

Social services: quality jobs and the role of earnings

DEVCOBA Conference

Session: 'What makes quality jobs in the Social Care sector?'

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Job quality

“Composition of work and employment characteristics impacting (positively/negatively) workers’ health & well-being”

- measured at the job level,
- using 7 job quality dimensions, with subdimension (Figure)

Physical environment

- Posture-related
- Ambient
- Biological and chemical

Work intensity

- Quantitative demands incl. emotional
- Pace determinants and interdependency

Working time quality

- Duration
- Atypical working time
- Working time arrangements
- Flexibility

Social environment

- Adverse social behaviour
- Social support
- Management quality

Skills and discretion

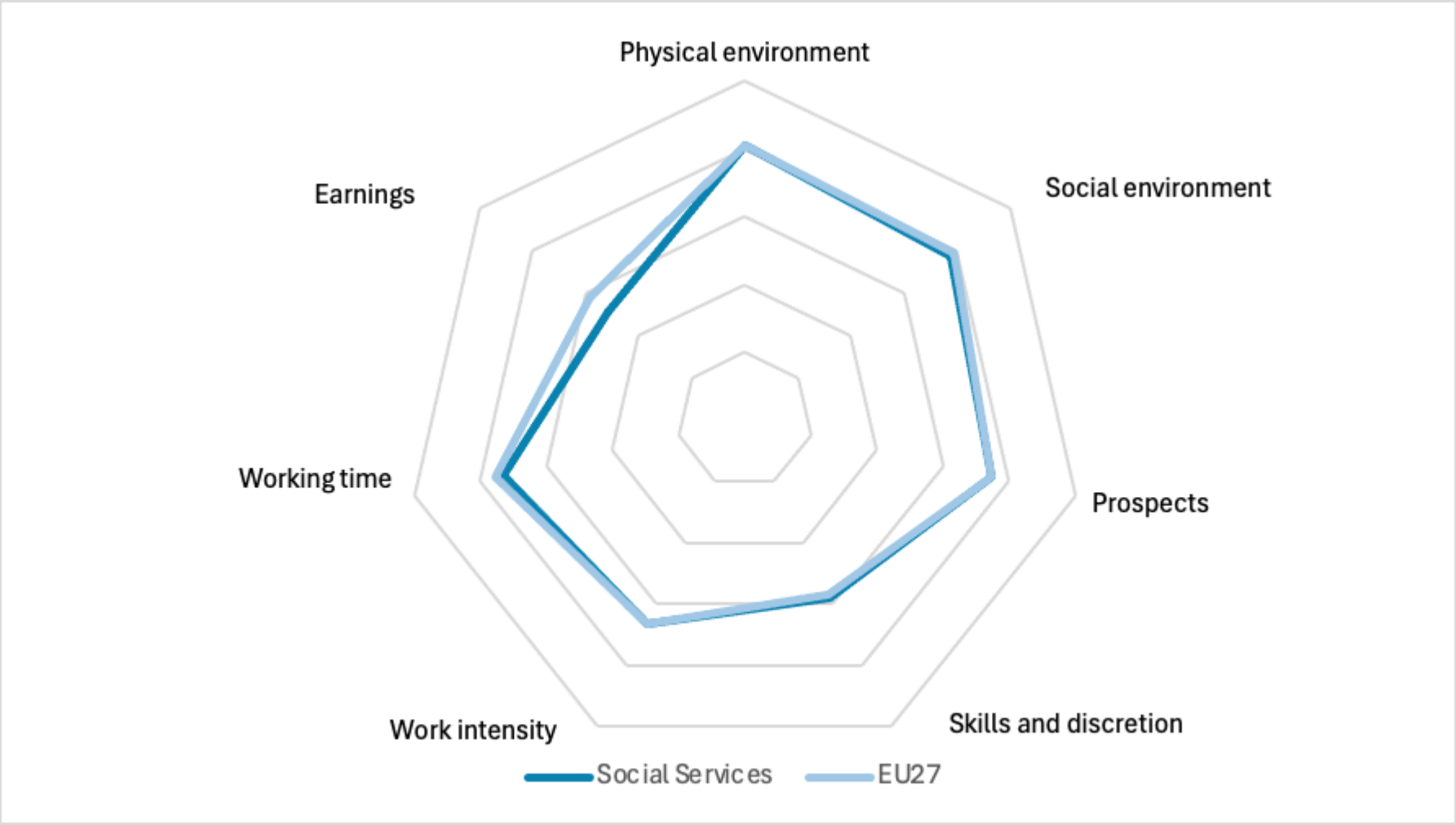
- Cognitive dimension incl. computer use
- Decision latitude
- Organisational participation
- Training

Prospects

- Career prospects
- Employment status
- Job security
- Downsizing

Earnings

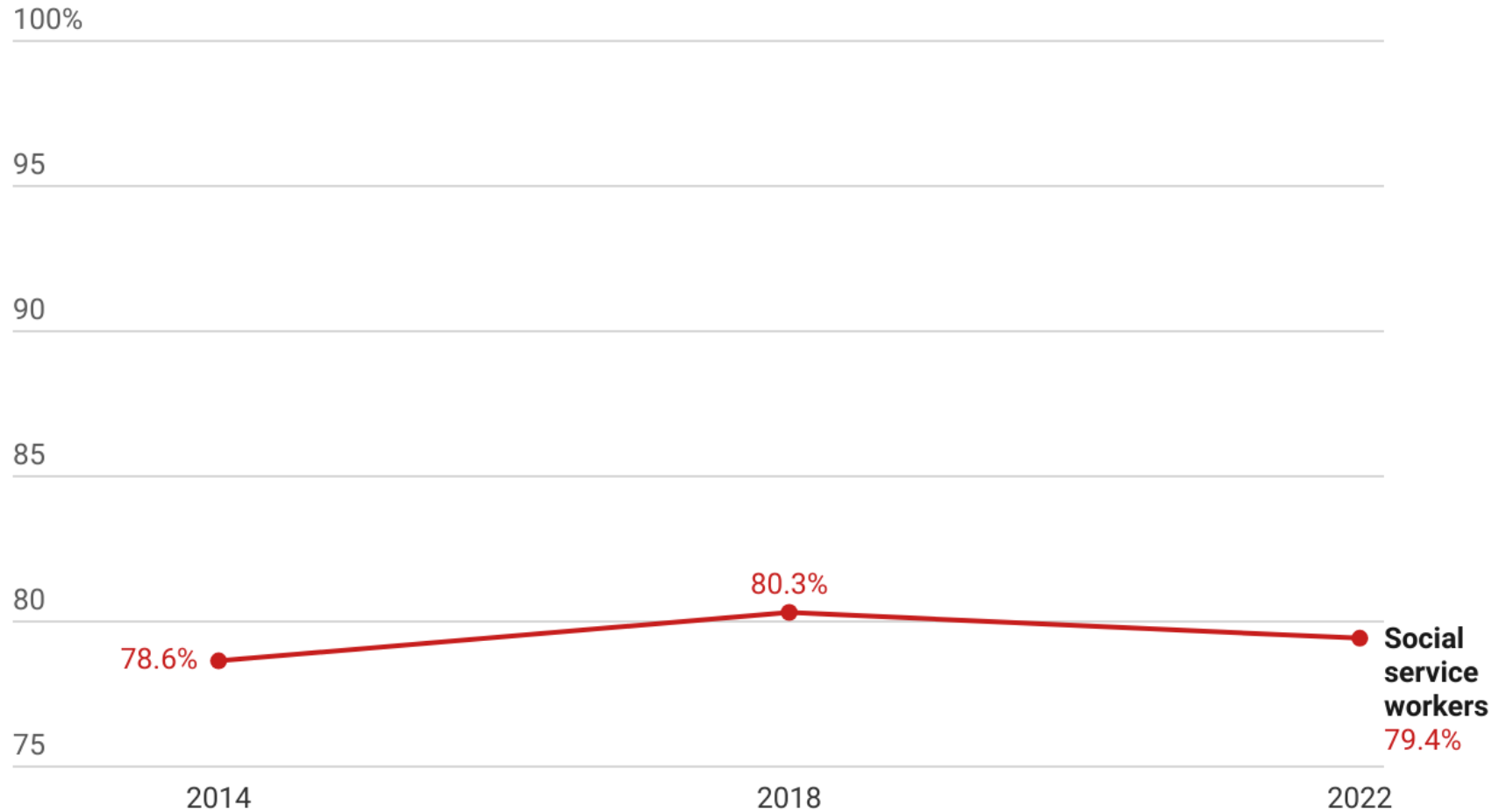
Job quality dimensions: Social services compared to EU average



Source: EWCS series analysis; Note: previous analysis showed that LTC scored worse than healthcare in all dimensions (only equal in work intensity); and worse than all sectors for work intensity, physical environment, working time quality, social environment and monthly earnings (Eurofound, 2020, *Long-term care workforce: employment and working conditions*).

Pay remains low

Hourly pay social services workers, % of average pay,
2014, 2018 & 2022, EU



Notes: Mean hourly pay; average of MS proportions; NACE 87&88 as a proportion of all sectors (excluding public administration, defence, compulsory social security); Data/way of calculating slightly differs from Eurofound's previous approach, so re-done for all 3 years consistently.

Source: Eurofound's analysis of Eurostat's Structure of Earnings Survey (SES) data, extracted June 2025. An update will be published on Eurofound's website over the summer, also drawing on new EWCS 2024 data.

Lowest, but increasing, in the quickest growing sub-sector



Hourly pay residential and non-residential, %-point difference with national average pay all workers, EU, 2022



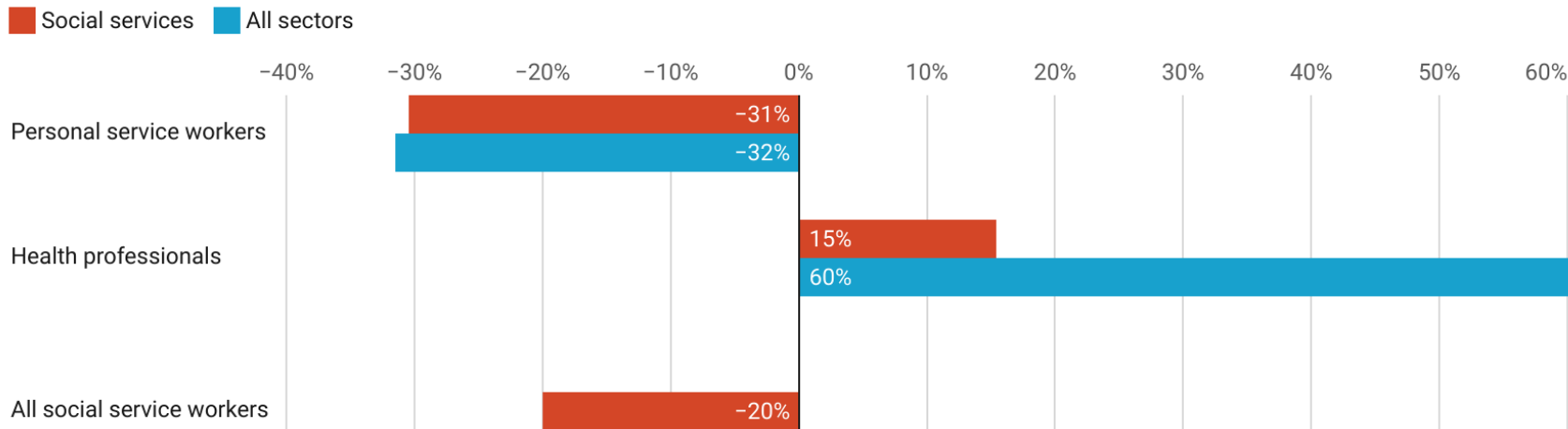
Notes: Mean hourly pay; average of MS proportions; NACE 87&88 as a proportion of all sectors (excluding public administration, defence, compulsory social security).

Source: Eurofound's analysis of Eurostat's Structure of Earnings Survey (SES) data, extracted June 2025.

- Relative pay decreased in the residential care but increased in social work without accommodation from 2018 to 2022.

Heterogeneity, but low-paid professions over-represented

Hourly mean pay in social services compared to all sectors, occupations, %-points difference, average in 24 MSs, 2022



Notes: ISCO 22 & 51; CY, IE, MT data unavailable for all occupations

Source: Eurofound's analysis of Eurostat's Structure of Earnings Survey (SES) data, extracted June 2025.

- Healthcare: generally better conditions, sometimes explicitly in separate collective agreement (competition for nurses)
Similar reasons for part-time work as other sectors, but more relevant given the high rate of part-time work
 - better access to childcare and LTC can increase working hours

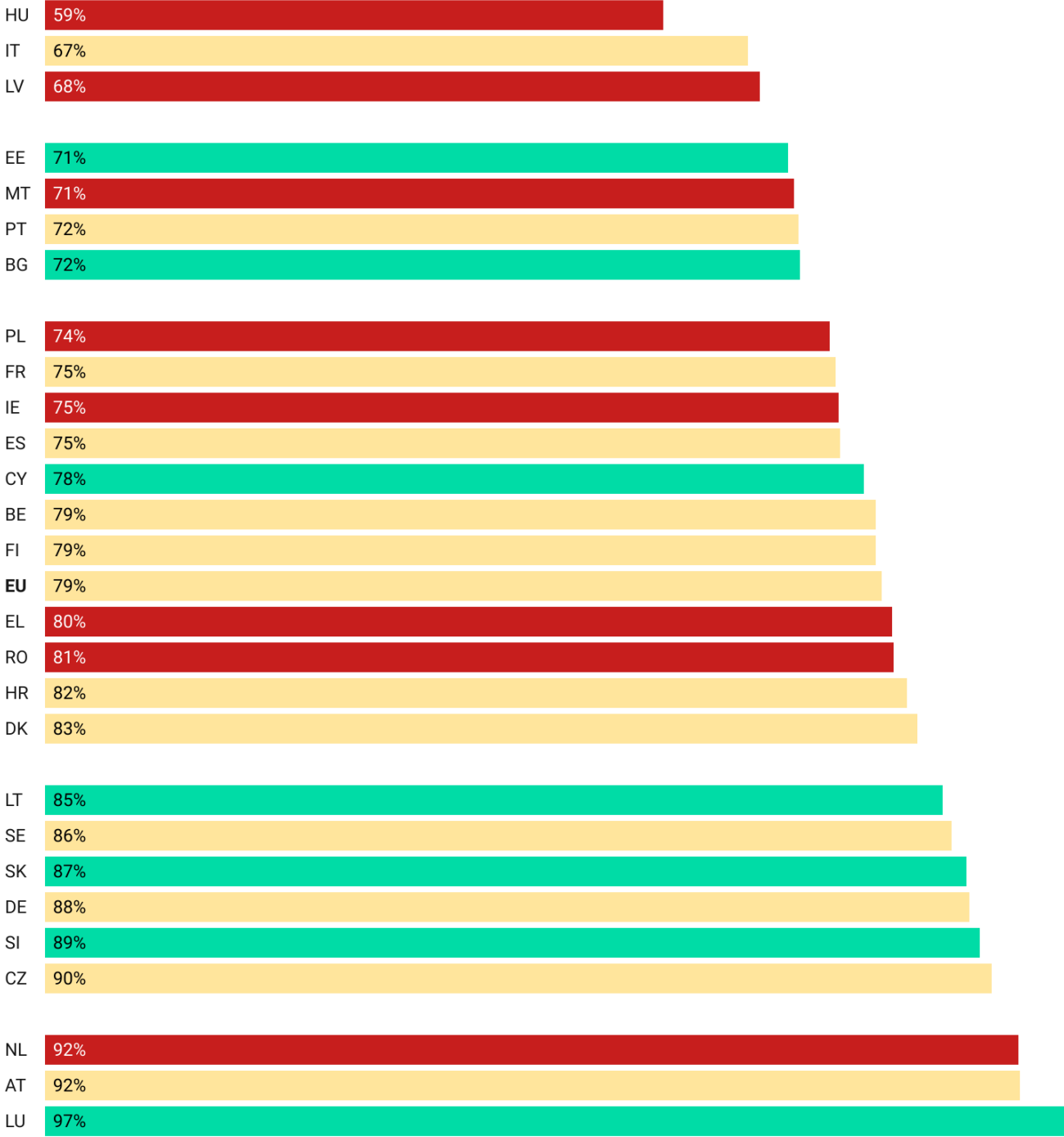
- Lowest paid:** (social) carers/assistants, assistant nurses, childcare workers/assistants
- Better paid:** specialised nurses, social workers & therapists



Social service pay as proportion of national average pay, by MS, 2022, and change since 2018 (red: decrease $\geq 2\%$ -points, green: increase $\geq 2\%$ -points)

- In all MSs, social service workers earn below average
- Member States where 100% is covered by collective agreements include those where rates are $>90\%$

Notes: bar is green if relative change $\geq 2\%$ -points, and red if $\leq -2\%$ -points; only in EL and MT mean hourly wages, as measured in SES, decreased in absolute terms.
Source: Eurofound's analysis of Eurostat's Structure of Earnings Survey (SES) data, extracted June 2025.



Inadequacy of pay

Workers reporting they get inappropriate pay, 2024



Notes: Question: 'considering all your efforts and achievements in your job, you feel you get paid appropriately'; Average of Member State values. 2024 EWCS data for the 23 Member States in which more than 20 social services workers were surveyed; excl CY, EL, HU, SK)

Workers reporting difficulties making ends meet, 2024



Notes: Some difficulties, difficulties, or great difficulties. Social services = NACE 87 & 88; Average of Member State values. EWCS 2024 data, excluding countries with low counts.

Adequacy of pay: depends on expenditure

- Housing needs (costs, and barrier to take-up work)
 - especially a problem in capital cities; wages may be set nationally
 - some cities/countries provide access to (social) housing to essential workers
- Service needs (costs, and barrier to work more hours)
 - childcare and education
 - healthcare
 - long-term care
 - transport



- Domestic care workers
 - employed by households: excluded from data, but often worst conditions (especially live-in care)
 - women and foreign workers even more over-represented
- Working conditions beyond pay, enabling longer working lives (and thus earning capacity)



- **Pay and employee benefits** as one of the three most important areas where they would like to see improvements is certainly high, at 68.8%, but it is only slightly higher than among other workers (68.6%).
- **Health and safety at work, including mental health**, is highlighted as one of the areas where improvements are needed by more social services workers (30.9%) than other workers (23.4%).

*Source: Eurofound (2025), *A decade of low pay: Social services workers still earn around one-fifth less than the average*, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/all/a-decade-of-low-pay-social-services-workers-still-earn-around-one-fifth-less-than-the-average>, analysis of EWCS 2024 data.

**A decade of low pay:
Social services workers
still earn around one-fifth
less than the average**



Thank you

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***Forthcoming in 2026:
Eurofound's care services report***