



Salaries of social workers in Europe

REPORT

POLISH FEDERATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS AND
SOCIAL SERVICE EMPLOYEES UNIONS



■ Polska Federacja Związkowa [O]
Pracowników Socjalnych i Pomocy Społecznej

„We help those who help”

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Polish Federation of Social Workers and Social Service Employees Unions

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Introduction

This report on the level of remuneration of social workers in Europe was produced on the initiative of the Federation of Polish Social Workers' Union (PFZPSiPS) in co-operation with the International Federation of Social Workers – Europe Region (IFSW). The survey was conducted in 2019, taking into account the level of salaries for 2019. The aim of the survey was to compare the level of salaries of social workers in Europe, as well as to answer the question concerning, among other things, the financial recognition of social workers in individual countries. The amount of remuneration is one of the elements influencing the level of prestige of the profession and its social approval.

The motive for undertaking this study was the worrying analysis of the remuneration of social workers carried out by researchers of working conditions and safety of social workers (Dunajska et al., 2016). These studies noted that, for the most part, the social workers surveyed were dissatisfied with their salaries. Less than 10% of the respondents described them as good or very good. Moreover, when comparing the average salary in the public sector to the salary of social workers, the authors conclude that they are a disadvantaged group. This situation motivated members of the Polish Federation of Social Workers and Social Service Employees Unions to take steps that would support the process of professionalisation by, among other things, applying for higher salaries. It is difficult to find research on the earnings of social workers in an international comparative perspective in literature on the subject. Existing studies are dedicated to country-specific analyses (Jin, 2013; Pedersen, 2016) or to gender-specific income inequalities (Koeske & Krowinski, 2004). Our study attempts to fill this gap and explain potential disparities.

The survey was quantitative in nature and was carried out using the questionnaire method. An electronic questionnaire form was sent to individual IFSW member organisations. It contained 5 questions concerning: 1) the minimum and 2) the average level of earnings of social workers in a given country, 3) the minimum and 4) the average salary of all employees employed in the country, and 5) the range of additional benefits offered to social workers in the course of their profession. IFSW member organisations presented the remuneration figures in Euros (€) and, in the case of countries where another currency is used, a conversion based on the average exchange rate on the day of completing the survey.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the amount of wages in force in a given country after the payment of compulsory levies, e.g. in the form of taxes, social security contributions, etc. In this way, the impact of differences in various tax and pension systems on the data presented was minimised. In addition, it should be stressed that not all countries in which the survey was conducted have introduced a guaranteed minimum wage, and consequently, the level of the minimum wage is determined, for example, in the course of direct negotiations conducted for individual industries (professions).

Although it was not possible to avoid all doubts about the differences in remuneration systems, in particular with regard to wage differentiation according to the job position and the place of employment, the report is the first and, in our view, an important attempt to answer questions about the income situation of social workers in Europe.

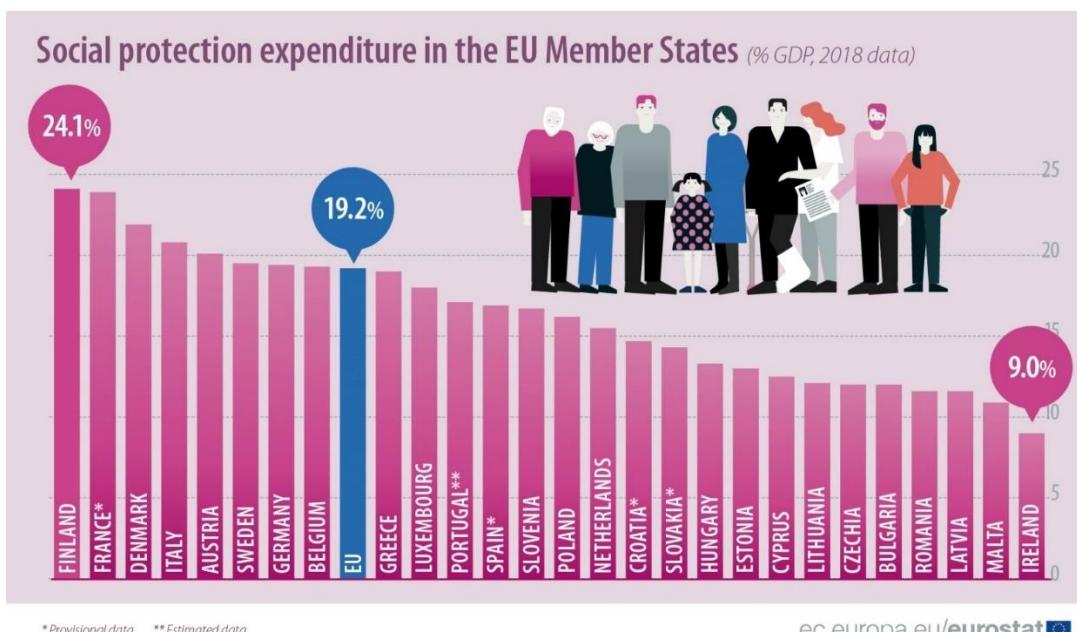
The survey takes into account completed and submitted questionnaires from 16 European countries and the borderlands of Europe and Asia.

The situation in Armenia was identified by a local organisation on the basis of their own survey carried out in 2016-2017.

Armenia (AR), Belarus (BY), Bulgaria (BG), The United Kingdom (not England) (UK), England, Finland (FI), France (FR), Greece (GR), Spain (ES), Iceland (IS), Germany (DE), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Turkey (TR), Hungary (HU) i Italy (IT)

1. The level of remuneration of social workers in the countries studied.

The level of remuneration of social workers in the individual countries under study varies considerably and depends on many factors, the discussion of which exceeds the framework of this report. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the background to the problem of salaries, which is the general level of expenditure incurred in the above countries for per capita social assistance. According to Eurostat data from 2018 (more recent data has not been published) – the **largest expenditure** on the above mentioned aid in the European Union (EU) countries and selected other countries covered by this report was incurred, in order, by Finland, France, Italy and Germany. Slightly **below the European average** (EU-28) in the above-mentioned expenditure were Greece, the United Kingdom (data for the UK from 2016), Portugal, Spain and Iceland (data for IS from 2016). The **lowest level of financing of social services** was recorded in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey (data for TR from 2016).

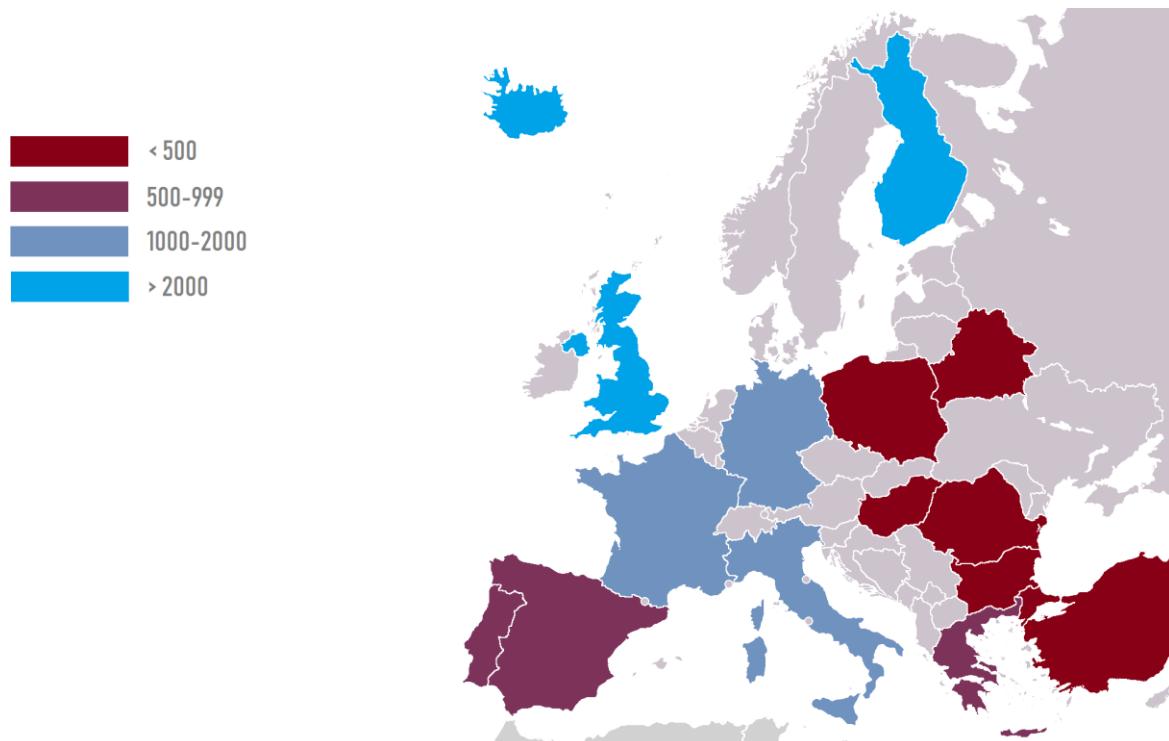


Source: Eurostat

If we compare the above data with the minimum and average salaries of social workers in the above mentioned countries, we can see that only a part of them are mapping the general trend towards financing social policy objectives. Thus, the highest net **minimum**

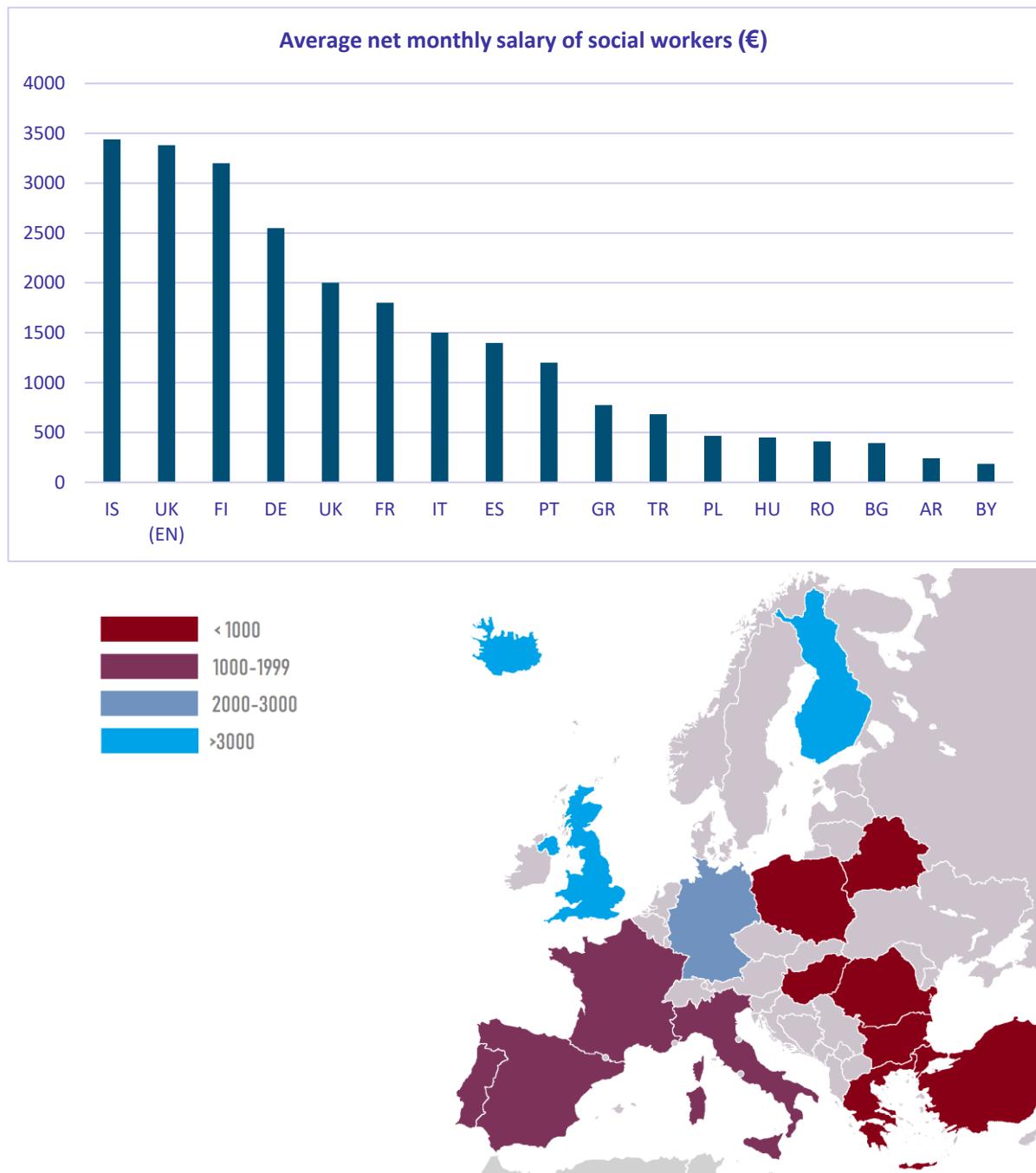
salaries, i.e. over € 2,000 (€) per month, are paid to social workers from Finland, Iceland and the UK (including England). The minimum salaries between €1,000 and €2,000 are available to social workers from Italy, Germany and France. A lower salary of between €500 and € 999 is foreseen in Spain, Portugal and Greece. Workers are sentenced to less than €500 of a minimum wage in Turkey, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Belarus and Armenia.

Figure 2 Minimum wage of a social worker



If we consider the **average net monthly salary** of social workers – the group of countries with the highest salary **above 3000€** is again Iceland, England and Finland. Average salaries between **€2000 and €3000** can be counted on by the employees of Germany and Great Britain (except England). Average salaries of between **€1,000 and €2,000** are paid in France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. The group with the worst paid social workers in terms of average salary (**below 1000€**) is again: Greece, Turkey, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Armenia and Belarus.

Figure 3 Average net monthly salary of social workers



Taking into account the different level of financing of social objectives in individual countries mentioned at the beginning of the report – compared to the level of salaries (minimum and average) offered on a national level for social workers – only **in the case of countries with the lowest social service inputs, it is also possible to speak clearly of the lowest level of salaries of these workers**. In countries such as Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey, where the overall level of expenditure on social assistance is significantly lower than the European average, the lowest level of salaries of social workers is also noticeable. This dependence, which may only appear to be superficial, cannot be seen in the case of countries with high and close to average social spending. So there are countries such as Iceland and the United Kingdom, which, although they spend slightly below the European average on social services, pay their social workers quite clearly more than other countries. There are also countries like France, Germany and Italy, whose social spending is higher, but this trend can no longer be seen in the remuneration levels of social workers themselves. From the point of view of employees and the aid system as a whole, the Finnish model is similar to the most complete one, where both the aid expenditure and the salaries of social workers are among the highest among the countries studied.

The above mentioned data also shows that the dividing line in the remuneration paid to social workers runs regionally – the best-paid workers are those from the north and west of Europe, the lowest are workers from the east and south of Europe.

2. The income situation of social workers in individual countries.

A comparison of just the amounts of remuneration received, without taking into account other variables such as the economic situation, the level and the cost of living in a given country – does not reflect the actual income situation of social workers compared to other working citizens in that country. For the purpose of this analysis, it was therefore decided to relate the average wage of social workers to the guaranteed minimum wage and the average wage of workers in all fields of employment in each country. In this way, it will be possible to get closer to the answer to the question of the real income status of social workers and their professional and financial recognition among all working people.

Two coefficients have therefore been distinguished, allowing for a reliable, though not ideal, assessment of the place and level of remuneration of social workers in relation to actual earning opportunities in the countries studied:

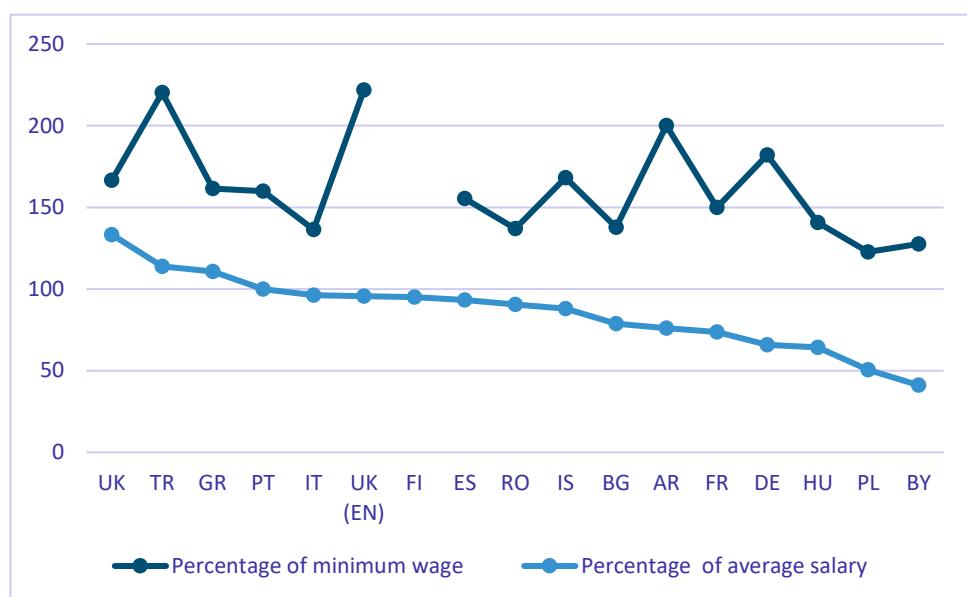
First of all, the average salary of social workers was compared with the minimum wage in force in the analysed country. The value of the examined proportion was expressed as a percentage (%) and was marked P(MIN). Thus, the higher the indicated percentage P(MIN) is and the more it exceeds 100% the more it must be accepted that the income situation related to the social worker's remuneration is better in a given country, because the real level of the average salary paid to the social worker is different from the minimum and worst paid professions.

Secondly, the amount of the average salary of social workers was compared with the amount of the average salary calculated in a given country for all employees. The value marked as P(MAX) is also given as a percentage (%) and just as in the case of the previous rate, the higher this rate, the better the income situation of the employee compared to other occupations. This means that the salary of a social worker is close to or exceeds the value of the average salary for all employees in the particular countries under analysis.

Table 1 Percentage of the average salary of social workers in relation to the minimum wage and average wage of all employees (%)

CODE	Percentage of minimum wage – P(MIN)	Percentage of average salary – P(MAX)
UK	166.66	133.33
TR	220.32	113.83
GR	161.45	110.71
PT	160	100
IT	136.36	96.15
UK (EN)	221.85	95.58
FI		95.01
ES	155.44	93.26
RO	137	90.52
IS	168.11	87.9
BG	137.76	78.8
AR	200	75.94
FR	150	73.71
DE	182.14	65.72
HU	140.62	64.28
PL	122.69	50.48
BY	127.58	41.11

Figure 4 Percentage of the average salary of social workers in relation to the minimum wage and average wage of all employees (%)



Finland, which did not provide the data necessary for the analysis, is not included in the above mentioned compilation of the relation between the average wage of a social worker and the minimum wage in the country concerned.

Nevertheless, it follows from the above mentioned data that the **worst income situation** of social workers in comparison with the all employees occurs respectively in Belarus, Poland and Hungary. In the first two countries social workers can count on only about 120% of the minimum wage, but at the same time only on less than 50% of the average wage for all industries.

In the vast majority of the countries surveyed, social workers do not reach the average salary of all employees, but among them there are such countries as England (UK-EN), Finland, Spain, Iceland, Armenia, France and Germany, where they do not come close to the minimum wage, which could indicate a **stable income situation** of employed social workers.

In countries such as Italy, Romania and Bulgaria, on the other hand, average salaries of social workers **balance between the minimum wage and the average salary**, but their value is rather close to the threshold (border) of the worse financial situation of social workers.

Only in 4 of the countries included can social workers count on wages at or above the national average level. These are Portugal, Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom (UK). In these countries, the average salary of a social worker is also well above the minimum wage. Although the income situation of these social workers seems to be **the most favourable and the position in employment and pay is the strongest**, it should not be forgotten that in Turkey and Greece, but also in Armenia, the salaries themselves are among the lowest in Europe.

3. Additional benefits offered to social workers in the framework of their profession.

In some of the countries included, social workers can expect certain benefits, including financial ones, in addition to remuneration. However, the organisations participating in the survey indicate that the benefits vary and depend, among other things, on the place of employment, the agreements made and the number of hours worked. The benefits indicated by the organisations are listed below.

Table 2 Benefits

CODE	Benefits
UK	None
TR	20-100€
GR	None
PT	Allowance for meals
IT	Nothing significant
UK (EN)	None
FI	Depends on the place of employment
ES	Allowance for meals and transport, but it depends on agreement
RO	None
IS	None
BG	100€
AR	Depends on the place of employment
FR	None
DE	None
HU	50€
PL	48€
BY	None

4. Summary and conclusions.

The analysis of the collected data made it possible to observe several interesting trends and phenomena in the area of wage differences of social workers in the analysed countries. It should be noted, however, that the analysis is based on data declared by the respondents and does not apply to all European countries.

First of all, **the social security expenditure reviewed by Eurostat does not confirm the perhaps intuitive thesis about the relationship between the level of funding of the social security system and the salaries of social workers.** A small number of countries confirm this thesis while in most cases the link is not visible.

Secondly, taking into account the average monthly salaries and minimum monthly wages of social workers in the countries studied, it is possible to formulate **a thesis with significant ranges and as a result categories of countries in view of the level of financing of social workers.** Four groups of countries can be distinguished according to the level of funding.

When the minimum wage is taken, the groups are:

- Finland, Iceland and the United Kingdom;
- Italy, Germany and France;
- Spain, Portugal and Greece;
- Turkey, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Belarus and Armenia.

When the average salary is taken, the situation declared by the respondents is as follows:

- Finland, Iceland and England (not the UK);
- The United Kingdom (not England) and Germany;
- Italy, Spain, France and Portugal;
- Greece, Turkey, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Belarus and Armenia.

As a result of the analyses, a certain trend can be observed in the funding of social workers, the amount of which is related to social security expenditure only in the countries where it is highest, i.e. Finland, Iceland and the UK. **In the case of low expenditure on social security, there is a low level of wages of social workers.** Thus, we can observe countries such as Iceland and the United Kingdom, which spend slightly

below the average European budget on social benefits but pay their social workers much better. There are also countries such as France, Germany and Italy, whose social expenditure is admittedly higher, but this trend can no longer be seen in the remuneration of social workers themselves.

One of the clues to explaining the differences in funding levels could be Gosta Esping-Andersen's (2010) theory about caring regimes, which identifies the differences in the functioning of welfare states, among others, at the level of "decommodifying" access to social benefits and services, the impact of social benefits and services on changing existing social divisions and the relationship between the state and the market. Esping-Andersen's typology assumes the existence of three "regimes" which to some extent may explain the observed differences in the level of earnings of social workers. Let us recall that the Scandinavian countries are part of social democratic regimes, which are characterised by extensive social care and declared and actually implemented high living standards, supporting the improvement of the quality and quantity of benefits as well as raising the quality of social services. The results of the study confirm the rule that says the level of benefits also depends on employees' salaries. On the other hand, the United Kingdom turns out to be an exception, indicated as an example of a liberal model in the Esping-Andersen typology. Here, not very high social spending does not go hand in hand with salary levels, which are among the top countries. On the other hand, countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain, France and Portugal, which belong to the conservative model, implement the postulate of preserving the existing differences in social structure and are characterised by the fact that state authorities are ready to replace the market in exceptional cases, mainly relying on state social insurance.

Central and Eastern European countries deserve a separate category, which in turn are characterised by 'emergency', a feature of the unrealised welfare state project in these countries (Inglot, 2009). The lowest level of social security expenditure in the CEE countries can be explained by the historical heritage of the welfare state, which in this case is related to the political transformation after the fall of communism (Inglot, 2011). **Unfortunately, it seems that this 'emergency' continues to this day, as indirectly demonstrated by the salaries of social workers.**

Thirdly, the part of the study comparing the average salary of a social worker with the minimum wage in a given country has documented that **the worst income situation of social workers in comparison with all employees occurs respectively in Belarus, Poland**

and Hungary. In the first two countries, social workers can count on only about 120% of the minimum wage, but at the same time only on less than 50% of the average salary for all industries.

It seems that the weakness of the welfare state of Central and Eastern Europe lies not only in the application of a 'emergency' strategy in solving social problems by means of ad-hoc benefits in post-transformation conditions, but also in the lack of perspective for building professional social services staff based on a fair salary. This is, as can be seen, a feature of the entire Central and Eastern European region.

The study bears witness to the problem of low funding of social services, in this case the salaries of social workers. The differences in the development of salaries in this professional group are not only influenced by the economic situation, but also, as we believe, in reference to the Esping-Andersen theory and the concept of Tomasz Inglot's "historical heritage", by historical, social and ideological conditions. Therefore, it may seem that the study has triggered more questions than answers.

For the future, it will be important to obtain as far as possible even more complete data from all European countries, as well as to take into account indicators that correlate with the level of salaries of social workers, so that somewhat more accurate and reliable explanations can be formulated. It may be useful to use the measure of money purchasing power.

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