11.98
DKK	03-Apr	3.60	3.83	3.27	2.82	0.134	0.145	-	1.56	1.55
	+3m	3.35	3.55	3.20	2.85	0.134	0.146	-	1.57	1.53
	+6m	3.10	3.30	2.95	2.85	0.134	0.144	-	1.61	1.56
	+12m	2.60	2.80	2.65	2.85	0.134	0.141	-	1.62	1.54
SEK	03-Apr	4.00	4.02	3.27	2.76	0.087	0.094	0.65	1.01	-
	+3m	3.75	3.87	2.81	2.80	0.088	0.096	0.65	1.03	-
	+6m	3.50	3.61	2.69	2.86	0.086	0.092	0.64	1.03	-
	+12m	3.00	3.15	2.50	2.90	0.087	0.091	0.65	1.05	-
NOK	03-Apr	4.50	4.78	4.53	3.85	0.086	0.093	0.64	-	0.99
	+3m	4.50	4.65	4.25	3.70	0.085	0.093	0.64	-	0.97
	+6m	4.25	4.30	3.95	3.65	0.083	0.089	0.62	-	0.97
	+12m	3.75	3.80	3.70	3.60	0.083	0.087	0.62	-	0.95

*Notes: GBP swaps are SONIA, USD swaps are SOFR

Commodities

	03-Apr	2023				2024				Average	
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2023	2024
ICE Brent	89	82	78	86	83	82	85	80	80	82	82

Source Danske Bank

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