



European Pillar of Social Rights Addressing Nurses Salary in Europe

The aim of this document is to provide readers with an overview of the state of nurses' salaries across Europe, and the importance of addressing this issue at the EU level. It aims at making the [article 6 \(wages\) of the European Pillar of Social Rights](#) a reality for the nursing profession. The level at which nurses are remunerated is one of the key factors affecting their job satisfaction and the attractiveness of the profession. Nurses are the single largest professional group delivering health and social care, and their salary represents a significant part of the health and social ecosystems budget and is thus a contentious policy topic across countries in Europe.

Back in 2018, the EFN conducted a mapping among its members in relation to nurses' salaries in comparison to professions with the same educational level (e.g. police officers, teachers, physiotherapists, social workers). Thirty EFN members gave data for comparison.

The findings reported in this document are a snapshot in time and a first level analysis of data. The main thrust behind this survey is not to compare between countries, but to find trends within the data that can inform policy discussions at national and European levels. It is important to note that nurses across Europe work in different working conditions not only between the same professions but in relation to the professions that this report attend to compare. Even though nursing is predominately a female profession and gender issues arise in nursing reimbursement, this report is not intended to address this issue.

Starting salaries:

- Nurse/Police officer: comparing the available data on the starting salary of these two professions, a balanced situation is observed, with some EU Member States that foresee a higher starting salary for police officers and others where a newly graduated general care nurse earns more.
- Nurse/Teacher: differences are identified across countries in the starting salary of these two. In the majority of countries, the initial salary of a nurse is lower.
- Nurse/physiotherapist: the starting salaries for the two professions are comparable. However, in the instances where there is a difference, the most prominent gap is registered in favour of the physiotherapists.
- Nurse/social care worker: among the 24 countries that submitted data on this, it was possible to observe that in 10 cases the starting salary of a newly graduated nurse is higher and in 9 countries where social care workers' salary is higher, the gap is more significant.
- There are countries in which the salaries of entry-level nurses are very low and with little prospect for growth. This has a negative impact on the attractiveness of the profession. This translated into the nursing shortages that most countries are experiencing. In some countries, these shortages are very severe.

The difference in nurses' salary growth according to work experience:

To assess the importance and the support provided by governments and employers to the nursing profession, it is crucial to observe how the general care nurses' salary grows with experience. Among the 30 countries considered, almost all of them observed a salary increase over time, although at very different degrees. The conclusions are the following:

- In one country the increase is significantly higher and in two countries the salary does not increase meaningfully in the considered 15 years-time.
- In several countries, during the first three years in the nursing profession, the salary of a general care nurse does not increase and in six countries the increase in salary in the first 3 years is less than one euro.
- Examination of nurses' salary growth across countries suggests that some countries are more aligned in their remuneration policies compared to others. There are similarities in terms of actual yearly salary value and similarities in terms of percentage increase.

The difference between the salary growth of nurses and other professions:

Taking as reference the main four professions analysed above it is obvious that although the general care nurse's salary increases in the first three years; such **increase often does not translate into a match of the initial remuneration of other professions.**

In most of the cases analysed, the **three-years' experience salary of nurses remains lower than the basic starting salary of the other professions.**

Similarly, looking at teachers' salary, it is possible to establish that in most of the countries, **nurses' salary increase in three years was not sufficient to level up the initial remuneration of teachers.** This trend is present also when comparing the increase of a nurse's salary in three years to the basic starting salary of a physiotherapy and a social care worker, but to a lesser extent.

Additionally, this conclusion can also be drawn looking at how nurses' salaries grow in 15-years and the data available for the other professions. In effect, it is possible to observe that in the long-run nurses do experience an increase in their salary which in some cases is higher than other professions, but, a higher **increase in the salary does not necessarily corresponds to a higher or equal final salary and on average; nurses' salaries remain lower than other professions.**

The difference in nurses' unsocial hours payment across countries in Europe:

Regarding the unsocial hours payment, differs widely across the countries analysed.

- Some countries tend to pay unsocial hours with a percentage of 25%, 50%, 125% or 150% per hour of hourly wages which may differ according to the type of unsocial hours (weekend, night shifts, public holidays). Most of countries provide fixed amounts or follow a specific formula.
- There are cases in which countries measure nurses' average salary including the compensation some nurses receive for working overtime, nightshifts or weekend-shifts. Hence, the real average wage under normal conditions is smaller.
- Overall, there is great variability in nurses' unsocial hours payment practices across countries in Europe hindering clear comparisons.
- In some countries, the little recognition given to the nursing profession by the national governments foster the tendency of salary stagnation over time. Sometimes, this salaries' stagnation is justified by national governments in the cut public expending. In those countries in which nurses' salaries actually rise as required, the rises are very insufficient.

The difference in nurses' weekly working hours across countries in Europe:

- The average among the 30 countries analysed is 38.9 hours per week

Statistical cluster analysis of similar country cases:

- Four groupings were identified through the process of hierarchical cluster analysis. The clustering of countries together suggests that there are similarities that deserve a closer inspection and that there are best practices to be shared among countries of different groups.

Conclusion

The comparisons among EFN Members' responses reveal great disparities in Europe that are not straightforward to explain. Even though nurses starting salaries appeared to be on some cases comparable to that of other professions, they seem to experience slower salary progression. And this is a key for experienced nurses who want to stay in the profession.

For the purpose of comparison, the basis salary was used. Furthermore, the data confirms that **despite having a harmonised educational framework for nurses across the EU, nurses' salaries vary significantly and randomly** across the EFN membership. These salary analysis and discussions are at the heart of the recruitment and retention challenges that taunt nurses across Europe.

Future efforts need to focus on unpicking the factors that lead to better and worse salary conditions for the different professions, but firstly on nurses' salary.

National governments should recognise the added value of the nursing profession to the healthcare sector and engage in dialogue with the nurses' representatives in accordance to this document to improve their salaries, working conditions, and to ensure safe levels of staffing delivering good quality care and patient safety. Moreover, national governments often tend to say that healthcare policy is a priority for them, but this is not reflected in the national budgets.

This analysis shows that nurses' wages is a very important topic for the profession. A negotiation must start, from a professional perspective, with the European Commission to strengthen the European Social Pillar of Social Rights, particularly article 6.

Nurse's salary must be equal or greater as graduate professions with the same educational level and grow with experience comparably to the graduate professions.

Moreover, nursing is a predominant female profession which partly explains the discrimination on salaries and career progression. Future studies of nursing salaries across EU countries should take under consideration the status of the nursing work, the issue of gender discrimination and the purchasing power parity of nursing salary in order to give a more precise report.

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