Implementation of the Social Goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy by EU Member States*

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Abstract:

Purpose: The subject of interest in the work is social goals, the importance of which was increased in relation to the previously binding Lisbon Strategy when it turned out that they were too underdeveloped in it. The main aim of the paper is to assess the implementation of the social goals of the Europe 2020 strategy by the EU Member States in the period 2010-2019, i.e. a year before its expiry, as well as to compare the results achieved by them.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The article proposes an effective and easy-to-use measure of ranking and monitoring member states in terms of their results using a procedure based on the taxonomic research with application of zero-unitarization method (min-max normalization). This method allows the integration of 10 indicators - 7 main statistical indicators provided for this purpose and 3 additionally selected by the authors - which is an extension of the previously used set of variables serving this purpose.

Findings: The obtained results allow not only to assess the implementation of the social goals of Strategy 2020, but also to use the knowledge gained on this subject when planning future strategic goals and their indicators.

Practical Implications: The practical advantage of the analytical method used in the article is not only the possibility of using taxonomic research using the zero unitarization method to evaluate individual objects in terms of the implementation of multidimensional goals, but also obtaining additional information about the internal structure and characteristics of this implementation.

Originality/value: The added value of the applied research method, apart from the aforementioned extension of the set of variables, is the fact that the level of achieving the social goal of each object is assessed on the basis of the results obtained in each group of indicators taken into account for this purpose. It is also worth emphasizing that this work focuses solely on the implementation of social goals, while other researchers deal with the synthetic (general) evaluation of the Strategy.

Keywords: Europe 2020 Index, EU social priorities and targets, indicators, classifications of countries, Zero-unitarization method.

JEL classification: A13, C02, O43, 52, P48.

Paper Type: Research study.

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1. Introduction

The failure of the Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010) and the global financial and economic crisis of 2007-2012 revealed many weaknesses of the European Union (EU) not only in terms of economic policy, but also in social policy and its inability to handle problems related to social inequality. For years, many politicians and economists believed that economic growth was replacing or reducing the need for running the social policy. The consequence of this approach was the growing social inequalities in the EU in many countries. Inequalities threaten social cohesion, economic growth and socio-economic development. Denying the importance of social issues may lead to weakening of the foundations of the EU (Allmendinger and Driesch, 2014; Inan, 2005). The economic crisis placed the problem of social inequalities high on the list of political priorities and made social policy more and more widely recognized as an instrument not only reducing inequalities and poverty, but also having a positive effect on the economy (Tucker, 2003; Zeitlin, 2008; Rodrigues, 2002).

Taking this into consideration and willing to avoid the crisis effects, the European Commission proposed a new plan of economic development - Europe 2020 - A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (2010). A new type of growth appeared in the document - smart, sustainable and inclusive - which the EU should follow in the long-term perspective (in 2010-2020), with particular attention being paid to the issues of balancing this process. As a matter of targeting its activities, the European Commission has agreed on a limited number of measurable goals for 2020, among which social goals are prominent. These goals should be monitored and strongly reflect the diversity of situations in individual Member States. Therefore, their measurability based on reliable data is important, which is why the European Union has formulated a set of synthetic indicators that enable to compare achievements in this area, both at the national and community level. The results of the measurements provide the basis for formulating recommendations for individual Member States in regard to further actions essential to achieve targets. Hence their conduct is so important. This determined the subject and purpose of the article.

The subject of research in the article are the social goals of the Europe 2020 strategy, and its aim - to assess the implementation of the social goals of the Europe 2020 strategy by EU Member States in the period of 2010-2019, as well as to compare the results achieved by them, both in relation to all and individual goals, to see if social inequalities between countries have decreased. It is important to explore it, both for individual countries and for the stability of the whole EU. EU countries differ significantly not only in the level of economic development, but also social one (Fura and Wang, 2017) especially the "old" and "new" Member States (Neira *et al.,* 2009)

which is also reflected in the achievement of the main indicators of the "Europe 2020" strategy. It is worth emphasizing that this paper focuses only on the implementation of social goals, while other researchers mainly handle a synthetic evaluation of the implementation of all goals of the Strategy. The empirical part of the paper is based on the taxonomic research with application of zero-unitarization method.

The 10 indicators were used to conduct the analysis - 7 main statistical indicators provided for this purpose and 3 additionally selected by the authors - which is an extension of the previously used set of variables serving this purpose. In addition, the use of a multivariate, two-stage analysis of indicators also allows for a detailed analysis of changes in achievements in individual three social goals and for indicating which of them had the greatest impact on the level of implementation of the group of goals. Therefore, this article is a complement of the identified research gap.

The rest of the article is organized as follows: a synthetic review of the literature concerning measuring the implementation of the Strategy in the EU Member States, description of the research methodology, presentation of the research results of 28 EU countries according to the level of implementation, both of a group and individual social goals with a discussion on them, and a summary of arrangements on the degree of fulfilling obligations in the social area by the Member States and recommendations regarding arrangements for further action strategies.

2. Literature Review

The huge role of the Europe 2020 Strategy has determined the appearance of a large number of publications on its implementation, including scientific reports (incl. the ones of the European Commission and various institutions), studies of the European Statistical Office and Statistical Offices of the Member States. Most publications present empirical studies of the progresses made by the Member States in implementing the strategy (Naldi *et al.,* 2015; Paprotny, 2016; Kacprzyk, Fura and Wojnar, 2016; Szymańska and Zalewska, 2018; Balcerzak, 2015). Part of the publications concerns the assessment of the implementation of strategic goals in selected countries (Bonsinetto and Falco, 2013) or in a group of countries against the background of the EU (Banelienė, 2013). Few publications focus strictly on social goals (Staníčková, 2017; Petmesidou, 2017; Kryk, 2017) - none of them used complementary indicators to assess the implementation of the Strategy's social goals, which is an additional argument in favour of such an action.

In the Europe 2020 Strategy, as was already mentioned, inclusive growth has been adopted as an important direction in counteracting social poverty. It is one of the priority areas, based on a high level of employment, ensuring economic, social and territorial cohesion. Such growth requires aiming at professional activation of the biggest possible number of people. Employment is treated as the most desirable system counteracting social exclusion. However, since not everyone is able to work and earn an income that allows them a decent life, the EU has formulated an anti-

poverty program based on social solidarity[3]. The inclusive growth area has been assigned integrated guidelines of a social nature. Namely: increasing the professional activity indicator and reducing structural unemployment; developing a qualified workforce responding to the needs of the labour market, promoting the quality of employment and lifelong learning; improving the efficiency of education and training systems at all levels and increasing the number of entrants to higher education; promoting social inclusion and combating poverty (Council Decision, 2010; Kryk, 2016). The measurable goals have been assigned to the guidelines: first headline target is to increase employment of people at the age of 20-64, second - to increase the level of education through reducing the percentage of people leaving school too early and increasing the percentage of people at the age of 30-34 with higher or equivalent education, third - to reduce poverty and social exclusion. To check the progress in their implementation - they are periodically monitored, which is why a group of seven synthetic indicators were established with reference levels determining the average European result (it should be achieved in 2020)[4], which the Authors complemented with three additional indicators corresponding to the above-mentioned integrated guidelines[5].

From the point of view of the social goals of the Europe 2020 strategy, the indicators represent the most important parameters in the field of social exclusion and will help to measure, both at the national and European level, the progress in reducing poverty and to present achievements.

3. Research Methodology

In the paper, a dynamic approach with two analytical levels was used. The evaluation was based on a taxonomic linear ordering method (Hellwig, 1968) and on the normalization with a constant reference point for the whole period of the analysis (the years 2010 and 2019). The constant reference point gives the range of normalized variables described with equation (1) (Kukuła and Bogocz, 2014; Balcerzak 2015).

$$R(X_{jt}) = \max_{it} x_{ijt} - \min_{it} ijt \tag{1}$$

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[3]*Among others, the following were created: European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, Social Investment Package, Employment Package, Youth Employment Package, White Paper on Pensions (European Commission 2017).*

[4]*The reference levels have been partially based on former establishments included in the Lisbon Strategy with certain complementation and modifications (this regards the first two goals), the third goal has been added as a new one in the Europe 2020 Strategy.*

[5]*It should be mentioned that EU members, taking common goals into account, had the opportunity to set national reference levels for social achievements properly to their own possibilities and conditions. Part of the countries used this possibility and adopted slightly different reference levels than the European ones, sometimes they are more ambitious than the European ones, sometimes - on the contrary. However, due to the calculation procedure, the article is limited only to the EU reference level.*

First, the overall assessment of countries by one synthetic measure based on all proposed 10 indicators was made. Then assessed their achievements divided into separate groups (three headline targets) were evaluated. The method used allows not only to create rankings of countries and evaluation of the implementation of the headline indicators but also to group them into four classes - countries with: a) very high; b) high; c) medium and d) the low level of achievement of the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy. In the research, the data from Eurostat for the period of 2010 and 2019 was used (Eurostat).

The fulfillment of headline targets in the paper is monitored with the following specific diagnostic criteria:

Headline target 1. *75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed*.
x_{1t}- Employment rate of age group 20-64 (percentage of the number of employed aged 20-64 to the total number of people in the same age group).
x_{2t} - indicator adopted by the authors -Youth unemployment rate by sex (expressed as percentage of the number of unemployed aged 15-24 to the total number of economically active people in the same age group).
x_{3t} - indicator adopted by the authors - Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex (percentage of the number of young people aged 15 to 24 not in employment, education or training, the so-called NEET, in the total population in the same age and gender group).

Headline target 2. *The share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree.*
x_{4t} - Early leavers from education and training, age group 18-24 (percentage of the population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and who were not in further education or training during the last four weeks preceding the survey).
x_{5t} - Tertiary educational attainment, age group 30-34 (percentage of the population aged 30-34 who have successfully completed tertiary studies, e.g. university, higher technical institution, etc.).
x_{6t} - indicator adopted by the authors - Adult participation in learning by sex (percentage of the number of people aged 25 to 64 who stated that they received formal or non-formal education and training in the four weeks preceding the survey).

Headline target 3. *20 million less people should be at risk of poverty.*
x_{7t} - People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (percentage of total population).
x_{8t} - People living in households with very low work intensity (percentage of total population).
x_{9t} - People at risk of poverty after social transfers (percentage of total population).
x_{10t} - Severely materially deprived people (percentage of total population).

Among the selected variables, 3 (x_{1t}, x_{5t}, x_{6t}), were considered to be stimulants characteristics having a positive influence on the measure, whereas 7

$(x_{2t}, x_{3t}, x_{4t}, x_{7t}, x_{8t}, x_{9t}, x_{10t})$ were regarded as destimulants reducing the synthetic measure of the fulfillment of social goals.

In order to bring the variables to comparability, they were normalized by means of the min-max normalization (Kukuła 1999):

$$z_{ijt} = \frac{x_{ijt} - \min_{it}\{x_{ijt}\}}{\max_{it}\{x_{ijt}\} - \min_{it}\{x_{ijt}\}} \tag{2}$$

$(i = 1,2,\dots,n);\ (j = 1,2,\dots,m);\ (t = 1,2,\dots,l);\ z_{ij} \in [0,1]$

$$z_{ijt} = \frac{\max_{it}\{x_{ijt}\} - x_{ijt}}{\max_{it}\{x_{ijt}\} - \min_{it}\{x_{ijt}\}} \tag{3}$$

$(i = 1,2,\dots,n);\ (j = 1,2,\dots,m);\ (t = 1,2,\dots,l);\ z_{ij} \in [0,1]$

where:
z_{ijt} is the normalized value of the *j*-th variable in the *i*-th country on year t,
x_{ijt} is the initial value of the *j*-th variable in the *i*-th country on year t.
The stimulants were normalized with the formula (2) and the destimulants with the formula (3).

Assessment of the variable that characterizes the objects – a synthetic measure SM_{it} – was obtained with the formula (4).

$$SM_{it} = \frac{1}{m}\sum_{j=1}^{m} z_{ijt} \tag{4}$$

$(i = 1,2,\dots,n);\ (j = 1,2,\dots,m);\ (t = 1,2,\dots,l);\ z_{ij} \in [0,1];\ SM_i \in [0,1]$

The synthetic measure enables to divide the set of countries into four groups:
1. Group I – the countries with very high level of synthetic measure of fulfillment aims of the Strategy, where $(SM_{it} \geq \overline{SM_{it}} + S(SM_{it}))$
2. Group II - the countries with a high level of synthetic measure of fulfillment aims of the Strategy, where $(\overline{SM_{it}} \leq SM_{it} < \overline{SM_{it}} + S(SM_{it}))$,
3. Group III - the countries with an average level of synthetic measure of fulfillment aims of the Strategy, where $(\overline{SM_{it}} - S(SM_{it}) \leq SM_{it} < \overline{SM_{it}})$,
4. Group III - the Countries with a low level of synthetic measure of fulfillment aims of the Strategy, where $(SM_{it} < \overline{SM_{it}} - S(SM_{it}))$,
where
$\overline{SM_{it}}$- arithmetic mean of a synthetic measures SM_{it},
$S(SM_{it})$ - standard deviation of a synthetic measure SM_{it}.

4. Research Results and Discussion

In the first stage of the research, the level of implementation of the social goals was evaluated in 28 EU (including GB) based on 10 indicators (seven indicators of the Europe 2020 strategy extended with additional three indicators adopted by the authors). The results of the analysis were presented in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1. *The result of multivariate analysis of fulfillment aims of social goals Europe 2020 strategy in the years 2010 and 2019.*

2010			2019		
No.	Co.	SM	No.	Co.	SM
I - Countries with very high level of synthetic measure of fulfillment aims of the Strategy					
1	NL	0.7896	1	NL	0.8379
2	DK	0.7580	2	SE	0.8247
3	LU	0.7527	3	CZ	0.8187
4	SE	0.7524	4	DK	0.8053
5	FI	0.7194	5	SI	0.8051
6	SI	0.7156			
II - Countries with a high level of synthetic measure of fulfillment aims of the Strategy					
7	AT	0.6795	6	FI	0.8012
8	CZ	0.6728	7	AT	0.7675
9	DE	0.6385	8	LU	0.7373
10	CY	0.6298	9	EE	0.7293
11	GB	0.5958	10	PL	0.7278
12	FR	0.5858	11	DE	0.7246
13	BE	0.5783	12	IE	0.7120
			13	FR	0.7100
			14	GB	0.6963
			15	MT	0.6909
			16	SK	0.6818
			17	CY	0.6755
III - Countries with an average level of synthetic measure of fulfillment aims of the Strategy					
14	EE	0.5333	18	LT	0.6677
15	PL	0.5269	19	HU	0.6671
16	SK	0.5066	20	PT	0.6487
17	MT	0.4830	21	BE	0.6418
18	PT	0.4485	22	LV	0.6334
19	IE	0.4425	23	HR	0.5650
20	HU	0.4284			
21	LT	0.4276			
22	GR	0.4092			
23	HR	0.3920			
IV - Countries with a low level of synthetic measure of fulfillment aims of the Strategy					
24	IT	0.3629	24	ES	0.4968
25	ES	0.3600	25	BG	0.4801
26	LV	0.3070	26	GR	0.4452

| 27 | RO | 0.2891 | 27 | RO | 0.4344 |
| 28 | BG | 0.2638 | 28 | IT | 0.3976 |

Source: *Author's calculations based on Eurostat data:* http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database.

The amount of the synthetic measure of social goals implementation reflects the changes that have occurred over 9 years, both in the groups of countries according to the level of achievement and their position in the ranking. In 2019, the number of countries with a very high level of the Strategy goals implementation was one less than in 2010. Four countries remained in the group (NL, SE, DK and SI). The CZ came 3rd, moving from the 8th position in the group of countries with a high level of the Strategy goals fulfillment (this is a great achievement for a country regarded as the so-called new members). Two countries (LU and FI) moved from the first to the second group.

In 2019, there was a spectacular increase in the number of members qualified for the group of countries with a high level of fulfillment aims of the Strategy - from 7 to 12. Five countries (EE, PL, IE, MT, SK) previously belonging to the third group moved up to the second group, four of which belonged to the so-called new EU members. The number of countries with the average level of the Strategy goals in 2019 fulfillment was four less than in 2010.

There were five foregoing members left (LT, HU, PT, LV, HR) and BE joined the group, but each with a higher level of the SM index, which is a good prediction for the implementation of social goals. Only the size of the group of countries with a low level of the Strategy goals fulfilment remained unchanged. There was only one change between countries in this group - (GR) fell from the 22th position in the third group to the 26th position in the fourth group, due to the persistent bad economic situation negatively affecting the implementation of social goals, and LV from the 26th position to 22th in the third group. In the analysed period, virtually in all countries, there was an increase in the level of social goals' achievement, whereby in some of them it was relatively low (NL, LU, CY, IT, GR, ES, DE, DK, BG, BE, SE, RO), and in others - high (LV, LT, HU, IE). In 2019, RO, GR, IT, ES, BG were farthest from the pattern (value one) (see Figure 1).

Whereby, RO and BG are new members with the weakest economic situation in the EU, needing a longer time to achieve social goals, the other three southern countries (IT, GR, ES) have been members of the Community for a long time, but are still struggling with the effects of the economic crisis of 2008 -2012, high unemployment and a migration problem, which negatively affects their achievements in the social area. On the other hand, the closest to the pattern, i.e. social goals' achievement, were NL, SI, SE. FI, CZ, DK, LU.

Figure 1. *The average level analysis of fulfillment aims of social goals Europe 2020 strategy in case of the EU28 in the years 2010 and 2019.*
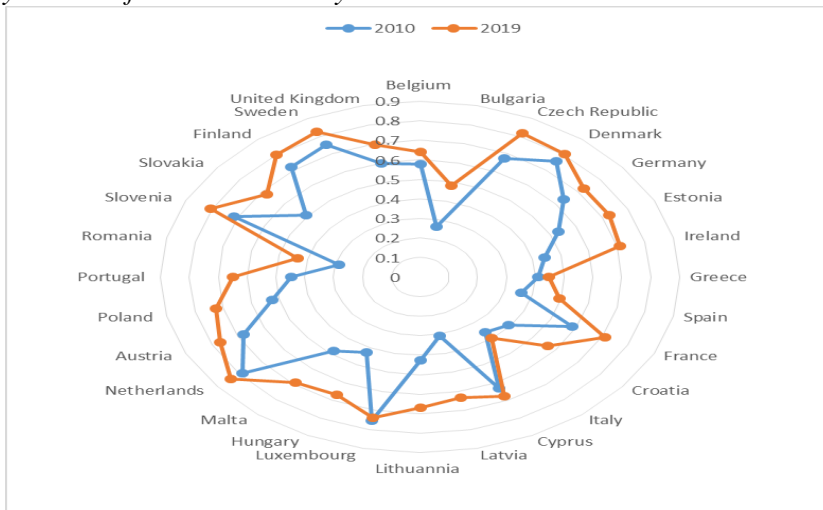
Source: Author's calculations.

To understand how EU countries implemented each of the three Headline Indicators related to social goals, in the second stage of the research the synthetic measures for reaching the separate three groups of targetswere estimated. The results are presented in Figures 2, 3, and 4.

Figure 2. *The average level of fulfillment aims of Headline target 1 of Europe 2020 strategy (75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed) in case of the EU28 in the years 2010 and 2019.*
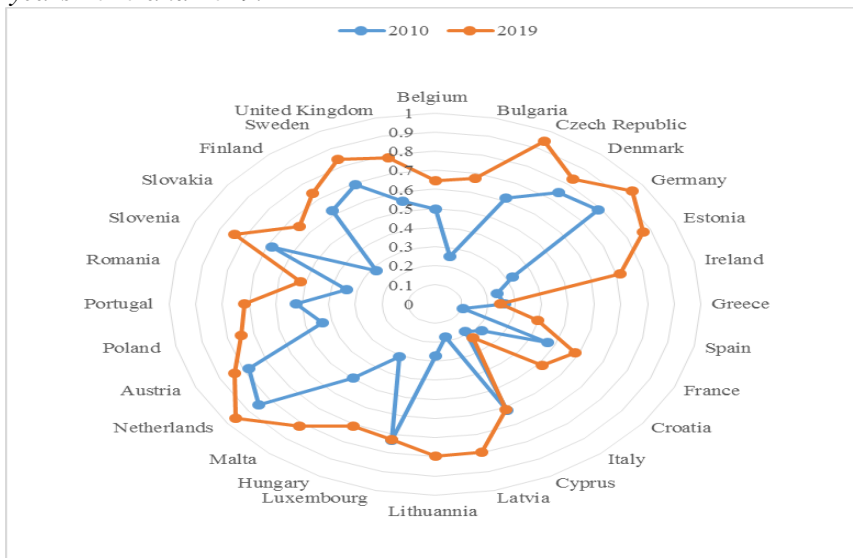
Source: Author's calculations.

In 2019, the closest to achieving the headline target 1 were NL, CZ, DE, SI, DK, EE, which had the highest level of all indicators used to measure this goal. The farthest from achieving the goal were: GR, IT, ES, which despite using programs supporting the reduction of unemployment (e.g. Youth Guarantees) had high unemployment rates (general, youth, and NEET). For this reason, they will not achieve the goal within the prescribed time. During 9 years, the greatest achievements in the implementation of the goals were made by IE, EE, LV, LT, HU, MT, PL, SK, thanks to the improved economic situation and the effective use of EU assistance. On the other hand, LU did not have any achievements in this regard. The youth unemployment rate and the NEET unemployment rate increased and the employment growth slowed down in LU.

Summarizing, in the analyzed period, almost all countries, except for CY, IT LU, showed progress in achieving the headline target. EU aid, especially dedicated to youth, played a huge role in this respect. When in 2012 the deteriorating situation of young unemployed people, which was exacerbated by the then economic and financial crisis, was identified, the European Commission presented a proposal for a Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on the establishment of a Youth Guarantee (EU Commission, 2012a), as a part of the Youth Employment Package developed[6] (EU Commission, 2012b). Following the Commission's proposal, Member States jointly established the Youth Guarantee in the form of a Council Recommendation of April 2013 (OJ, 2013), which was one of the most significant EU initiatives to improve the situation of young people on the labor market.

The Youth Guarantee was a demand/obligation for Member States to provide young people up to 25 years of age - within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed - a good-quality job offer tailored to their education, skills and experience, or the opportunity to obtain an education skills and experience required to find a job in the future through internships, apprenticeships or further education (Special Report, 2015). The Youth Guarantee covered all young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). The identification of the NEET group was important for a more complete picture of the participation of young people in the labor market, because the indicators used so far, mainly concerning employment and unemployment, turned out to be insufficient to analyze the complex condition of the representatives of the young generation. Concentration on the NEET group made it possible to refer to the general youth, not only the professionally active part. This focus on systematically reaching out to professionally inactive youth (not looking for a job, not in education or training), and not only on supporting youth actively looking for a job, was a kind of novelty guarantee for young people (Kryk, 2018a).

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[6]*The Employment package (launched April 2012) is a set of policy documents looking into how EU employment policies intersect with a number of other policy areas in support of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It identifies the EU's biggest job potential areas and the most effective ways for EU countries to create more jobs.*

The establishment of the Youth Guarantee has been accompanied by political guidance and financial support at Union level, in particular through the Youth Employment Initiative (European Council, 2013)[7]. Twenty Member States with regions meeting the criteria for receiving this assistance have been selected for funding under the Youth Employment Initiative[8]. The largest funds for the activation of NEETs were allocated to seven countries: Spain, Italy, France, Poland, Great Britain, Greece and Portugal (in total 81.2% of the total funds from the Initiative), in which there was (or still exists) a high unemployment rate among young people (European Commission, 2014).

The analysis of the key indicators used to monitor the effects of the Youth Guarantee program showed that, support for young people resulted in quite satisfactory changes in the indicators used to measure this phenomenon (namely a reduction in the unemployment rate of people aged 15-24 and 25-29, people up to 25 years of age covered by active labor market programs, reduction of the share of people up to 25 years of age and 25-29 years of age in the total number of registered unemployed and reduction of the average duration of unemployment among young people), but - as already mentioned - not in all supported countries (GR, IT, ES) (Kryk, 2018 b, Special Report, 2017, EC Communication, 2016). In countries like GE, IT, and ES, the persistent unfavorable economic situation has a negative effect on the labor market in general and making it difficult to achieve EU goals in this area.

In 2019, SE, LU were the closest to achieve the headline target 2. In their case, the level of indicators for assessing this area was already higher than the EU average and there had actually little opportunities to increase their level. The farthest from the target were: RO, BG, IT, HU, MT characterized by the lowest level of indicators. The specificity of which (concerning the level of education and lifelong learning) requires e.g. longer implementation time, adjusting the demand for employees accordingly to the change in the structure of the economy (running more slowly there) or the attitude of adults towards increasing/changing qualifications. In 9 years, the greatest achievements in the implementation of the goal were made by: MT, GR, FR, IE, ES, LV, LT thanks to an increase in the percentage of people with higher education, which was a consequence of the need to extend the period of youth education in order to delay their entry to a labour market with high unemployment rates. The lowest achievements in headline target 2 were made by BG, HR, SI, BE, whereby the first two countries were characterized by a low level of area indicators, and in the next two countries, the level of these indicators exceeded the already determined union average.

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[7]*It was launched to provide support to young people living in regions where youth unemployment was higher than 25% in 2012. It was topped up in 2017 for regions with youth unemployment higher than 25%in 2016.*
[8]*These include Sweden, Belgium, Ireland, United Kingdom, France, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Cyprus.*

Figure 3. *The average level of fulfillment aims of Headline target 2 of Europe 2020 strategy (The share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree) of the EU28 in the years 2010 and 2019.*
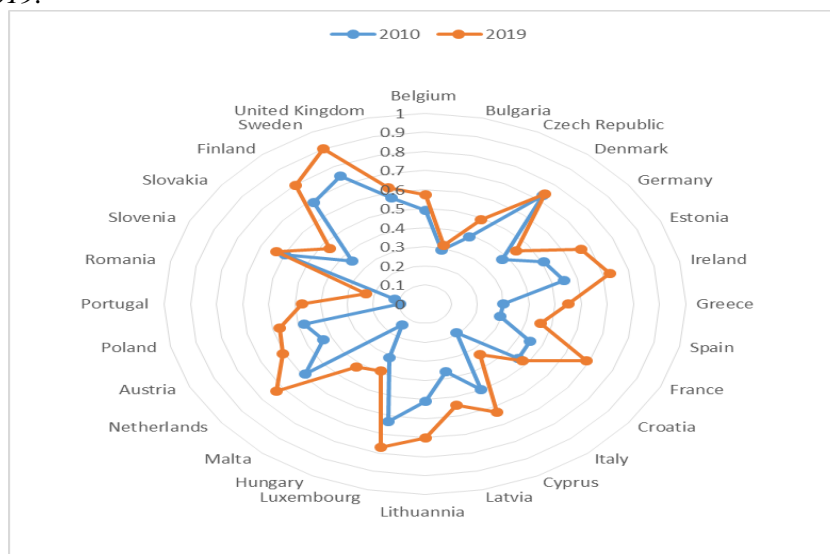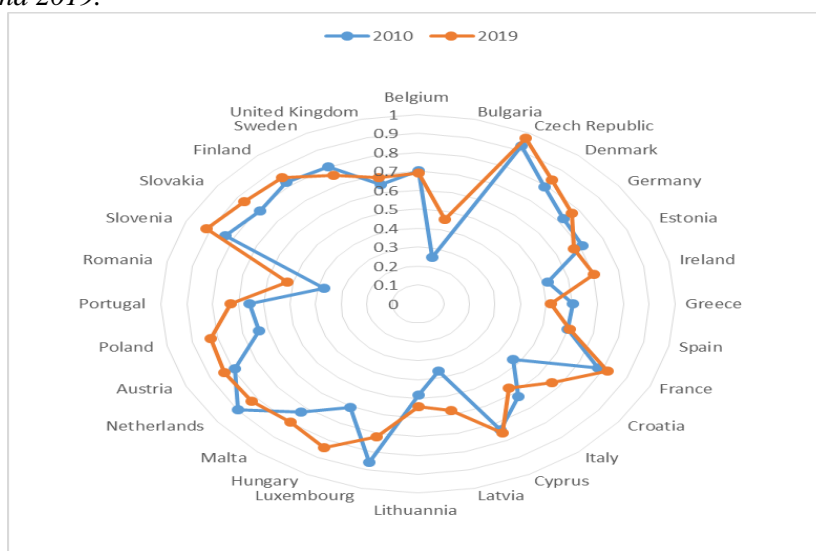

Source: Author's calculations.

In general, countries' achievements in the implementation of headline target 2 were different in the analyzed period. It is important that there has been a positive change in the main indicators for measuring these achievements, i.e. a reduction in the percentage of early school leavers (it continued to decline, reaching a level close to the planned target in 2019 - below 10%) and an increase in the percentage of people aged 30- 34 years with higher education (it increased to the planned level - at least 40%) (EU Commission, 2019a). The largest changes took place in countries where these indicators significantly deviated from the EU average in 2010, while the smallest in countries where the values of these indicators were slightly lower or even equal and higher than the planned 2020 target. The improvement in both reducing early school leaving and increasing the percentage of young people enrolled in tertiary education has obvious implications for the labor market. Education is important to support employment growth. Early leavers from education and training may find it more difficult to enter and function in the labor market, the higher the education, the greater the chances of finding a job (as evidenced by the employment rate of the university and secondary graduates, which is higher than the overall EU average).

In 2019, the closest to achieving headline target 3 (see Figure 4) were CZ and SI thanks to the high level of all indicators monitoring the implementation of social goals and good economic results, which was already obtained in 2010. The farthest from the target were BG, RO, GR, ES, IT, whereby while in the first two countries there was a certain progress thanks to EU funds, in the last three there was a regress in relation to

the base year, caused by the difficult economic situation affecting the labour market and the surge of a significant number of migrants from outside Europe, which additionally increased the social burden in these countries.

Figure 4. *The average level of fulfillment aims of Headline target 3 of Europe 2020 strategy (20 million less people should be at risk of poverty) of the EU28 in the years 2010 and 2019.*

Source: *Author's calculations*

The greatest achievements in the implementation of the goal were made by HR, HU, LV, IE, PL, which effectively used EU assistance and improved the economic situation after the last global financial crisis. Moreover, PL introduced additional social programs (such as 500+ Program and Thirteen for Retirees), which reduced the risk of poverty and social exclusion. The lowest results in the implementation of headline target 3 (apart from the already mentioned GR, ES, IT) were achieved by BE, CY, FI, FR, LT, DE, CZ, and SE, NL, EE, and LU even regressed. It should be noted that most of these countries belong to the so-called old EU members, which have accepted relatively large numbers of emigrants, which has negatively affected the fulfillment of obligations in the field of reducing poverty and social exclusion. The exception is CZ, which in 2010 had a poverty level much lower than the EU average, therefore its effects in reducing it were insignificant.

In summary, the problem of poverty exists in most EU Member States, with few exceptions. The mid-term review of the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy carried out in 2015 showed that until then, the Member States had focused on economic and budgetary consolidation due to the 2008-2012 crisis, and not on social issues, including poverty. Therefore, the European Commission undertook the task of

preparing an annual report commenting on the progress of countries in implementing social indicators of the Europe 2020 Strategy on the basis of national reports (CR)[9], in order to motivate them to act in this area. A review of the European Commission's comments on the achievements of individual members shows that only in the case of the countries with the highest poverty levels (RO, GR, LV, BG, IT, ES) the "recommendations" directly pointed to the need to eradicate poverty. In relation to other countries, this was indicated indirectly, emphasizing the need to improve the quality and access to social services (e.g. childcare to facilitate the employment of women as second earners in the household or single parents), developing social assistance, increasing the efficiency of redistribution of social protection.

However, most of the recommendations on poverty reduction were linked to employment. They mainly focused on labor market issues (such as strengthening activation measures, combining social security with activation, reducing disincentives to work) and education (improving education, vocational training, training and lifelong learning, and reducing skills/qualifications mismatch) employees to the needs of the labor market).

In addition, in countries with the highest AROPE (at-risk-of-relative poverty rate), the policy measure strongly recommended for poverty reduction was the minimum income program (i.e. improve its effectiveness, link it to activation, etc.), mostly related to social protection areas such as like pensions and health (extremely cautiously, minimum income was discussed in close connection with taxes on sustainable development).

This indirect approach and an iterative process of monitoring progress in poverty reduction mobilized countries to act in the labor market and education, which worked in these areas but did not deliver the expected poverty outcomes. Only countries implementing specific measures (including PL HU, SI) achieved significant effects in reducing poverty. For this reason, the European Commission concluded that it was necessary to adequately strengthen the social dimension. The "European Pillar of Social Rights" (EPSR - 2017, published 2018) was developed[10] which became the basis for the adoption of many different solutions/instruments to reduce poverty in the Member States (e.g. Social Europe Your stories, 2018, Europe stands for equal opportunities, 2019a, Europe stands for fair working conditions, 2019b, Europe stands

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[9]*The CRs constitute a new key milestone in the annual monitoring process by providing a significant input into the drafting of the country-specific r recommendations at the closing of the yearly cycle (Petmesidou, 2017, Polakowski & inni, 2019).*
[10]*The European Pillar of Social Rights was adopted at the 2017 Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth. It provides both new rights for citizens and aims to help them better enforce the rights they already have. The European Pillar of Social Rights is based on 20 basic principles, organized in three categories: equal opportunities and access to employment, fair working conditions, social protection and social inclusion.*

for social protection and inclusion, 2019c). These documents set the framework for actions and set their direction, but many of the tools needed to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights are in the hands of the Member States, social partners and civil society (Von der Leyen, 2019).

5. Conclusions, Proposals, Recommendations

The conducted studies show that:

•   In 2019, the amount of the synthetic indicator for assessing the implementation of social goals of the Europe 2020 strategy was higher than in 2010 in all Member States, but the indicator was increasing to a varying degree. In the so-called old Member States, the increases were generally lower than in the new Member States. The consequence of this was a change in the ranking and classification of countries according to the level of fulfilment of social goals. Namely, 10 countries fell to lower positions, 8 of which remained in their category (DE, CY, GB, FR, DK, IT) and 4 moved to the lower category (FI, LU, GR, BE). Only 3 countries (NL, AT, RO) remained on permanent positions and in the same category. However, 15 countries moved up to higher positions in the ranking, 9 of which remained in its category (SE, SI, LT, HU, PT, LV, HR, ES, BG), and 6 countries moved to the higher category (CZ from the second to the first group, and EE, PL, IE, MT, SK from the third to the second group). In 2019, the total number of countries with a very high and high level of implementation of social goals was 17 and was by higher by 4 than in 2010. The number of countries in the third group decreased to 6, and the number of countries in the fourth group remained unchanged (5 countries), only its structure changed.

•   Comparing the achievements in the implementation of the three main goals, it can be noticed that headline target 1 related to employment was implemented to the greatest extent, and headline target 2 related to education - to the lowest extent.

•   In 2019, the greatest achievements in the implementation of headline target 1 were made by NL, CZ, DE, SI, DK, EE, and the lowest by GR, IT, ES. The results of the remaining 19 countries do not guarantee the achievement of the planned goals.

•   In the case of headline target 2, the closest to it were SE, LU, and the farthest from it were RO, BG, IT, HU, MT. The greatest progress in achieving the goal was made by: MT, GR, FR, IE, ES, LV, LT.

•   In the case of headline target 3, the closest to achieve the goal were CZ and SI, while BG, RO, GR, ES, IT were the farthest. Whereas, the greatest progress in achieving the goal was made in HR, HU, LV, IE, PL.

While analysing the research results, it can be noticed that they reflect the socio-economic events that took place in the analysed period. Therefore, when developing further action strategies, one should consider the potential turbulences in the environment that can destroy even the best plans. This article presents only one option for evaluating the implementation of the social goals of the Europe 2020 strategy, however, it would be interesting to examine the results in relation to the incurred financial outlays, i.e. to verify the cost-effectiveness of the implemented actions.

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