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SOCIAL POLICIES OF SELECTED COUNTRIES AND THEIR CHANGES

Abstract

The paper aims an analysis of fundamental differences in the field of social policy of the selected countries. The purpose of all models of modern social policy applied in the economically developed countries worldwide is to substitute for the income of those that have lost it due to some social events, to provide a health care, to provide support for families with children or to provide a help when a person is in distress with the aim to prevent him from poverty and secure pensions. An efficient improvement of both the social attitudes of the state and especially the legislation at national level should be, in the first row, the way of how the state can increase the standard of living of its residents and improve the quality of life. For our comparison and a comprehensive research, we chose the representatives of different social models. France, Germany, Sweden and the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

KEY WORDS: EU legislation, functions and tools of social policy, sources of funding of social benefits, social benefits structure, material and financial support for the social field.

INTRODUCTION

When discussing social policy, one can imagine a specific social activity under this concept, one can say that social policy is actually concrete acting of certain agents at different levels, by whom social reality is subsequently influenced. Krebs (2010) defines social policy as a policy that focuses primarily on humans, their development and the cultivation of his living conditions, dispositions, development of his personality as well as his quality of life. As such, it necessarily deserves a clear, concrete and important place in the whole social system.

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Within the scope of the social policy we include education, health, family and housing policy, social security and employment. Tomes (2010) defines social policy as a „systematic and purposeful pursuit of various social actors for maintaining or achieving, in their own interest, a change in behaviour or encouraging the development of their social system or other systems or tools to implement his or other social policies”.

We come across social policy issues on daily basis as on one hand, we keep hearing about problems related to social areas dealt with by sociologists, senators, economists, political scientists, government officials, and we receive their opinions through various media. However, on the other hand, the experts mentioned above do not always cooperate and find common solutions to these problems.

Another problem attached is that each European state stems out from different legislative regulations that are in force at the national level. However, the goal of the European Union does not lie in the need to unite these different systems, but rather to promote the objectives by which they want to achieve a more equal gender equality in the labour market, reduce unemployment, support research and education and develop better skill-gaining of workers. For these purposes, the European Social Fund was established, from which Member States of the European Union can draw funds to finance their programs in the social sector.

Globalization and integration have caused that gradually expanding EU, in addition to political processes undergoing fundamental changes in the field of economy and social policy. Social policy in the EU covers a wide range of areas. It includes equal opportunities, Health and safety issues at work, employment, working conditions, social protection in the social security system. In particular, it focuses on the most vulnerable groups of the population (people with disabilities, long-term unemployed, migrants, otherwise marginalized individuals or groups) and global challenges such as growth unemployment, poverty and social exclusion of a large proportion of the world and european populations.

1 SOCIAL POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The current EU social policy partly corresponds to the opportunities they provide individual national economies and the common interests of member countries. It has the ambition to respect the dignity of a human being and assumes that the basic standard of the social dimension is enshrined in the national legal order of the EU Member States. The concept of the basic aspects of the common social policy is primarily the coordination of social security systems, the equality of men and women, health and safety at work, equal opportunities in the labor market and comparable labor relations. Its primary objective is to eliminate the increasing poverty and social exclusion of individuals and marginalized groups.

However when trying to define social policy at the European level, we can claim that that social policy represents a legislative area that is not common for all Member States of the Union (for more information about this problematics, see Dušek, 2007, or Dušek, 2011). This policy is ranked among the areas of shared competence, which means that Member States are allowed to provide their own legislative rules if that is not covered by the legislation of the European Union. Minimum social standards and basic social rights are governed by the law and regulations of the Union and specifically concerns the following areas:

- free movement of labour;
- labour law and working conditions;
- health and safety at work;
- non-discrimination;
- gender equality.

In the past, the European area relied, in terms of social issues, on the Charter of Fundamental Social Rights of Workers signed in Turin in 1961. It is a document that was adopted by the Council of Europe and with its 19 articles it is considered a wide-ranging legal framework for the future harmonization of social policies of the Member States of the European Union.

The European Union supports social activities of the Member States and due to the diversity of the economic situation of individual countries, it introduced a support through the European Social Fund that stands at the disposal of all Member States. The primary goal of the fund is to improve the prospects of people seeking job and to help them to obtain the required qualifications, it means to improve people's employability.

The fund was established in 1960 and its primary mission is to support the reduction of the unemployment, develop employment and to promote social inclusion and equal opportunities with a focus on the development of the labour market and human resources. Among the objectives of the European Social Fund we can find:

- social inclusion via helping people from disadvantaged social groups in entering the labour market;
- help the unemployed people to enter the labour market;
- lifetime learning;
- equal opportunities for all in accessing the labour market;
- improvement in access and participation of women in the labour market;
- development of a skilled and adaptable labour force;
- introduction of modern ways of organizing work and business;
- combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities related to the labour market.

To ensure that residents of the European Union can benefit from social

systems and benefits, there are European institutions dealing with social issues. These institutions include:

- the European Parliament;
- the European Council;
- the European Economic and Social Committee.

A indispensable part of the regular institutions of the European Union is the European Commission. Its mission, according to the portal Europa.eu (2015) is to represent and defend the interests of the Union as a whole. It drafts proposals of a new European legislation, and is in charge of implementing EU policies and spending the EU funds. Under the political leadership of the Commission there are 28 commissioners (one from each Member State).

2 COMPARISON OF SOCIAL POLICY MODELS OF THE SELECTED COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD

In our research where we compare four different models of social welfare system, more different standpoints were engaged. One of these factors of comparison is a reduction of income inequality. Zeman (2009) explains that the system of the redistribution through taxes and transfers is applied mainly in the Nordic countries, where it makes up to 42% reduction in the income inequality. In Anglo-Saxon countries with the continental model the inequality is reduced by up to 39%. The least significant is the redistribution system in the countries of the Mediterranean model, where the reduction amounts to only 35%.

Brdek, Jírová and Krebs (2002) claim that within the European Union there is no common European model. However, among individual Member States one can find certain common features in the socio-economic models of those Member States. The individual EU Member States are characterized by a relatively strong role of the state in the social sector. Also, all the countries provide their citizens with financial support during the retirement, sickness, disability, maternity, when taking care of a child or when they are unemployed. At the same time they undertake measures enabling the access to affordable health care.

In all the countries of the European Union the main source of funding the social expenditures make social contributions of the employers. For the Scandinavian social model is typical a system of social security based primarily on funding from the state budget and the tax revenues earmarked for social spending make up 52% of the total revenues. Similarly works the Mediterranean type of a welfare state and its representative is Italy, where the state participates up to 46% in the funding. The EU average funding from the state budget is 38%. Around 20% consists of the contributions from people who do safeguard themselves against risky situations (employees, self-employed, etc.) and the remaining 3.3% comes from additional sources (Chart1).

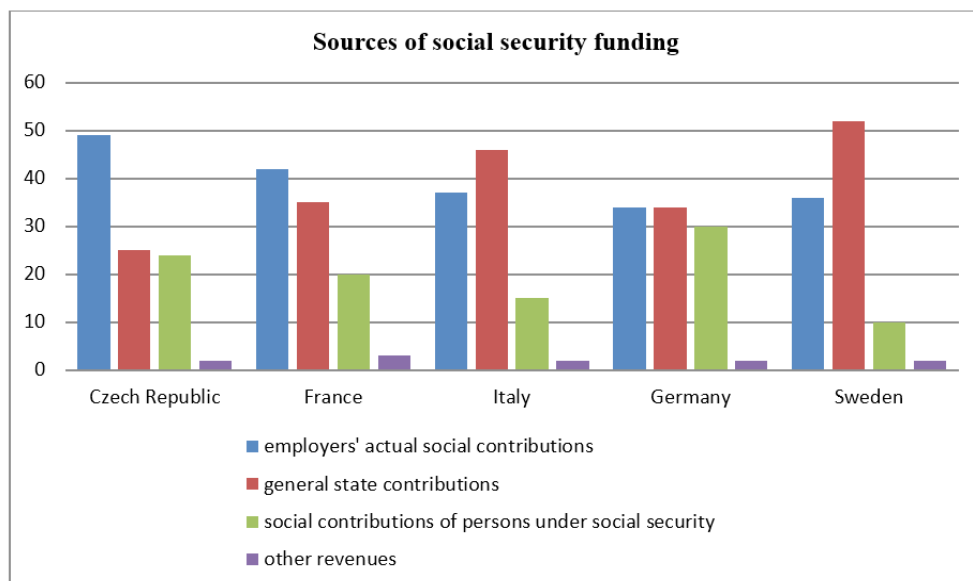


Chart 1: Sources of social security funding of the selected European States

Rodrigues and Schmidt define, that “the need for combined multi-source financing results from the subsidiary position of social services in the social protection system, from dependence on redistribution mechanisms, which still covers only part of the funds needed to finance them. Multi-generality is also driven by the growth in demand for social services linked mainly to demographic developments, as well as the interest for the highest quality and freedom of decision-making by users in the field of social services” (2010 In Repková, 2012, s. 125)

Krebs (2010) describes and defines the objective of the social policy as a change of a social reality when at the same time fully respecting the basic principles. These basic principles include main ideas and thought processes that create characteristic features of the social policy. We talk here about the principles of equity, the equality, social solidarity, subsidiarity and the participation.

Among the instruments of social policy in all countries of the European Union we can include:

- benefits in kind (drugs and medical devices)
- social services
- discounts and advantageous purpose-based loans
- social incomes (cash benefits for social assistance and unemployment benefits).

The Slovak Republic accepts all important international documents dealing with human rights. The Slovak Republic ratified many of them during the existence

of the Czechoslovakia. After separation in 1993, the Slovak Republic became a contractual party by the succession. They were particularly the following documents: International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (No. 95/1974 Coll.), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (No. 120/1976 Coll.), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (No. 120/1976 Coll.), Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment and Punishment (No. 143/1988 Coll.), Convention on Rights of the Child (No. 104/1991 Coll.), Convention on Political Rights of Women (No. 46/1955), Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (No. 62/1987 Coll.), Option Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (No. 169/1991 Coll.), Option Protocol to UN Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (No. 343/2001 Coll.). The government delegations of the Slovak Republic have attended international conferences on human rights organized by the United Nations and Council of Europe since 1993, where several action platforms and declarations were adopted. The Slovak Republic has assumed a political obligation to enforce recommendations of these conferences within its internal policy, including measures focused on elimination of all forms of violence and combating of human rights. (Haburajová Ilavská, 2014, s. 47). In addition to the difficult period of transformation, the social policy of the SR already clearly shows convergence tendencies towards European social policy, which ultimately increases not only the social protection of the population but also creates the prerequisites for the comprehensive development of human potential and human capital in general.

Expenditures in the field of social protection belong among basic indicators that allow for a comparison of the social policies of the individual states. Naturally, states with higher gross domestic product per capita in purchasing power parity have greater possibilities to cover the social issues. France is a country that within our comparison of the group the selected countries, contributes most to the social protection of the population as it makes on the average around 33%. In contrast, the least contribution is made by the Czech Republic (Chart 2). In France, the insured persons are divided into two basic groups:

- employees
- self-employed

Such a breakdown is valid in the framework of social models and is nearly identical for each European country. Legally it is provided that the employer is required to contribute to their employees to social security purposes and the self-employed persons contribute to the social insurance system based on the amount of their annual income. On the basis of the level of contributions and, on the other side, of the regularity of their contributions to the social insurance, the entitlement to benefits from the social security system is derived for everyone.

In general, the basic principle of non-discrimination is applied, which means in practice that the citizens of any Member State shall have the same social rights as the citizens of the Member State that executes the provision of the social security. An advantage is the abolition of the internal borders within the European Union, where the citizens can move unhindered from one country to another. A citizen of the Union is covered by the social system of the country where he works. The minimum standards are defined mainly on the basis of the Charter of Fundamental Social Rights of Workers and this regional grouping seeks to enforce a proper compliance of the chart. The citizens can also move freely, or even settle on as permanent resident that works in another country without losing their social security benefits and other benefits. Another advantage is the validity of the principle of aggregation, which is used in cases where a person spends part of his working life in one Member State and the other part in another Member State and does not meet a prescribed period for the entitlement to the benefits in one of them. Regulations on Coordination provide for the legislative provisions that, where appropriate, allow for the entitlement to benefits to take account of the insurance periods completed in other Member States.

The European Union adopted the Europe 2020 strategy pursuing for sustainable and primarily smart and inclusive growth supporting social inclusion of persons (Čajka, Terem, Rýsová, 2015). This strategy clearly set a target to pull, by the end of 2020, at least 20 million people out of both the poverty and social exclusion and to increase the employment among people aged 20-64 years to 75% as without this strategy the economic growth in the Union could be hampered. The strategy, along with the Lisbon strategy, is often deemed by other regions as a kind of central planning that was typical in the former communist bloc.

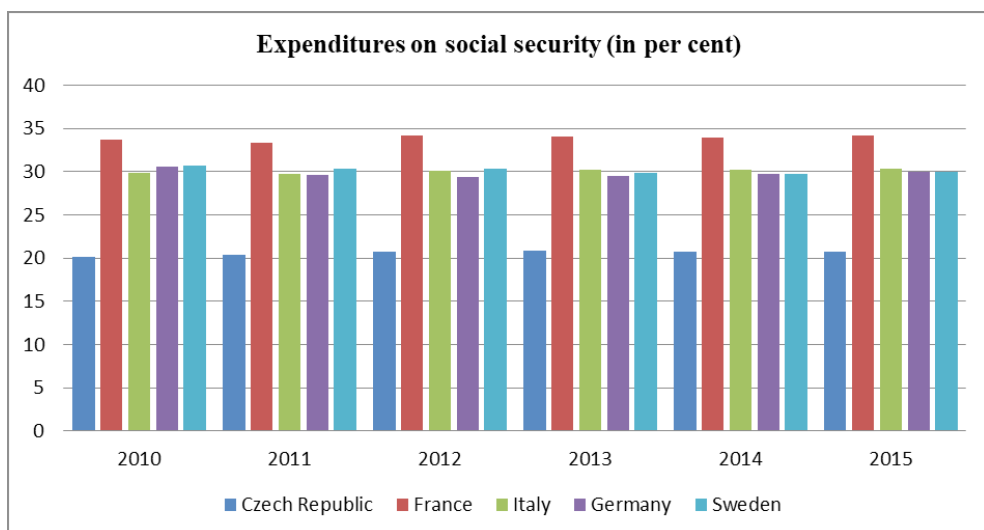


Chart 2: Expenditures on social security of the selected European States

Prior to the accession to the European Union, individual states feared of a rise in food prices, and especially of an overall reduction in the living standards of certain risk groups, which eventually did not happen. Other potential disadvantages were seen in the context of the need to ensure a functioning government able to effectively collaborate with the administrations of other Member States. All this gives a rise to increased demands on the administration. The basic positive element is a fact that each state has its own social security system, which is managed by himself.

It is also necessary to take into account the countries that are currently part of the European Union, but prior to 1989 these were the states with the communist regime, where the frameworks of their social policies were completely different than in the rest of the current states of the Union. Krebs (2010) describes the phenomenon of the former communist states as countries which after 1989 began to change gradually the demands on the welfare state, and thus the conditions for its functioning. After 40 years, the labour market faced constantly rising unemployment, and on the other hand, there also grew the revenue from gainfull employment. The rapid change of the social environment together with the price increases resulted in a decline of the living standards. But fortunately, this situation did not last long. An important change in the new social policy was a political aspect of promoting the interests of social groups, while supporting the establishment of the institutions that implemented these interests into the administrative and political decision-making.

A typical example of the former states of the communist regime in our observed group of countries is the Czech Republic. Due to the huge increase in the unemployment after 1989, something impossible in the previous 40 years, the state was forced to set up labour offices and minimum subsistence levels as well as social needs. According to the internet portal Social Policy (2015) newly established welfare system introduced the obligation to pay social and health insurance. A significant reduction occurred in the area of public social services, as regards an active employment policy, education or housing but the quality social services still lagged behind the capabilities and needs. In 2011, the Czech Republic published a document entitled Czech Social Doctrine focusing on the role of the state and other actors of social policy in its creation, including the citizens themselves. The Czech Social Doctrine is entirely consistent with the demands placed on the country by the European Union before the Czech Republic entered the Community. In the doctrine there are characterized both the goals and approaches to addressing social issues and problems in the Czech Republic. At present, the social policy in the Czech Republic is very unstable, the contributions or benefits do constantly change, are reduced or completely abolished. This mainly concerns the childbirth allowance, parental allowance, funeral or housing allowances.

A very important indicator in assessing the level of social security at the national level is the structure of social benefits. The value is directly proportional to the determination of the rate of growth of GDP and the expenditures on social security (Chart 3).

The largest share in terms of the unemployment is provided in France, in other countries the expenditures on this part of the social benefits make only around 3%. Out of the overall structure of the social security expenditures on average around 44% accounts for pensions throughout the European Union. The largest funding is provided in Italy and the Czech Republic. The second largest component make the expenditures on health care and sickness benefits. In Italy there are significant benefits to orphans and widows' pensions, which represents 11% of the total spending while the lowest expenditures are spent on housing support in all the countries surveyed.

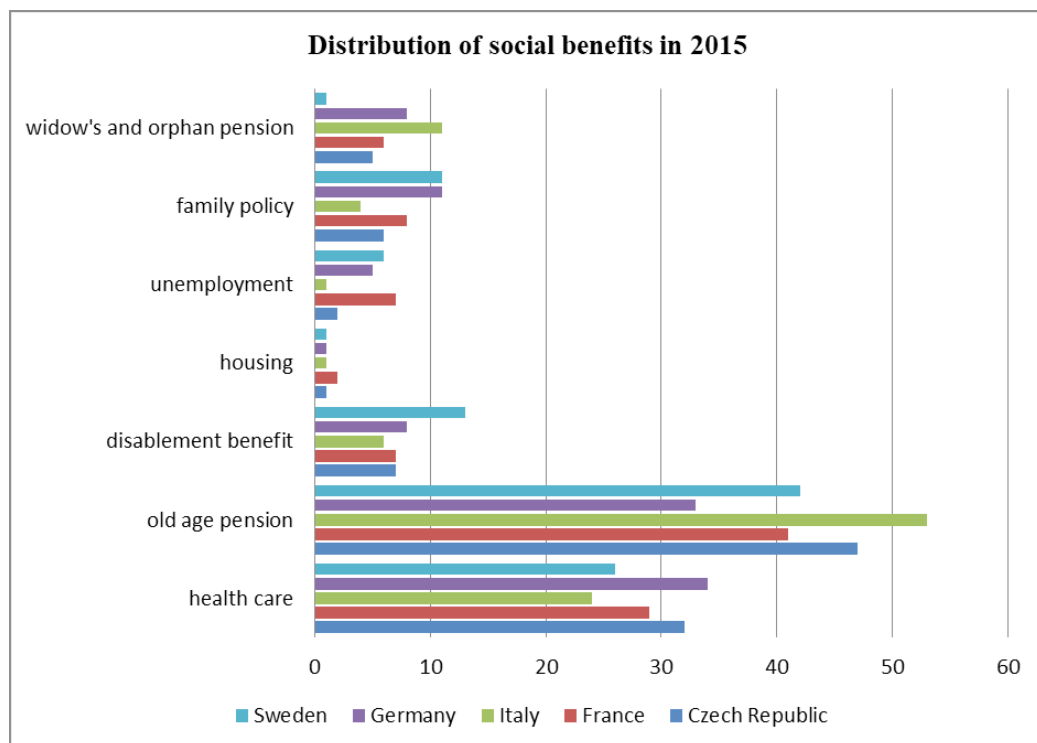


Chart 3: Structure of social benefits

Another pretty important indicator in the social area is a risk of poverty rate. As for the residents of the European Union, we can say that someone is considered a poor one if his monthly income is below 60% of the median of the average national income, including the benefits in the state. According to the Eurostat (2015), people who live on incomes below this level, usually have an impeded access to education, housing, financial and social services, and it is more

difficult for them to obtain a job and, on the other hand, they easily get into the trap of social exclusion. Haburajová Ilavská (2012, s. 23) speak, that social exclusion is a process where certain individuals are pushed to the margins of society. Social exclusion and poverty one of the main social issues in a globalizing world.

The lowest risk of poverty rate of the individual states of the European Union is in the Czech Republic since the last 7 years it has not exceeded 10%. The figures are somewhat surprising because was found that the Czech Republic had the toughest minimum wage among OECD countries (in 2007-2013: 8000 CZK), the Czech Republic has the lowest minimum wage based on the median national wage. That suggests, perhaps, that most Czech residents are earning above the minimum wage levels set by the government. Or that the median national income is low enough for most to avoid the poverty classification (see more in PARK, 2015, or DUŠEK, 2014). In 2015, the second lowest rate of risk of poverty, out of our group of countries, reached France. For Sweden, a high degree of redistribution and solidarity is characteristic because of their Scandinavian social democratic model. For this reason, the state has one of the lowest risks of poverty. While the highest poverty rate among the states in our comparison is in Italy. Germany keeps below the EU average (Chart 4).

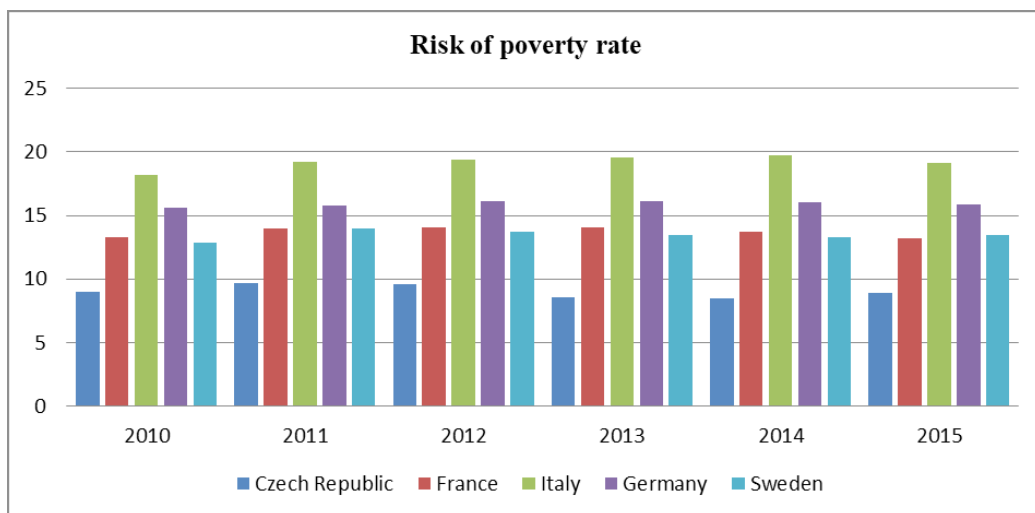


Chart 4: Risk of poverty rate of the selected European States

Another important factor that determines the standard of living of the population is the unemployment rate. Out of the total average of the European Union the Czech Republic has ranked, in the last 5 years, slightly above the average intensity of the unemployment among the people of the working age from 15 to 65 years. In our group of the selected countries the lowest unemployment rates were in Germany and the Czech Republic took the second position.

On the contrary, the highest unemployment rate in recent years has been in

Italy, where there is nearly 50% unemployment rate among young people under 25 years. Also France has been tackling the unemployment on a large scale (Chart 5).

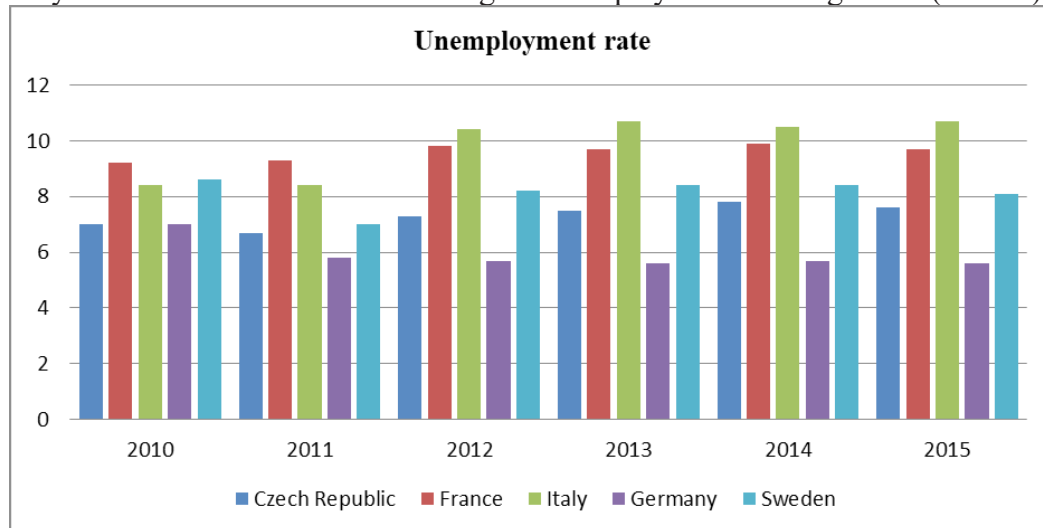


Chart 5: Unemployment rate of the selected European States

In order to reach a better comparison of the selected social phenomena, which are also an important driver of the social policy, we have done an analysis of a non-European country which is economically at a higher level compared to many European countries. Japan has a low number of the unemployed in comparison with other industrialized countries, which is partly due to the traditional system, which provides a life-time employment. In 2014, the unemployment fell to 3.9% and the last year this figure has not changed. A citizen has an entitlement to unemployment benefits in case that he managed to pay at least six months his social insurance from his employment in the preceding year. Also, it had to be a kind of full-time job. The calculation of the unemployment benefit depends on the age of the citizen and his income over the past six months and the maximum amount of the support makes 50% of the average gross annual salary. This financial support is paid for a maximum of three months and then a citizen is dependent on social benefits.

The subsistence wage makes $\frac{2}{3}$ of the average net monthly salary and consists of two parts:

- the amount determined for the household: dependent on the number of household members
- the amount determined for the citizen, which is derived from his age.

Regarding child allowances, any parents are not automatically pre-qualified. This financial benefit is paid only to families whose child has not reached a school age (below 6 years of age).

CONCLUSION

The EU considers poverty and social exclusion as a consequence of structural changes that accompany the socio-economic development of society, and therefore pays particular attention to them in all documents affecting EU integration, especially in the monetary and political union.

These changes include, in particular, changes in the labor market, technological changes in society (disadvantage of those with insufficient education or access to information and communication technologies), demographic changes (mainly the share of people over 65), ethnic diversity, structural changes Households and the redefinition of roles of men and women. Necessary structural changes in economies are also creating new risks Factors at risk of poverty and social exclusion. This is mainly unemployment (mostly long-term), long-term low income, low education and qualifications, disability, poor health and age, unsatisfactory housing and homelessness, gender inequality, migration, discrimination and racism, family breakdown and children's education in endangered (dysfunctional or dysfunctional) Families, living in disadvantaged areas where risks accumulate, individual dependence (especially on drugs and alcohol). In general, when the risks accumulate, their negative impact has a synergistic effect. This means that if it does not interrupt in time, for example, Poverty cycle, there is an intergenerational poverty that is risky from the point of view of social consequences.

The goal of the social policy at the European level is to increase the employment through development programs and to accelerate the economic changes and innovations as well as to enhance the competitiveness of the regions. The European Union invests in human resources, and supports the creation of more and better jobs. Another important fact is that the Union defines the direction which the social policy across Europe should follow. The differences in Europe's social security systems stem from the historical development of individual states and currently are shaped mainly by the economic and political situation of a given country. Within the comparison of the different systems there are significant differences among the examined countries in the number of social insurance, and also in the volume and terms of financial benefits. In terms of social security, generally we can say that European Union Member States belong among the most advanced countries in the world.

In the current social area, the general basic rule of non-discrimination is applied, which means in practice that the citizens of any other Member State shall have the same social rights as citizens of the State that executes the provision of social security. According to our comparison of the selected group of countries, we see that neither of them has a clearly excellent social system where the citizens should not have any problems concerning the social issues. In some states, even

if their system is redistributive and the social needs of their citizens perceives as their right (e.g. Sweden), there are still social problems and their number in some cases even increases. “Intersectoral and interdisciplinary approach is essential, because all human needs and form one inseparable whole”. (Baková, 2015, p. 241)

Conversely, for the comparison, we have chosen and outlined a non-European state, which ranks under the residual welfare state model. There is obvious, that the individual must primarily rely on his family, non-governmental institutions and only in the last turn on the state. A similar social model is also applied in some Western European countries (e.g. the United Kingdom).

Any social system has its strengths and weaknesses, and therefore one cannot clearly determine which state has the best social system, mainly due to different points of view and it always depends on the specific situation.

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