

# **European Federation of Nurses Associations Report on Nurses' Salaries in Europe**



**October 2018**



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# Executive Summary

The level at which nurses are remunerated is one of the key factors affecting their job satisfaction and the attractiveness of the profession. Because nurses are the single largest professional group delivering health and social care, their salary represents a significant spending item in the health and social ecosystems and is thus a contentious policy topic across countries in Europe.

Following discussions at the European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) General Assembly in Brussels 2018, the EFN Members agreed to conduct a survey to determine the general care nurse net salary across European countries, in comparison to related professions such as police officers and teachers. The findings 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 level, especially within the European Social Pillar.

Data were collected through a standard survey approach, utilising a structured electronic questionnaire consisting of four questions. Thirty EFN members submitted data in response to the questionnaire invite. The analysis made use of descriptive statistics, tabulation techniques and statistical cluster analysis. Five key areas of data have been analysed and are discussed in the report: the difference in nurses and other professions' initial salary, at national level; the difference in nurses' salary growth according to their working experience across Europe; the difference in nurses and other professions' salary growth according to their working experience, at national level; the difference in nurses' overtime payment across Europe; and differences in working hours across Europe.

The EFN Members' responses to the questionnaire reveal great disparities among countries in Europe that are not straightforward to compare or explain. The data confirm that despite a harmonised educational framework for nurses across the EU, nurses' salaries vary significantly and randomly across the EFN membership. This questionnaire has made a start at surfacing a complex issue at the heart of the recruitment and retention challenges that taunt nurses across Europe. Governments, policy makers and employers across Europe are aware that recruiting and retaining a highly skilled nursing resource is a priority to deliver safe and

effective quality health care for all citizens across Europe. Closer collaboration among the stronger and weaker performing groups of countries in Europe would make a positive step forward in informing meaningful policy dialogues based on live data from the frontline.

## Summary Report

### 1. Background

The level at which nurses are remunerated is one of the key factors affecting their job satisfaction and the attractiveness of the profession. Because nurses are the single largest professional group delivering health and social care, their salary represents a significant spending item in health and social ecosystems and is thus a contentious policy topic across countries in Europe.

The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) was formed in 1971 and is the independent voice of the nursing profession in Europe. The EFN consists of National Nurses Associations from 35 Countries, working for the benefit of 6 million nurses throughout the European Union (EU) and Europe. The mission of EFN is to strengthen the status and practice of the profession of nursing for the benefit of the health of the citizens and the interests of nurses.

During the EFN General Assembly held in Brussels April 2018, within the framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights discussion, the EFN Workforce Committee reflected on how to collect information on the net wages of nurses in Europe. The EFN Members agreed to conduct a survey to determine the general care nurse net salary across European countries, in comparison to related professions such as police officers and teachers. The main thrust behind this survey is to provide a snapshot in time and it is not to compare between countries, but to find trends within the data that can inform policy discussions.

## 2. Data sources

Data were collected through a standard survey approach, utilising a structured electronic questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of four questions:

1. What is the NET hourly salary for full time employed general care nurses in your country? (newly graduated, three and fifteen years of experience)
2. What are the weekly standards hours for a full time employed general care nurses in your country working in shifts?
3. How much is overtime paid an hour?
4. List the net salary of the professions with the same level of education (police, teacher, physiotherapist, social worker; newly graduated, five and fifteen years qualified)

Note that for the purposes of this questionnaire and the below analysis the ‘salary’ is considered as basic (standard full time working hours per week), **not** including any bonus overtime, allowances, etc. Moreover, the hourly salary quoted is for the current point in time: August 2018. All figures are shown in Euro. This standardisation is introduced to allow identification of trends across countries and help NNAs to reflect on the ‘next step forward’. This data analysis of the NET salary is complementary to many other existing reports collecting GROSS wages data (e.g. ICN, 2018).

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Questionnaire responses

Thirty EFN members submitted data in response to the questionnaire invite. All respondents provided data on nurses’ starting salary, and many also gave information on nurses’ progression after three and fifteen years of employment. Only six respondents could not give

salary information for comparative professions, while other members could give information for some but not other professions. This has been taken into account in the analysis.

The analysis presented below is grouped in the following areas of significant trends:

1. the **difference in nurses and other professions' initial salary, at national level;**
2. the **difference in nurses' salary growth according to their working experience across Europe;**
3. the **difference in nurses and other professions' salary growth according to their working experience, at national level;**
4. the **difference in nurses' overtime payment across Europe;**
5. **working hours across Europe.**

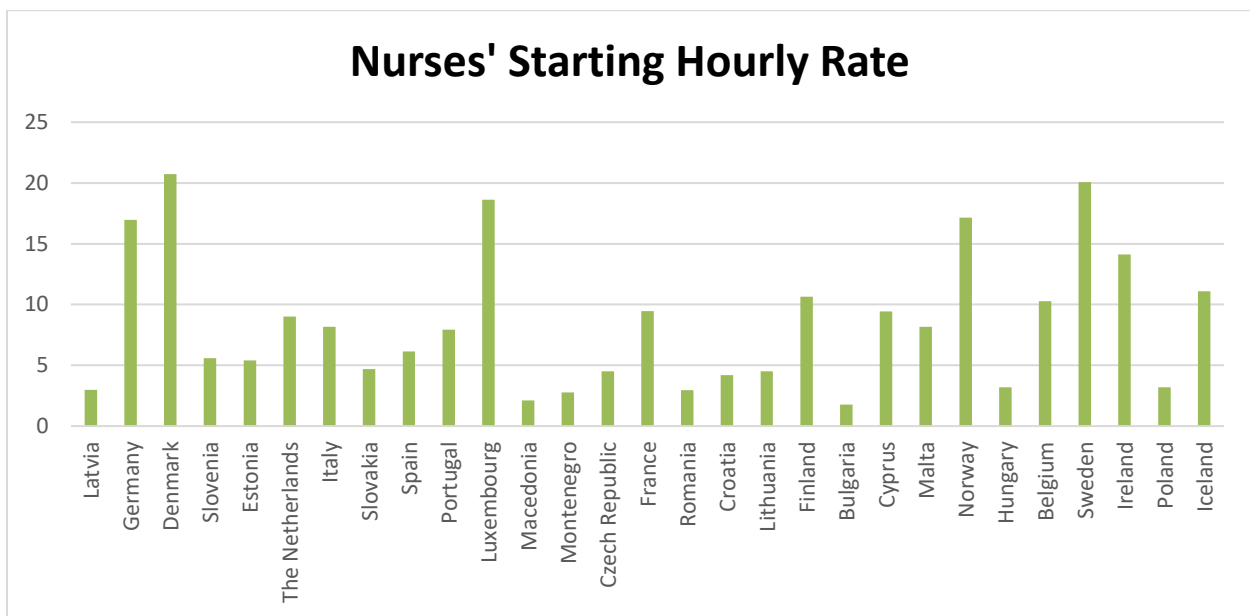
### **3.2 The difference between nurses and other professions' initial salary**

One of the main objectives of the questionnaire was to collect information on the net salaries of nurses, to enable a view on what money nurses have at their disposal to live by, regardless the social security taxes in each Member State. The analysis was not looking into details such as family and marital status but sought to generate a quick general picture of how every day cash money can be used.

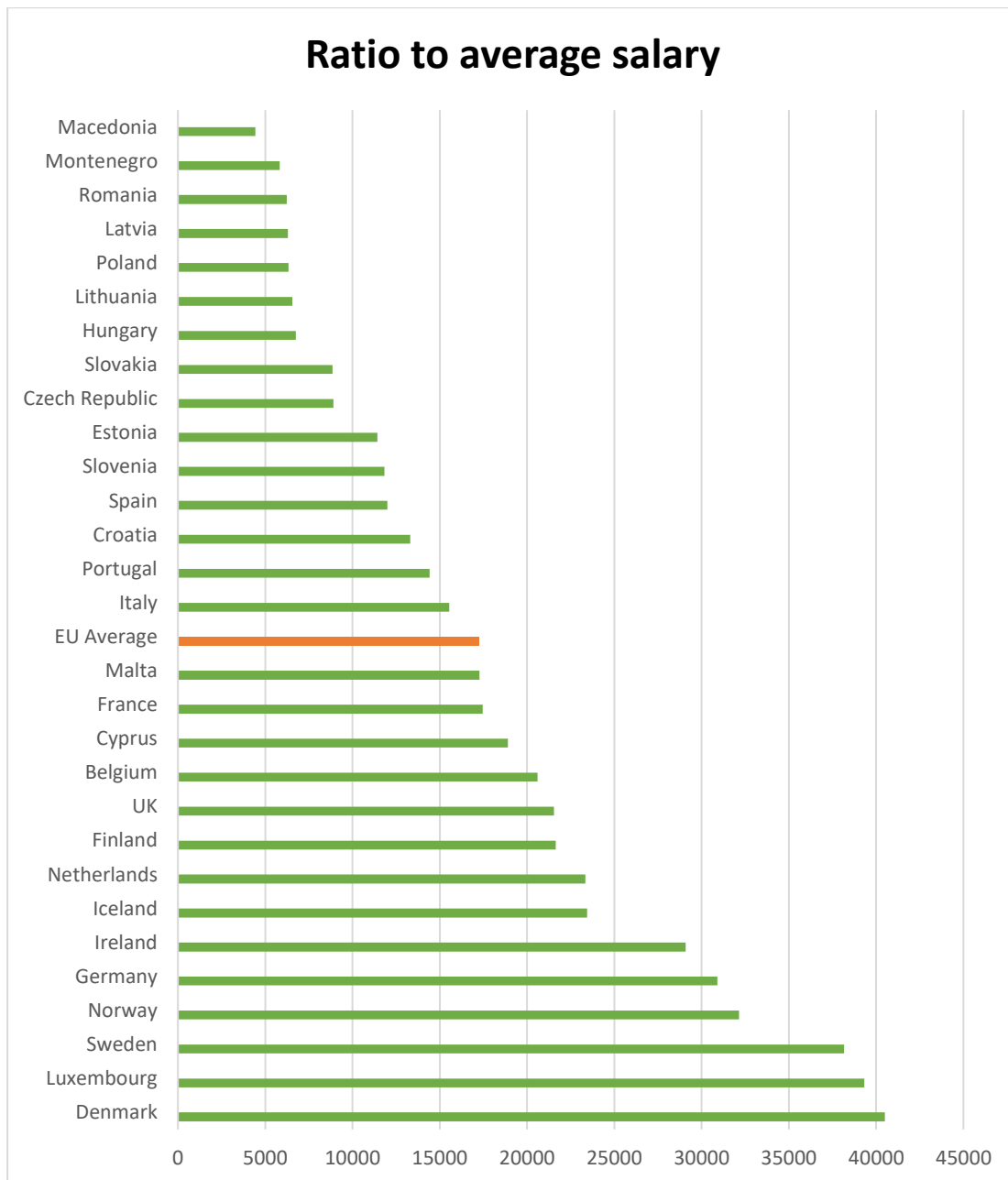
The analysis also compared nurses' salaries to some other professions, mainly those close to nurses, often considered as difficult professions, like police officers and teachers. The comparison among the starting salary of a general care nurse with other professions can help us understand how national governments perceive the importance of nurses in the overall national health and social policy dialogues. It is also an opportunity, based on this analysis, to build alliances with the 'similar' professions, and lobby governments to recognise their difficult positions as profession within major social challenges. Nurses could lead this societal and social dialog based on this 'first level analysis'.

## *Nurses' starting salaries*

The data collected showed a clear **picture of nurses' starting salary**: the situation in Europe is widely varied regarding the initial remuneration of general care nurses. The level of starting salaries is connected to different variables of the national spending systems and to the national average incomes. Interesting insights are noted in looking at nurses' starting hourly rates (seen below) and yearly salary ranked by comparison to the EFN average (seen in the following page).



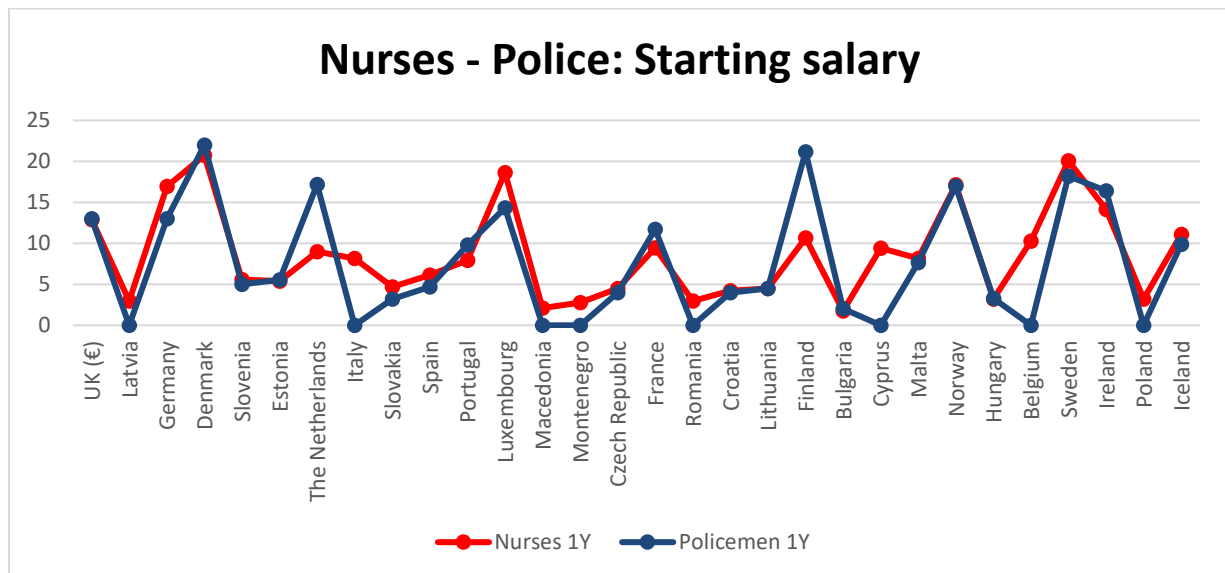




However, if the comparison among the initial salary of nurses across Europe gives a predictable outcome, it is interesting to compare **nurses' net salary to other professions, such as police officers, teachers, physiotherapists and social workers**. The comparison of the starting level remuneration of newly graduate professionals has to take into account the difference in working hours of the different professions; however, some trends can still be identified.

## Nurses vs Police officers

Comparing the available data on the starting salary of a general care nurse to **police officers**, we can observe a balanced situation, with some EU Member States that foresee a higher starting salary for policemen, and others where a newly graduated general care nurse earns more than a policeman. In these countries, the differences between the starting salaries of nurses and police officers are not wide. An exception is identified in Finland, where the starting average monthly wage of a policeman in 2017 was 3542€ (gross) while the salary of a newly graduated general care nurse was 2388.54€ (gross).

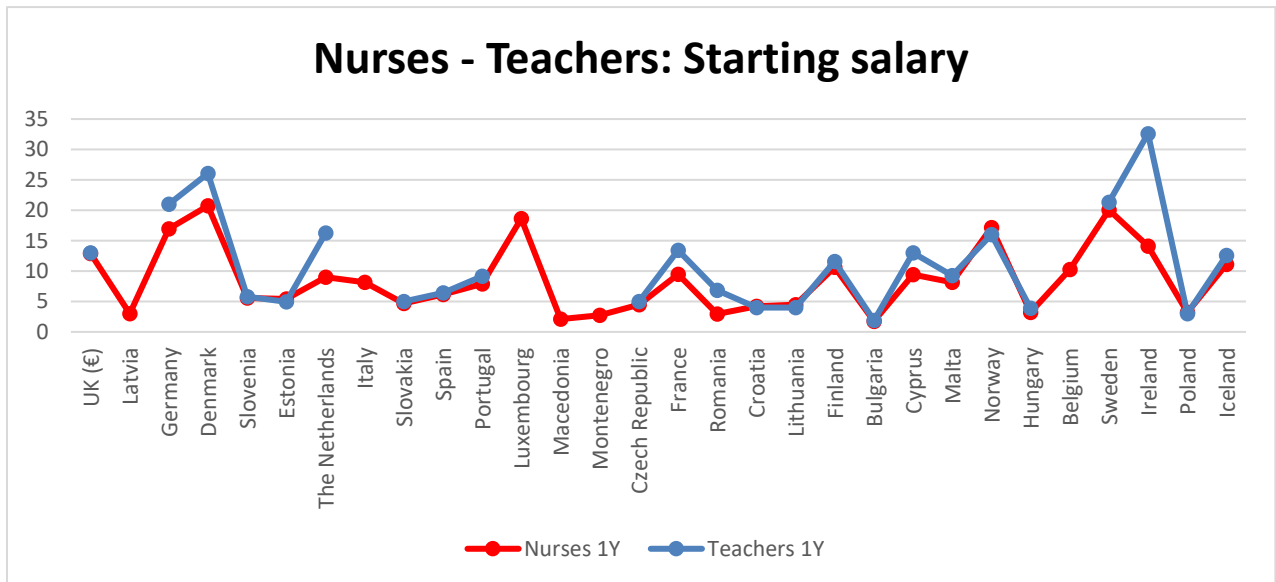


## Nurses vs Teachers

Important differences are identified across countries in the starting salary of **teachers** compared to general care nurses. Looking at the data of 24 countries on these two professions, it is possible to highlight a majority of cases (19) in which the **initial salary of a nurse is lower than a teacher's**, with an average of **2.16€ less per hour**.

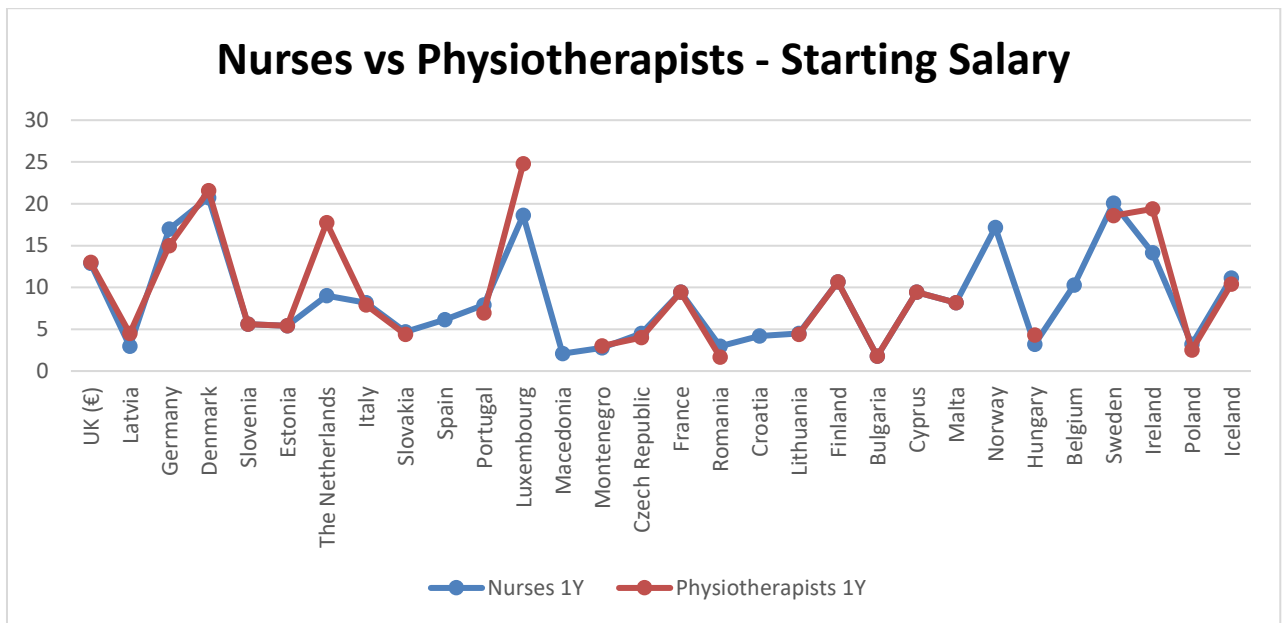
The most evident disparity is visible in Ireland, where a newly graduated general care nurse earns 14.13€ net per hour; that is 18.47€ less than the 32.60€ net earned by a grammar

teacher at the beginning of the career. However, in this specific comparison to teachers' salaries, it is crucial to consider the difference between the two professions in terms of working hours.



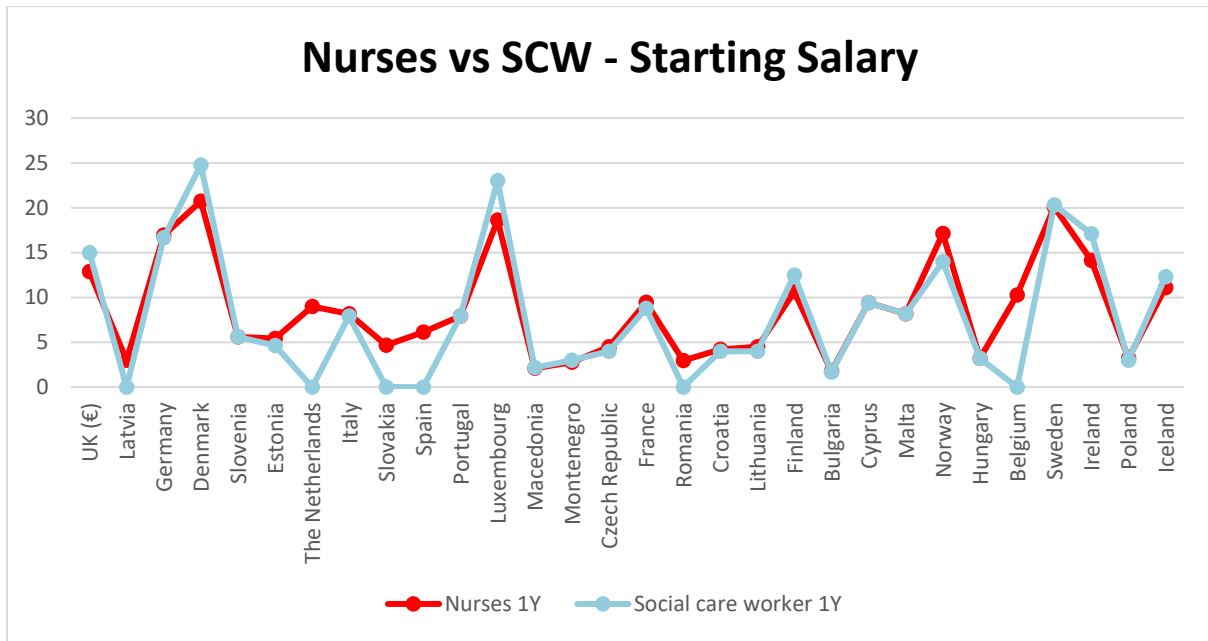
## Nurses vs Physiotherapists

Analysing the differences between the initial salary of a general care nurse and a **physiotherapist**, the available data show that in many of the cases reported (7/25) the starting salaries for the professions are **comparable**. However, it is interesting to note that in the instances where there is a difference, the most prominent gap is registered in favour of the physiotherapists. In Luxembourg, physiotherapists earn 6.5€ per hour more than nurses at starting level (**nurse 18.62€, physiotherapist 24.77€**). In the countries where the starting salary of a nurse is higher than the physiotherapists', the biggest difference is found in Germany, with the gap of about 3€ gross per hour.

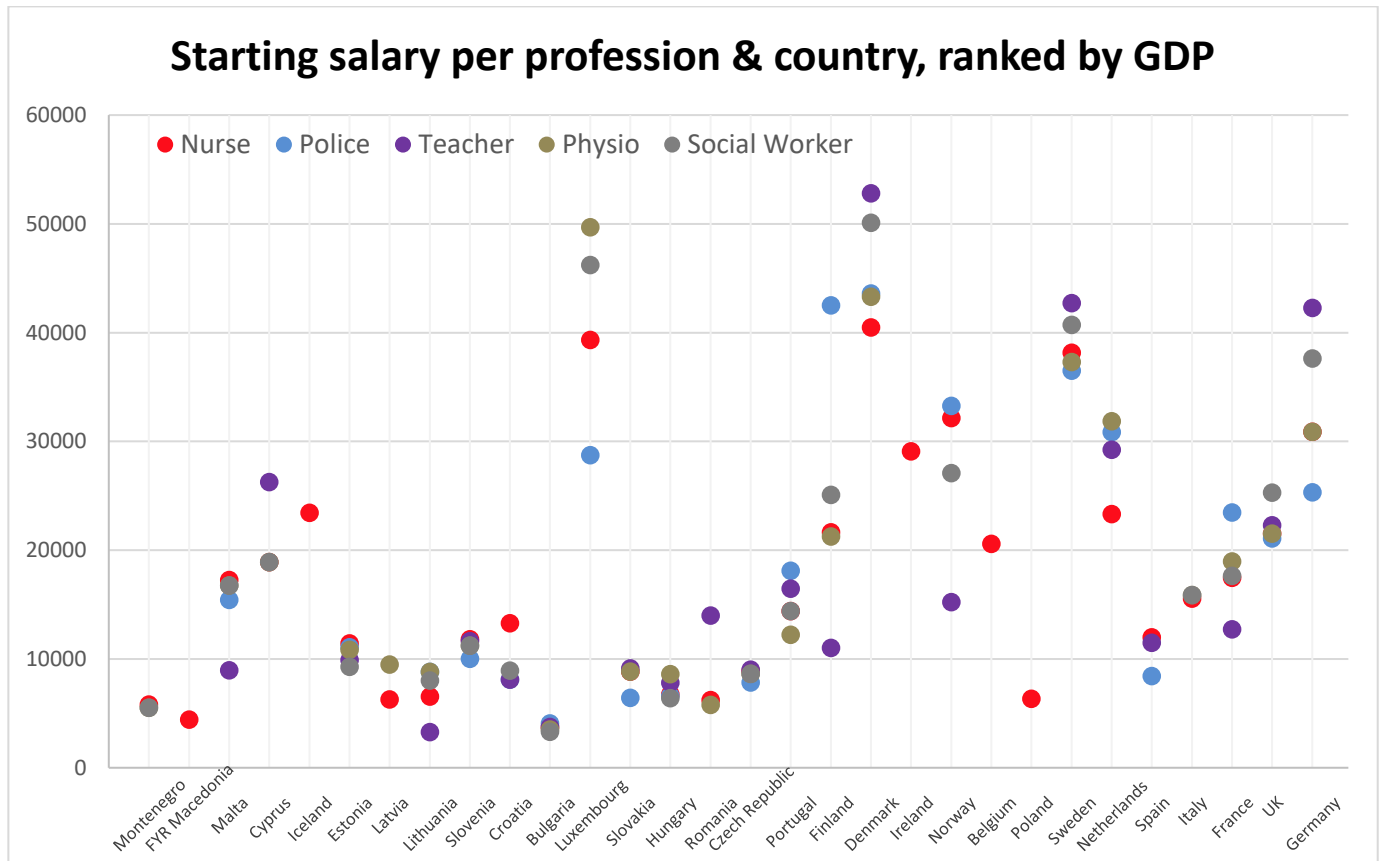


### ***Nurses vs Social workers***

Another interesting comparison is the one with social care workers. 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** than the one of a social care worker, with an average gap of 0.68€ per hour. The most relevant difference is registered in Norway, where a general care nurse earns 3.15€ more per hour compared to the starting salary of a social care worker. Interestingly, in the nine countries where social care workers’ salary is higher, the gap is more significant with an average difference of 1.89€ per hour. The most relevant difference is registered in Luxembourg, where a social care worker in his/her starting salary earns 4.4€ more than a nurse per hour. Finally, in five countries, the salary of two professions is equal.



*Nurses compared to other professions summarised*



As described above, the starting salaries of nurses and other comparable professions vary significantly across countries with no clear reason identified even when taking into account Gross Domestic Product. The four professions discussed above are the ones with most data available for comparison, but other significant results and disparities are observed at specific national level comparing the starting salary of a general care nurse to other professions.

For instance, in Denmark, a newly graduate nurse earns per hour 20.73€, that is 3.04€ less than a **craftsman**, who earns 23.77€ per hour at the beginning of the career.

Interestingly, it has been observed in three other countries (Romania, Slovakia, the Netherlands) from the submitted information on the salaries of **soldiers** that at their initial level receive a higher amount compared to the one of nurses. Likewise, in Romania and the Netherlands, also **firemen** at entry level earn more than a newly graduated nurse.

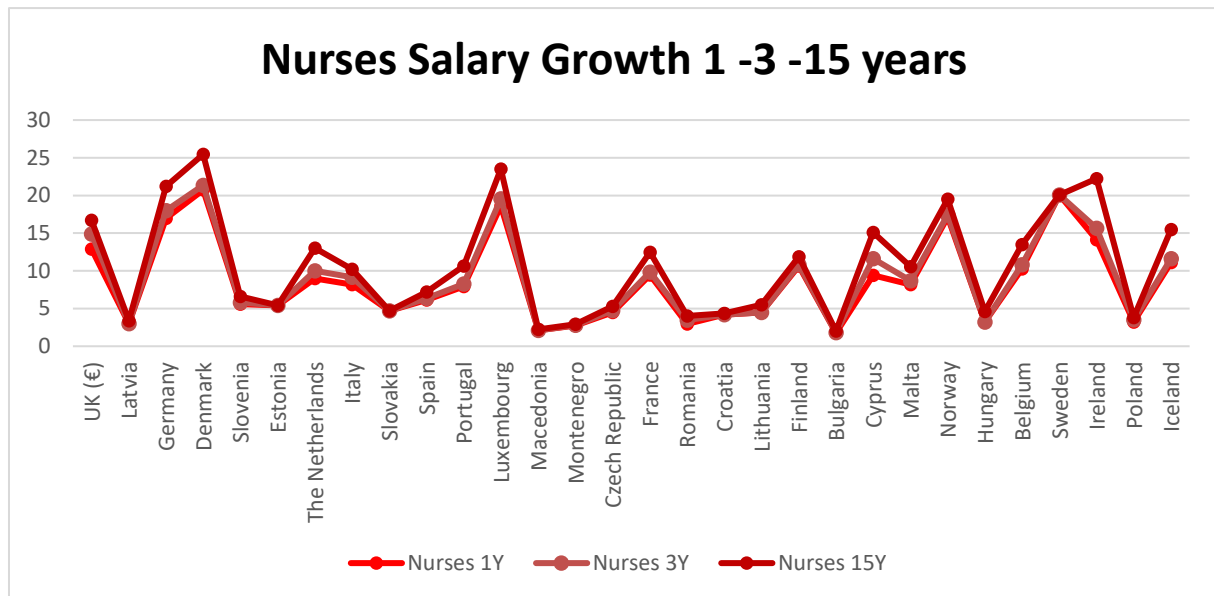
Other cases concern other healthcare professionals, such as the psychologists in France, and radiologists in Italy, whose starting salaries are higher than nurses' salaries.

### **3.3 The difference in nurses' salary growth according to their working 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. The EFN members have been asked to provide data concerning the hourly salary for full time employed general care nurses in their country; for a newly graduated general care nurse; a general care nurse with 3 years of professional experience; and a general care nurse with 15 years of professional experience.

Among the 30 countries considered, almost all of them observed a salary increase over time, although at very different degrees. The only EU country where the general care nurse's salary does not increase meaningfully in the considered 15 years-time is Slovakia, where a general care nurse earns 4.68€ per hour. A further exception is the Estonian one, where salaries are

not raised according to how many years a person has worked as a nurse. Here the salary depends on the contribution of the person and the institution's wage policy.

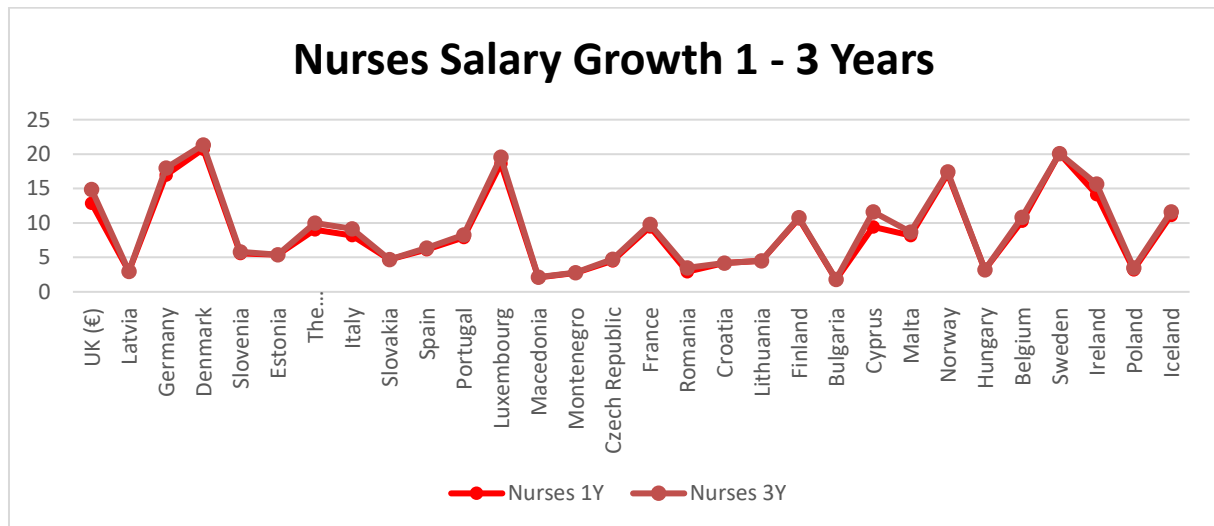


When we look at one and 3 years into the nursing job, we can make the following observations: the salary increase observed in the nurses' salary over three years greatly differs among the considered countries. Besides the aforementioned cases of Estonia and Slovakia, during the three years-time, we can observe an **average increase of 0.55 € per hour**. The highest increase has been registered by Cyprus, with an hourly salary increase of 2.20€ (starting salary 9.42€ - 3 years-experience: 11.62€).

The EU countries where a general care nurse experiences the lowest increase of her/his hourly salary during 3 of professional career (less than one euro) are:

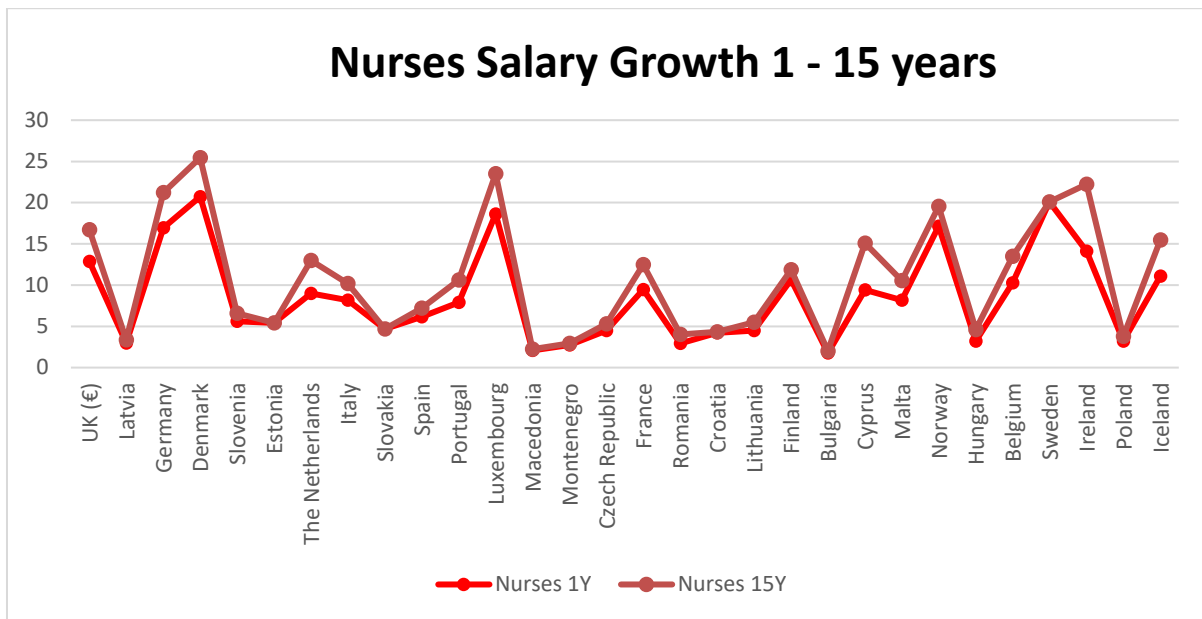
Slovenia with an hourly salary increase of 0.2€ (starting salary: 5.60 € - 3 years-experience: 5.8€); Spain with an hourly salary increase of 0.21€ (starting salary: 6.14 € - 3 years-experience: 6.34€); Czech Republic with an hourly salary increase of 0.24€ (starting salary: 4.5 € - 3 years-experience: 4.74€); Norway with an hourly salary increase of 0.28€ (starting salary: 17.15 € - 3 years-experience: 17.43€).

Additionally, it is important to note that in several countries, during the first three years in the nursing profession, the salary of a general care nurse does not increase, as the cases of Lithuania and Croatia demonstrate.



Looking at the **increase of the hourly salary in the 15 years-timeframe**, considering a general care nurse working in the public sector, not taking into account any bonus overtime or allowances, it emerged an **average increase of 2.24 € per hour**. The highest increase has been registered by Cyprus, with an hourly salary increase of 5.67€ (starting salary 9.42€ - 15 years-experience: 15.09€).

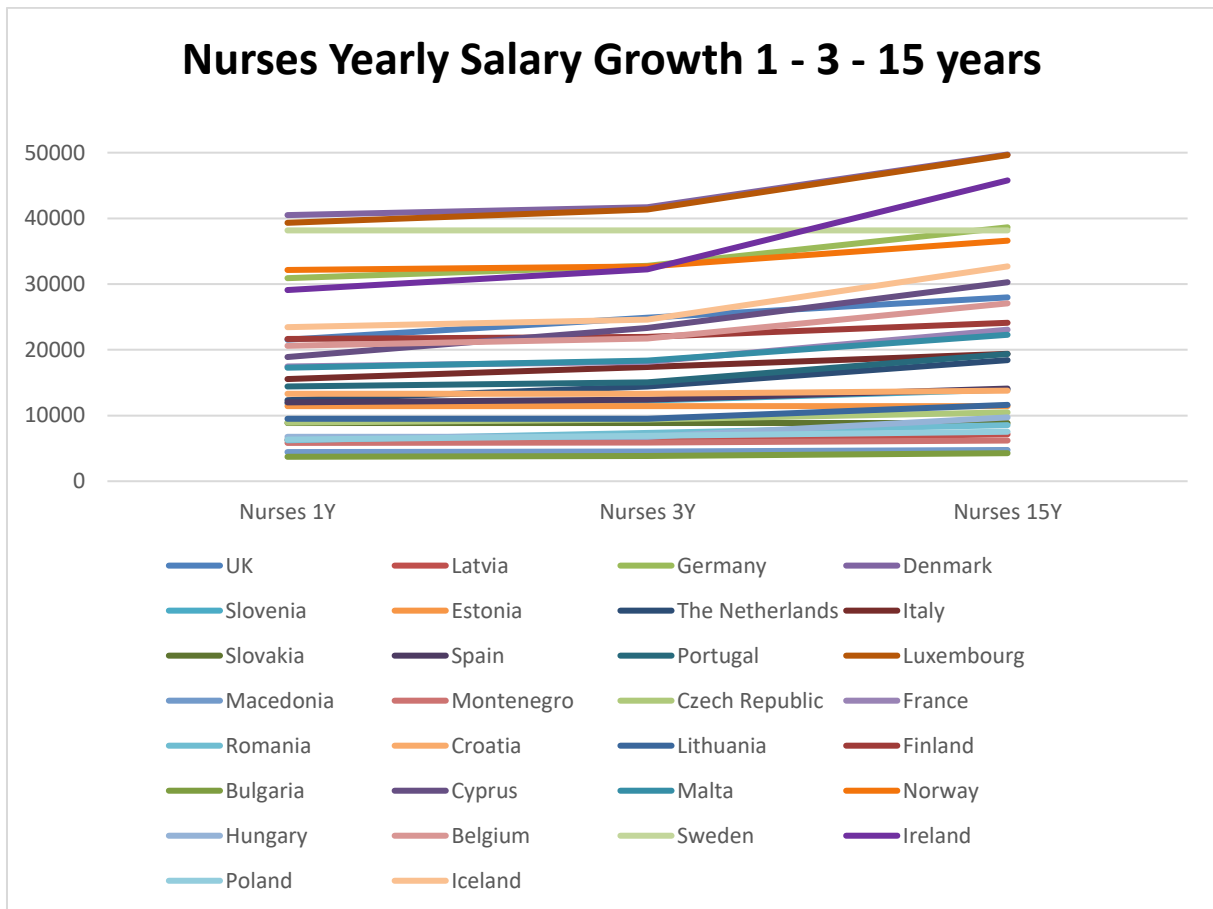




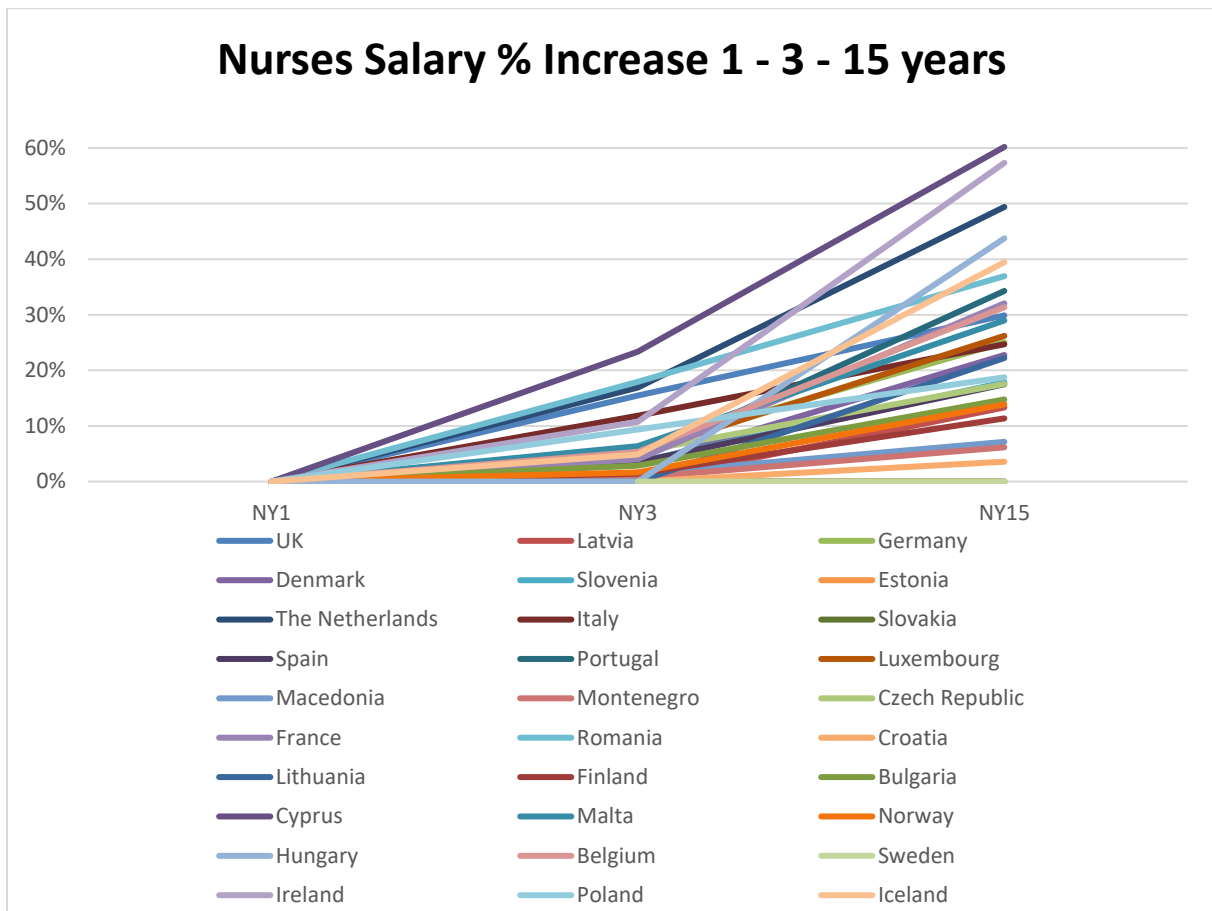
The EU countries where a general care nurse experiences the lowest increase of her/his hourly salary during 15 of professional career (less than one euro) are:

Croatia with an hourly salary increase of 0.15€ (starting salary: 4.20 € - 15 years-experience: 4.35€); Bulgaria with an hourly salary increase of 0.26€ (starting salary: 1.76 € - 15 years-experience: 2.02€); Latvia with an hourly salary increase of 0.40€ (starting salary: 2.98 € - 15 years-experience: 3.38€); Poland with an hourly salary increase of 0.60€ (starting salary: 3.20 € - 15 years-experience: 3.80€); Lithuania with an hourly salary increase of 0.70€ (starting salary: 3.10 € - 15 years-experience: 3.80€); Czech Republic with an hourly salary increase of 0.79€ (starting salary: 4.50 € - 15 years-experience: 5.29€).

Outside the EU, also Montenegro and Macedonia register very poor salary increase over time: Macedonia with an hourly salary increase of 0.15€ (starting salary: 2.10 € - 15 years-experience: 2.25€); Montenegro with an hourly salary increase of 0.17€ (starting salary: 2.76 € - 15 years-experience: 2.93€).



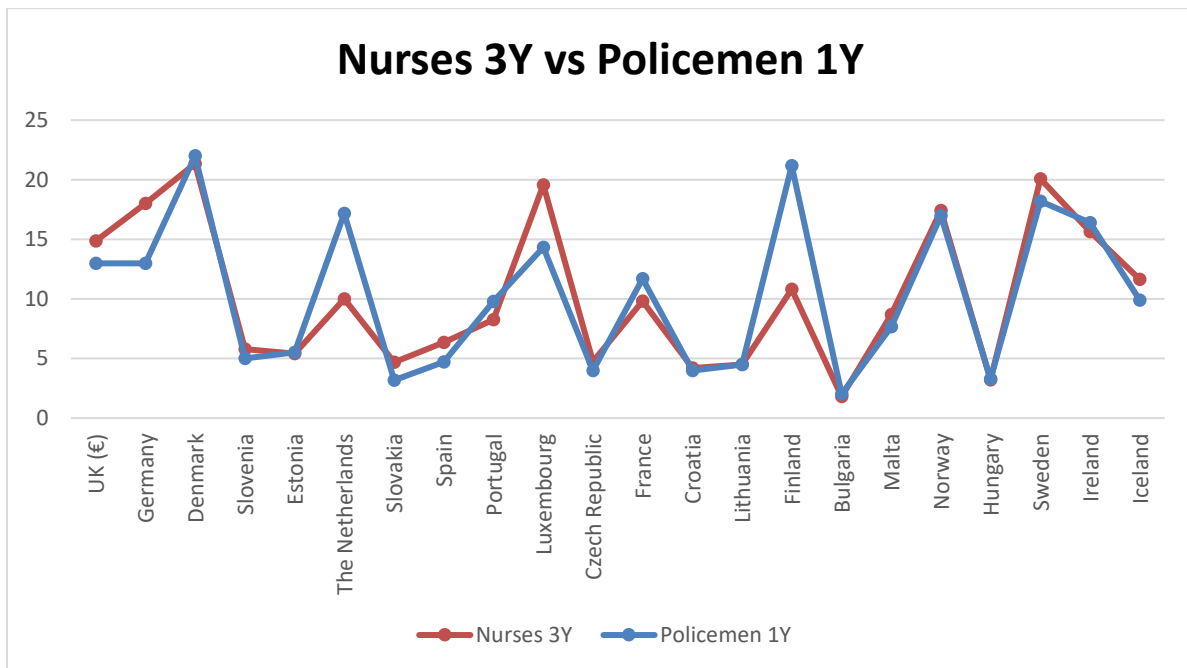
Finally, examination of nurses’ salary growth across countries suggests some countries are more aligned in their remuneration policies compared to others. There are similarities in terms of actual yearly salary value (graph above) and similarities in terms of percentage increase (graph below). For instance, the graphs above and below reveal four groups of countries being developed -this is considered in greater depth during the cluster analysis that follows further down in this report.



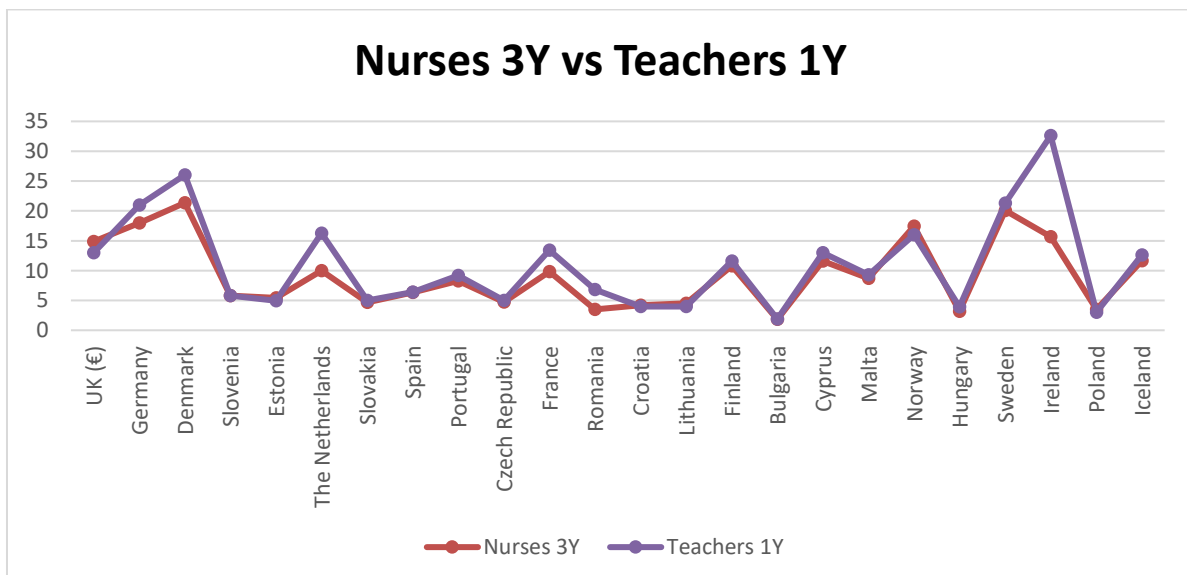
### 3.4 The difference between the salary growth of nurses and other professions

Further to observing how nurses’ salary increases over time, it is also possible to compare such growth to other professions. Taking as reference the main four professions analysed above (police officer, teacher, physiotherapist and social care worker), we can observe that although the general care nurse’ 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**.

An example of this situation is visible in Finland, where the comparison with police officers’ salary shows that although **nurses’ salary increased in three years, it is still lower than the one police officer earned at the beginning of their career**.

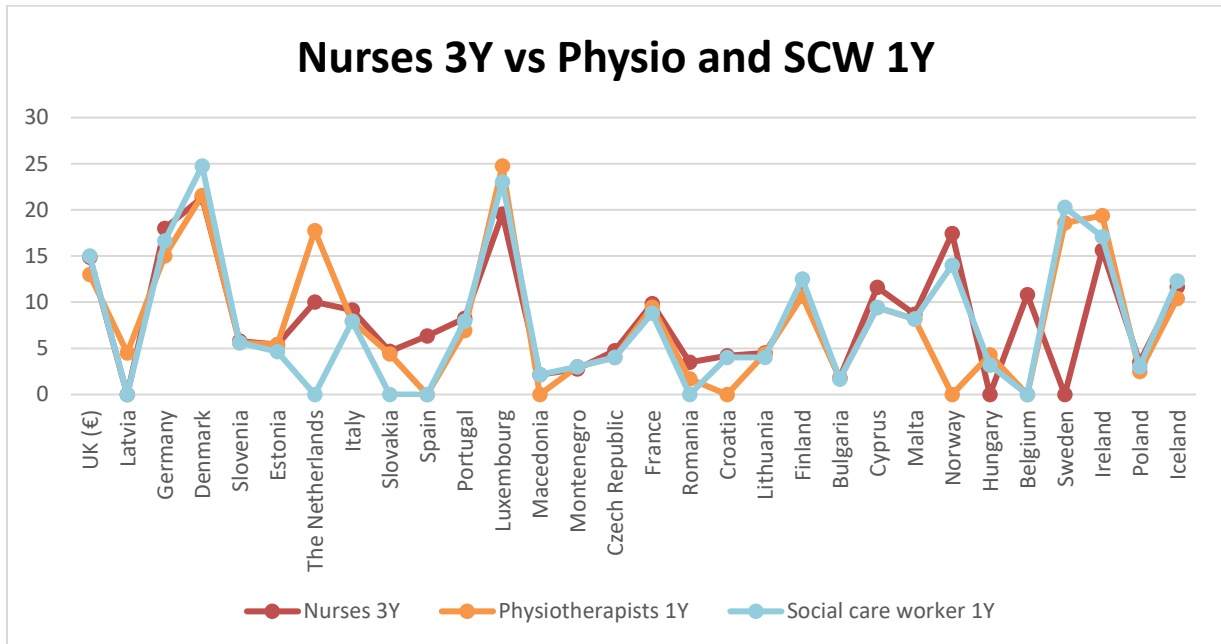


Similarly, looking at teachers’ salary, it is possible to establish that in most of the countries of our analysis, **nurses’ salary increase in three years was not sufficient to level up the initial remuneration of teachers**, as the examples of Denmark, Portugal, France, Finland show.

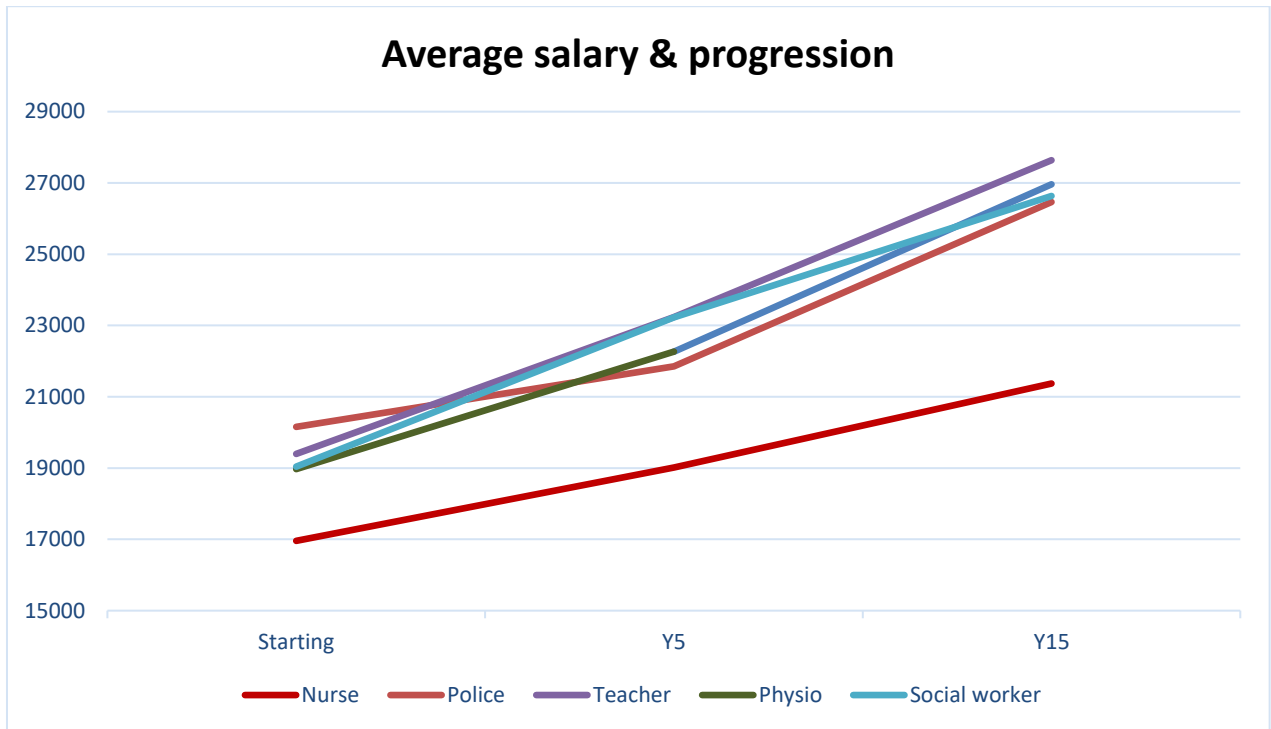


This trend is present also when comparing the increase of a nurse’s salary in three years to the basic starting salary of a physiotherapy and a social care worker, but to a lesser extent: for these professions, only in Ireland, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Iceland, Finland and Denmark,

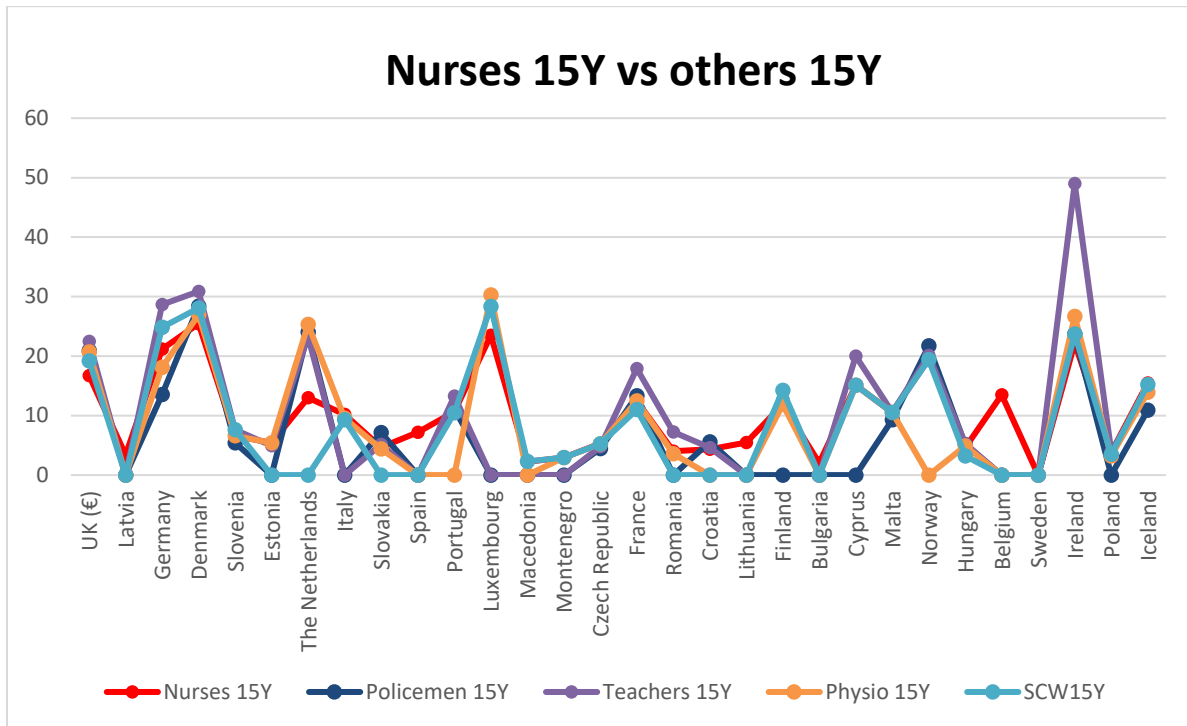
among the countries considered, the nurses' salary increase does not match the initial salary of the other two professions.



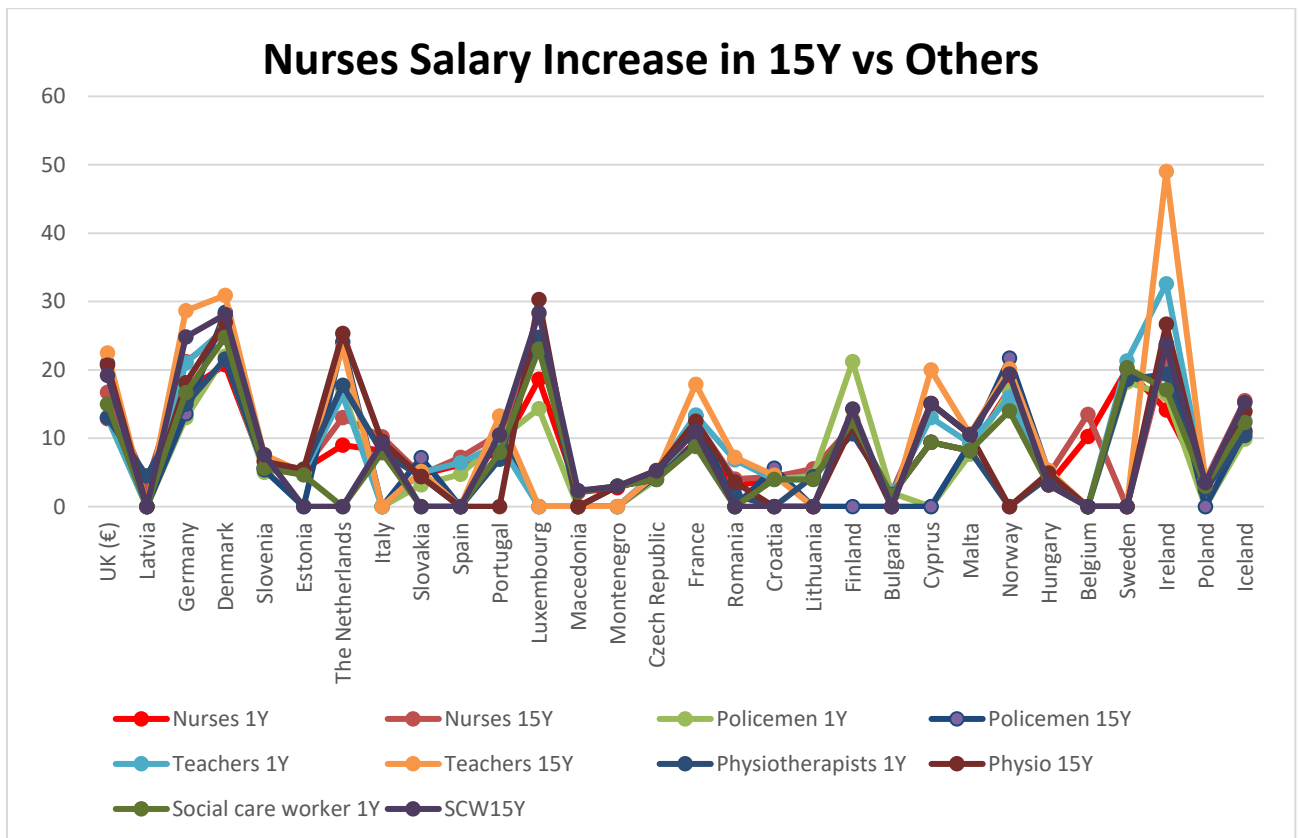
Additionally, this conclusion can also be drawn looking at how nurses' salaries grow in 15-years and the data available for the other professions. In effect, it is possible to observe that in the long-run nurses do experience an increase in their salary which in some cases is higher than other professions,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



A clearer picture can be seen when looking at average salaries and progression for the five professions across Europe (graph above). While there are gaps in the data from which the above is derived, the large dataset increases confidence that the above mirrors closely the reality of the EFN membership on average. It is evident that on average all professions experience a level of salary increase but, in the end, and on average, nurses' salaries remain lower than other professions.

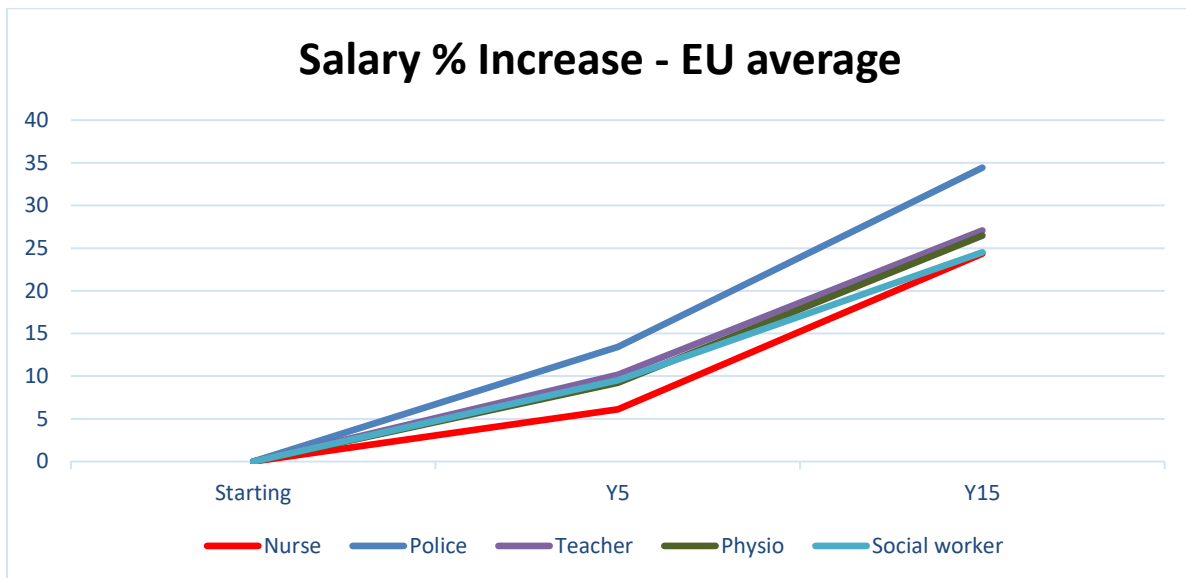


As an example, in Portugal, a newly graduated general care nurse earns hourly 7.92€, while the initial salary of a policeman is 9.80€ per hour. After 15 years, the nurse earns 10.64€ per hour, so experiences an increase of 2.72€ per hour. The policeman earns 11.14€ per hour after 15, that means an increase of 1.34€. Therefore, despite the higher hourly increase for the nurse, the final salary will remain higher for the policeman.



The above trends are also reflected in the average **percentage** salary increases among the five professions. From the graph below it can be seen that average percentage increases of salary for police officers is significantly higher in comparison with the other professions indicating greater progression prospects.





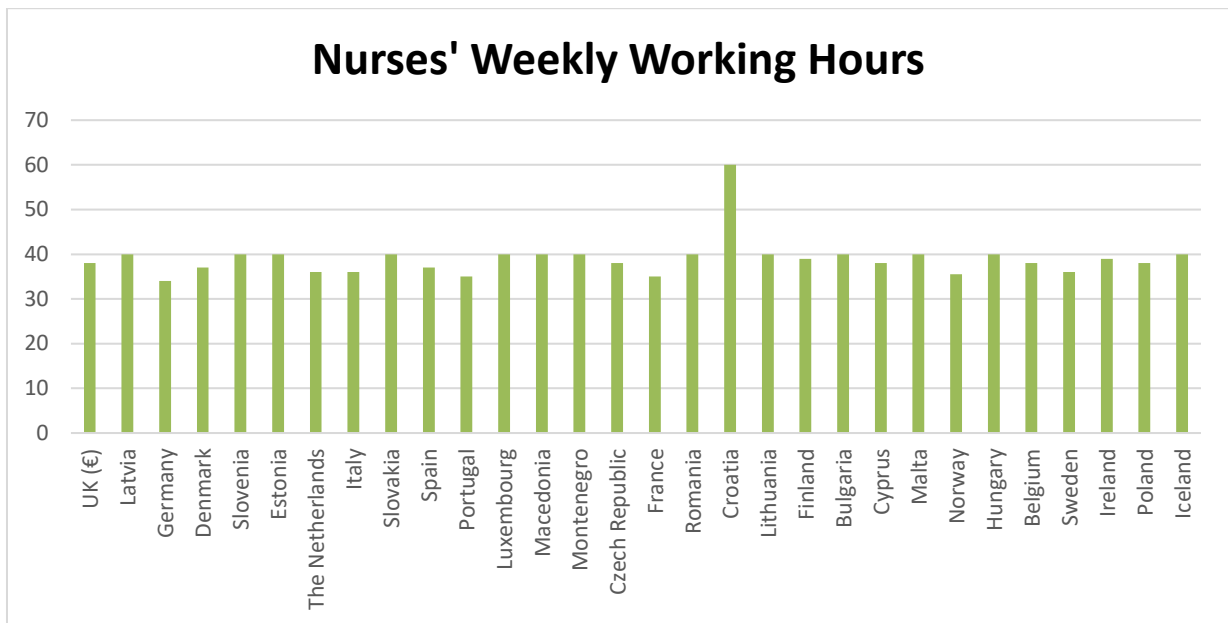
### 3.5 The difference in nurses' overtime payment across countries in Europe

Regarding the overtime payment, this practice differs widely across the countries analysed. Some countries tend to pay overtime with a percentage of 50% (Denmark and Bulgaria), 125% (France), or 150% (Luxembourg) per hour of hourly wages. These percentages may differ according to the type of overtime (weekend, night shifts, public holidays) as the cases of the UK, Malta, Romania and Hungary.

Lower percentage for extra working hours are foreseen by the Czech Republic, Ireland (25%) and FYR Macedonia (29%). Most of the other countries provide fixed amounts or follow a specific formula. Overall, there is great variability in nurses' overtime payment practices across countries in Europe hindering clear comparisons.

### 3.6 The difference in nurses' weekly working hours across countries in Europe

Finally, regarding nurses' working hours, the average among the 30 countries analysed is 38.9 hours per week. The highest weekly working hours are the ones applied in Croatia (between 50 and 60 hours per week).

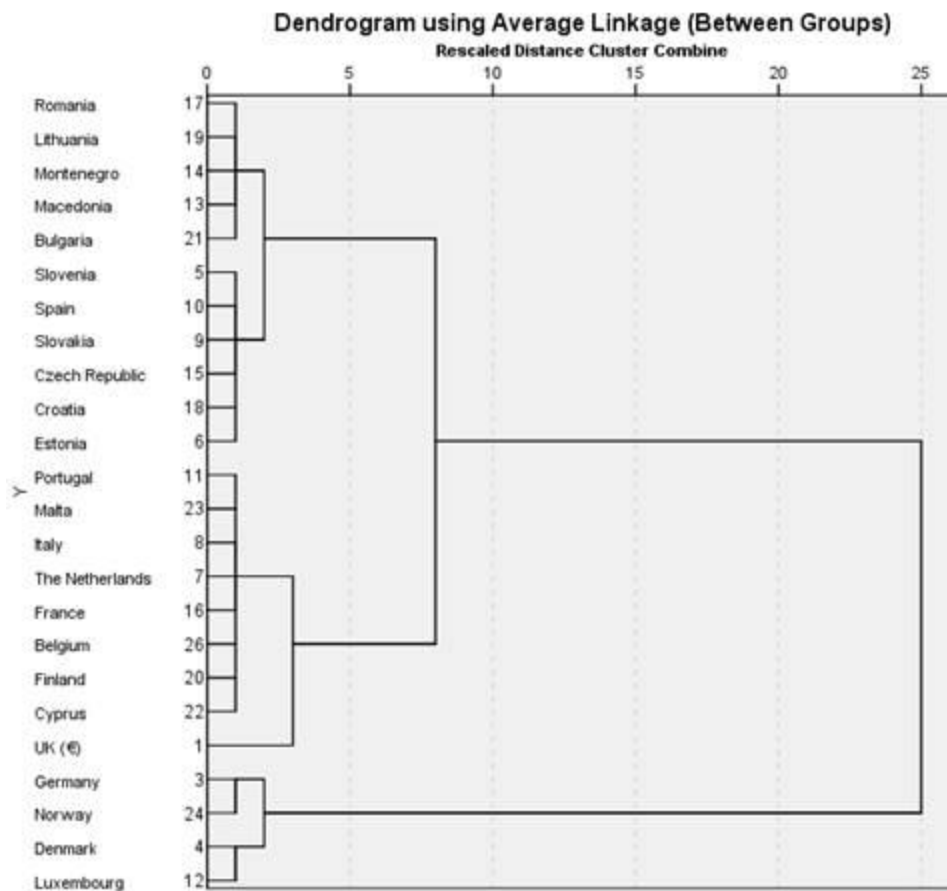


### 3.7 Statistical cluster analysis of similar country cases

In addition to the descriptive statistics noted above, a hierarchical cluster analysis was also undertaken to visualise the data in such a way that variables can be combined according to the response trends. The cluster analysis is based on the assignment of a set of observations into different subsets (clusters) aligning data based on similarities or differences. The basic criterion for clustering is distance in the data reported (variance taking into account missing data).

Hierarchical cluster analysis begins by separating each case into a cluster by itself. At each stage of the analysis the criterion by which cases are separated is relaxed in order to link the two most similar clusters until all of the objects are joined in a complete classification tree. The dendrogram is used to visualise the steps in a hierarchical clustering solution; this shows the clusters being combined and the values of the distance coefficients as each step merges.

Connected vertical lines designate joined cases. Data from countries that are similar to each other should belong to the same cluster, and data that are very different from each other should belong to different clusters. Through cluster analysis patterns can be identified which can lead to a higher level of interpretation.



The above dendrogram reveals four groupings merging at the start of the analysis, coming together very quickly, which suggests these are quite similar. The first group consists of Romania, Lithuania, Montenegro, FYR Macedonia and Bulgaria. The second group: Slovenia, Spain, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Croatia and Estonia. The third group consists of: Portugal, Malta, Italy, The Netherlands, France, Belgium, Finland and Cyprus. Finally, the fourth group consists of Germany, Norway, Denmark and Luxembourg.

Moreover, there is a quick merge between Groups 1 and Groups 2. The UK looks to be from the start on its own but the joins Group 3, which then clusters with Groups 1 and 2. Interestingly, Group 4 stays separate for some iterations, suggesting that their profile is different with the other countries.

Overall, the dendrogram confirms discussions noted above that starting salaries for nurses look to be better among countries part of Group 4. 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. This is professional and social dialogue! Let's talk together to help each other!

## 4. Conclusion

The EFN Members' responses to the questionnaire reveal great disparities among countries in the EU and Europe that are not straightforward to explain. But it doesn't matter, there are many things we cannot explain. But what is important we reflect on how we can use these data to support the design of the future European Social Pillar.

In the main, nurses' starting salaries appeared to be on some cases comparable to that of other professions, but they seem to experience slower salary progression. And this is a key concern to keep our experienced nurses in the profession!

The professions that are consistently positive outliers in the data are police officers, and this may be a reflection of governments' perceived severity of the work these professionals undertake. This is normal, but let us look at their position in social dialogue, but also the societal perception, knowing security is a key concern. It is time to build alliances so we both can progress as difficult professions. In the Emergency Departments nurses and police officers work closely to address the difficult situations at hand.

Furthermore, the data confirm that despite a harmonised educational framework for nurses across the EU, nurses' salaries vary significantly and randomly across the EFN membership. This questionnaire has made a start at surfacing a complex issue, but important to tackle, so that 6 million nurses in Europe see what EFN is doing for them!

These salary analysis and discussions are at the heart of the recruitment and retention challenges that taunt nurses across Europe. Although studies say salaries are not the first priority of nurses' mobility, this modest analysis shows nurses wages are key within the European Social Pillar, in alliance with other professions.

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, to get grip on what we want and how and when we want to achieve these policy outcomes, and with whom. The

cluster analysis, with its strong methodology to missing values, provides clarity on the four different groups in EFN, which should reflect together what they can learn from each other and how these ‘statistical groups’ can merge due to political lobby on the Net and Gross wages for general care nurses. Closer collaboration among the stronger and weaker performing groups of countries would make a positive step forward in informing meaningful policy dialogues based on live data from the frontline.

There is a political opportunity to negotiate, from a professional perspective, with the European Commission to strengthen the European Social Pillar.

This analysis is just a first start in an ongoing dialogue between EFN members, to strengthen the nurses’ voice in wages discussions, as the European Pillar is called.

Let us collectively strengthen, improve the data collection on Net salary, the analysis and the interpretation of the results, politically and professionally. Let us collectively prepare ourselves to lead the nursing profession to contributing to the European Social pillar priority on wages: a priority for the next European Commission. In solidarity let us strengthen the nurses’ voice, based on the evidence, and in partnership and collaboration with other professions. This report is the beginning of such a process.

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*The [European Federation of Nurses Associations \(EFN\)](#) was established in 1971 and is the independent voice of the profession. The EFN consists of National Nurses Associations from 34 EU Member States, working for the benefit of 6 million nurses throughout the European Union and Europe. The mission of EFN is to strengthen the status and practice of the profession of nursing for the benefit of the health of the citizens and the interests of nurses in the EU & Europe.*



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