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THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN PROVIDING MINIMUM WELFARE THROUGH UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME AND SOCIAL SECURITY MECHANISMS

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Abstract

Research purpose. Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a noteworthy social and economic model that reduces absolute poverty, improves people's physical and mental well-being, and has a positive impact on the labour market. It could serve as an alternative to the increasing need to adjust, reform, and enhance current social protection systems to ensure at least minimal welfare guarantees through them. The aim of this article is to evaluate whether the state's efforts to ensure minimum welfare and the expectations of the Lithuanian population regarding the state's role in securing socio-economic stability can be regarded as prerequisites for the introduction of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) as an alternative to the existing social security system.

Design / Methodology / Approach. The article is structured around the following research methodology: scientific literature on UBI as an alternative measure to the social security system, correlational and regression analysis, quantitative research, summary of research findings, and conclusions.

Findings. European countries strive to ensure at least a minimum level of well-being for their citizens. When looking for solutions to do this, there are two possible alternatives - to improve the social security system or to introduce UBI. This means making a radical decision on the method of ensuring minimum well-being. In both cases, it is necessary to consider state spending. Currently, the state's contribution to ensuring well-being includes not only government spending on monetary social support for people with the lowest incomes but also for those receiving the minimum and average wages. The expectations of Lithuanian residents regarding the provision of minimum well-being are thus focused on the state.

Originality / Value / Practical implications. The results of the study presented in the article suggest the need to intensify the debate on the introduction of UBI in Lithuania to reduce poverty in the most economically disadvantaged households. Two main alternatives exist: improving the current social protection systems (which is a more costly option in terms of cost-effectiveness due to inefficient administrative expenses) or introducing Universal Basic Income (UBI), which is a relatively cheaper option from an administrative standpoint. While the second alternative is not without its drawbacks, it is certainly worthy of at least theoretical discussion regarding the feasibility and potential of a phased introduction of UBI across the entire EU.

Keywords: Minimum well-being; national government expenditure; social support; unemployment; resilience; UBI

JEL codes: H53; H590

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Introduction

In welfare-oriented states, social protection in a broad sense is implemented through a social protection system that encompasses programs and measures from various fields (health, education, family, employment, etc.), which differ in objectives, principles, and methods across different countries. Economists, sociologists, and behavioural economics specialists study the characteristics and issues of social protection systems from various aspects: the implementation of state commitments at the macro level, the physical and mental health of individuals, economic and social well-being, and the shaping of individual behaviour. The issue of ensuring a minimum level of well-being remains relevant not only on government agendas but also as a scientific problem, which is examined from various perspectives to address questions regarding how systems should be improved, in what manner, and at what level social guarantees should be provided—either by enhancing the existing system or by taking a revolutionary step, such as the transition to UBI (Choi, 2021; Endo & Choi, 2023; Gubello, 2024; Kangas et al., 2021; Luduvice, 2024; Nesti et al., 2024, and others).

This article aims to assess whether government expenditure on welfare and citizens' expectations regarding state obligations can serve as a basis for the discussion on the introduction of Universal Basic Income (UBI). The objectives are as follows: to discuss the key theoretical issues surrounding UBI as an alternative to the existing social security system; to investigate whether funds allocated to social protection correlate with economic growth; to identify the factors influencing minimum income levels; and to examine the expectations of Lithuanian citizens regarding the state's role in ensuring minimal welfare.

The correlational and regression analyses confirmed the significant role of government expenditure in ensuring welfare, while survey results indicated that citizens' trust and expectations regarding welfare provision are largely delegated to the state. The article concludes with a discussion of whether expectations of state responsibility for ensuring minimum welfare mean that we are ready for the introduction of UBI.

A key limitation of this study is the exclusion of broader dimensions related to sustainability, utility, economic efficiency, and the overall effectiveness of the social system—elements that align with the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. These dimensions are undeniably relevant for a comprehensive evaluation of welfare systems. However, such a broad analysis of the concept of well-being is limited by the chosen purpose of the article.

The article is based on some results of the „Employment Challenges and Resilience in the Labor Market: social and individual resources and directions for their strengthening” project (under Agreement No. S-MIP-24-27 with the Research Council of Lithuania).

Literature review

In discussions regarding the methods of ensuring a minimum level of welfare, alternative and innovative solutions are being sought to ensure the implementation of key social protection goals. One topic that is receiving increasing attention is the questions related to the feasibility and potential of introducing Universal Basic Income (UBI) – unconditional regular payments to all residents.

The idea of UBI has been discussed in numerous academic publications that cover various policy aspects and issues, as well as its potential consequences if implemented. Many authors, including Choi (2021), McCreary (2024), and Gentilini et al. (2020), have analysed the concept of UBI. This idea is increasingly supported by entrepreneurs, scholars, and politicians. Although the concept of Universal Basic Income is increasingly viewed less as a utopian ideal and more as a potential solution to poverty—akin to cutting the Gordian Knot—there remain many unanswered questions regarding its feasibility. The implementation of UBI is thus assessed in terms of its potential consequences on poverty. (Connolly et al., 2024; Gielens et al., 2024; Hochman et al., 2024; Reed et al., 2023; Sawyer, 2024; Widerquist, 2024;).

De Siqueira and Nogueira (2020) examined the impact and concluded that establishing a UBI level that corresponds to the poverty line would likely reduce poverty. Due to financial constraints, UBI may lower

the poverty level without eliminating it. Gentilini et al. (2020), and Verho et al. (2021) have concluded that the implementation of UBI should have a positive effect on labour supply, and UBI is a potential solution to combat unemployment traps. However, despite all the favourable conclusions, there are scholars who remain sceptical of these findings.

The authors discussing the results of UBI experiments highlight various impacts: in terms of economic development (Sawyer, 2024; Wong & Forget, 2024), impact on the labour market (Verho et al., 2021; Wijngaarden et al., 2024; and others), public health (Gongora-Salazar et al., 2022; Kangas et al., 2021; Thomson et al., 2024; and others). The analysis of these authors introduces a wide variety of positive and negative consequences, determined by the region, as well as the social, economic, and cultural characteristics of the country and the model.

Researchers conclude that in developed countries, the primary goal of potentially introducing UBI is to reform the social security system, while in developing economies, UBI could serve as an alternative for poverty reduction, providing a serious basis to consider the feasibility of implementing UBI. Pilot studies consistently show that in the labour market, UBI does not discourage people from working, significant improvements in mental and physical health have been observed, and UBI has a positive impact on reducing absolute poverty.

UBI, as an alternative to the traditional social protection system, is closely related to the resilience of the labour market, as it affects social security, therefore the analysis of this alternative is essential in assessing how society can respond to socio-economic changes or long-term structural transformations.

Is it relevant to Lithuania? In terms of the goals of implementing UBI, the answer is yes, as there is a clear need to determine a solution for ensuring a minimum income.

Research methodology

The article presents the results of research with a macro-level focus on the state's role in providing minimum welfare through Universal Basic Income (UBI) and social security mechanisms using systematic analysis of scientific literature and quantitative methods – correlational and regression analysis (all calculations were performed using Eurostat indicators).

Analysing possible theoretical issues of ensuring minimum welfare, UBI is presented as an alternative instrument to the social security system, its advantages and disadvantages.

To assess whether there is a correlation between economic growth and changes in social protection expenditures, a correlation analysis of GDP per capita and social protection expenditures per capita in European countries from 2012 to 2023 was performed. The calculations were carried out using SPSS/PC software.

For the regression analysis, aimed at determining the impact of various factors on welfare derived from employment (wages) in Lithuania (from 2012 to 2023), both bivariate and multiple regression methods were used. Research variables: Minimum wage (brutto) (MW), Average wage (brutto) (AW), Employee compensation (COMP), Work efficiency (EFF), Employee (EMPL), Hours worked (HOUR), Education (EDU), GDP (GDP), GDP per capita (GDP_C), FDI (FDI), FDI per capita (FDI_C), Government expenditure (GOV_EXP), Unemployed (UNE), Labour cost (LAB), Value added (VAL), Population (POP), Inflation (INF). The calculations were carried out using SPSS/PC software.

The quantitative research methodology was selected to collect empirical data. A questionnaire was developed to assess the opinions of the country's residents concerning the monetary social support payments provided by the state. The respondents included residents aged 18 to 75. Empirical data collection took place between July 2023 and October 2023. The research employed a quota sampling method, resulting in a sample size of 1,009 individuals who were interviewed during the study. The margin of error for results of this sample size does not exceed 3.1% points, with a confidence interval of 95%. A combined method was used for the survey: CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) and CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview). Data analysis was performed using SPSS/PC software.

Research results

To assess whether the focus on ensuring minimum welfare in European countries aligns with economic growth outcomes, a correlational analysis was conducted. After conducting a correlational analysis of GDP per capita and social protection expenditures per capita in European countries from 2012 to 2023, a reliably significant relationship ($p > 0.95$; at 0.01 significance level) between the changes in these indicators was found in only 7 countries. These are: Bulgaria (0.965); Estonia (0.971); Croatia (0.970); Lithuania (0.954); Hungary (0.962); Poland (0.979); Romania (0.980) (Fig. 1).

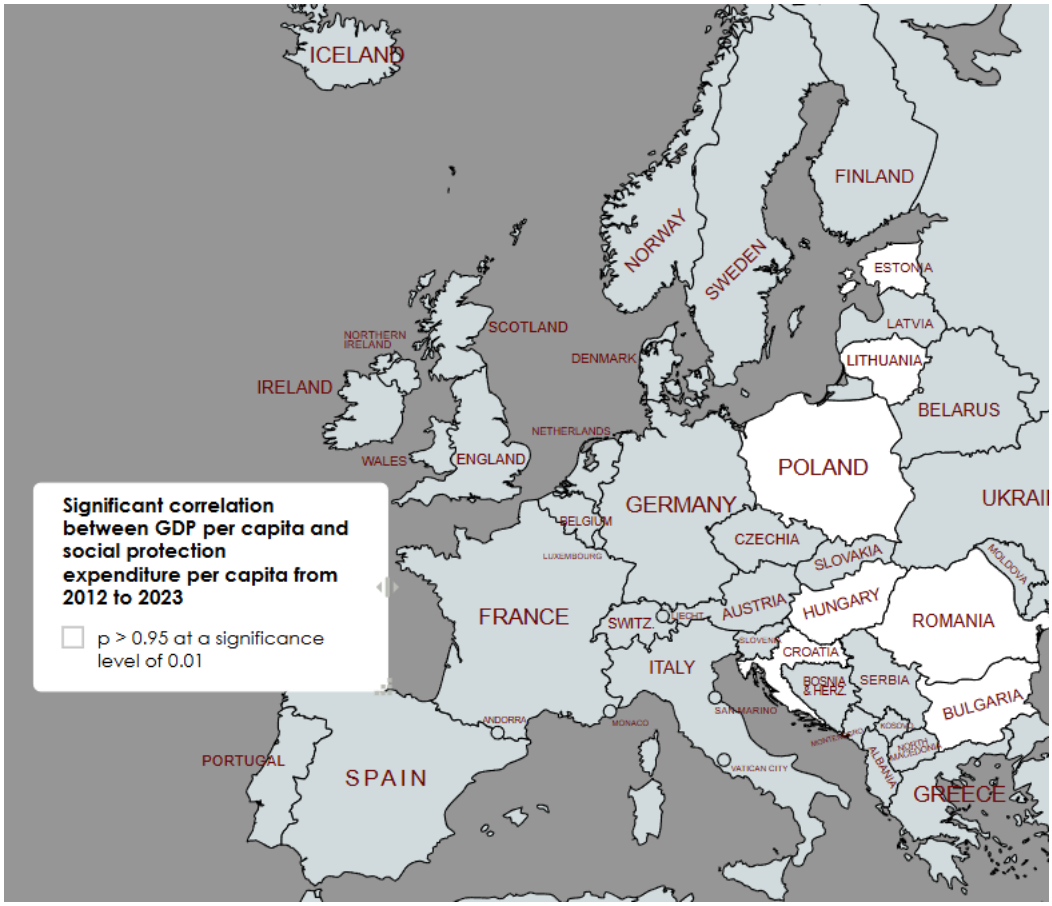

Fig. 1. Countries where a significant correlation has been established between GDPs per capita and social protection expenditure per capita from 2012 to 2023 ($p > 0.95$ at a significance level of 0.01) (Source: compiled by the authors)

These are Eastern European countries whose overall economic indicators (primarily GDP per capita) do not reach the EU average, thus expenditures on social protection and cash social protection constitute a relatively significant portion of the consolidated national budget. The correlation coefficient of changes in GDP per capita and social protection expenditures in economically strong Western European countries is relatively lower: Germany (0.939); Ireland (0.800); France (0.871); Italy (0.764); Netherlands (0.855); Austria (0.827); Norway (0.934); Switzerland (0.788*). In the United Kingdom, which pursues a relatively liberal economic and social policy, no correlation was found between GDPs per capita and social protection expenditures from 2012 to 2018 (before leaving the EU) ($p = 0.128$). Among these indicators, the weakest correlation was found when assessing the changes in the indicators of Spain, Sweden, and Greece (Spain – 0.433; Sweden – 0.439; Greece – 0.232).

The results of the correlation analysis allow for the hypothetical conclusion that the countries of Eastern Europe, which are trying to catch up with the living standards of the region (EU), are forced to allocate a relatively larger portion of their budget revenues to poverty reduction and ensuring minimal welfare. Therefore, the expenditures of these countries are more closely correlated with GDP growth rates. In

contrast, the social welfare expenditures of more economically developed countries stabilise at a certain level and do not "catch up" with the results of economic growth.

A regression analysis was conducted to identify the factors that significantly influence the securing of welfare through labour income in Lithuania. The results of the first step – the pairwise regression analysis: six statistically significant models for minimum wage and six for average wage. The results of the first step – the pairwise regression analysis: six statistically significant models for minimum wage and six for average wage (Table 1).

Table 1. Statistically significant regression equations (according to R^2, *t-stat* and *p*-value) (Source: compiled by the authors**)**

	***MW1*, Lithuania**	***AW1*, Lithuania**
Employee compensation (*COMP*)	$MW_1 = -209.23+0.04COMP$ R2=0.96, t stat = 27.79, p-value = 0	$AW_1 = -679.76+0.09COMP$ R2=0.96, t stat = 25.98, p-value = 0
Work hours (*HOUR*)	$MW_1=65.06+0.002HOUR$ R2=0.98, t stat = 41.62, p-value = 0	$AW_1=21.57+0.006HOUR$ R2=0.99, t stat = 613.94, p-value = 0
GDP (*GDP*)	-	-
GDP per capita (*GDP_C*)	-	-
FDI (*FDI*)	$MW_1 = -116.039+0.03FDI$ R2=0.93, t stat = 20.35, p-value = 0	$AW_1 = -467.37+0.08FDI$ R2=0.96, t stat = 27.85, p-value = 0
FDI per capita (*FDI_C*)	$MW_1 = -67.29+0.08FDI\_C$ R2=0.89, t stat = 14.98, p-value = 0	$AW_1 = -332.47+0.22FDI\_C$ R2=0.90, t stat = 16.56, p-value = 0
Government expenditure (*GOV_EXP*)	$MW_1 = -297.29+0.1GOV\_EXP$ R2=0.97, t stat = 30.76, p-value = 0	$AW_1 = -926.77+0.26GOV\_EXP$ R2=0.98, t stat = 33.65, p-value = 0
Labour cost (*LAB*)	$MW_1 = -133.39+69.85LAB$ R2=0.86, t stat = 13.42, p-value = 0	$AW_1 = -512.67+186.47LAB$ R2=0.89, t stat = 14.94, p-value = 0
Value added (*VAL*)	-	-

The table presents only statistically significant regression equations (according to R^2, *t-stat* and *p*-value). Lithuania has six statistically significant models for minimum wage and six for average wage.

Next, a multiple regression analysis was performed to determine how MW and AW are influenced. Those factors that were not statistically significant in the pairwise regression models with one variable were also used for multiple regression, since they may have a certain weight in multiple regression models. In order to determine the most appropriate model, a stepwise regression analysis was used. In this method, the number of insignificant variables was gradually reduced until only the factors with a significant effect on the dependent variable remained.

In the stepwise regression analysis with MW1 for Lithuania, first, the variables with the largest negative t-stat values are eliminated, next, with the lowest positive t-stat values, until it reaches 2, and then with the p values exceeding 0.05. Finally, one significant variable was left – GOV_EXP. The multiple regression equation looks the same as in the MW1 pairwise regression.

While selecting the variables for the AW1 model for Lithuania, three variables were left that conform to the conditions of t stat => 2 and p =< 0.05. R2 of the obtained model equals to 0.99. The model is presented below (Eq. 1):

$$AW_1 = -1967.82 + 0.006HOUR_1 + 0.03FDI_1 + 0.14GOV\_EXP_1 \quad (1)$$

where

AW_i is average wage;

HOUR is hours worked;

FDI_1 is a foreign direct investment;

GOV_EXP_1 is government expenditure.

The results of the regression analysis indicated that government spending (G) is a significant factor in securing welfare from labour income (wages): it is a determining factor for MW and one of the three key factors for AW, alongside the number of hours worked and foreign direct investment per capita.

The opinion of the working Lithuanian population and their confidence in their capabilities, as well as the state-guaranteed social protection, is illustrated by the results of a conducted representative survey (Fig. 2).

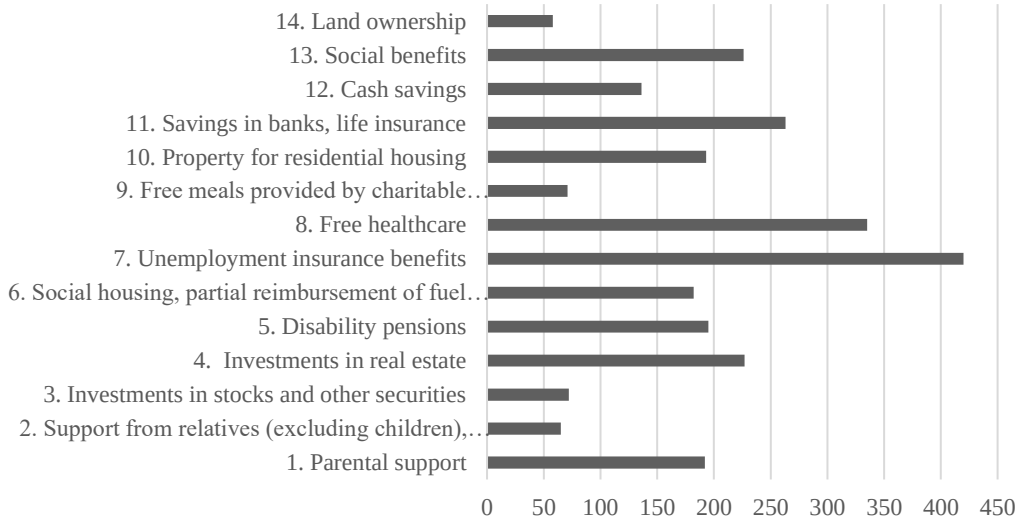

Fig. 2. Respondents' opinion on which of the measures applied in Lithuania best protects individuals facing hardships in working age (Source: compiled by the authors**)**

At the state level, the guarantees provided include unemployment insurance benefits (41.6%), free healthcare (31.2%), and social benefits (22.6%). These were mentioned by respondents as being more important than investments in savings in banks and life insurance (26.1%), real estate (22.5%), parental support (19%), and ownership of residential property (19.1%).

There is a relatively high level of trust in the support provided at the state level for working-age individuals, expressed by people from all income groups living in households, regardless of their place of residence, and whether they receive social benefits or not.

The survey data illustrates relatively homogeneous attitudes among the Lithuanian population regarding the amount of monetary social support (Fig. 3): 31% of respondents believe that the state-paid monetary social support benefit for a low-income individual to meet their minimum needs should be between 401-500 EUR; 17% believe that the social benefit should be between 301-400 EUR; and 15% stated that the social benefit should be between 501-600 EUR.

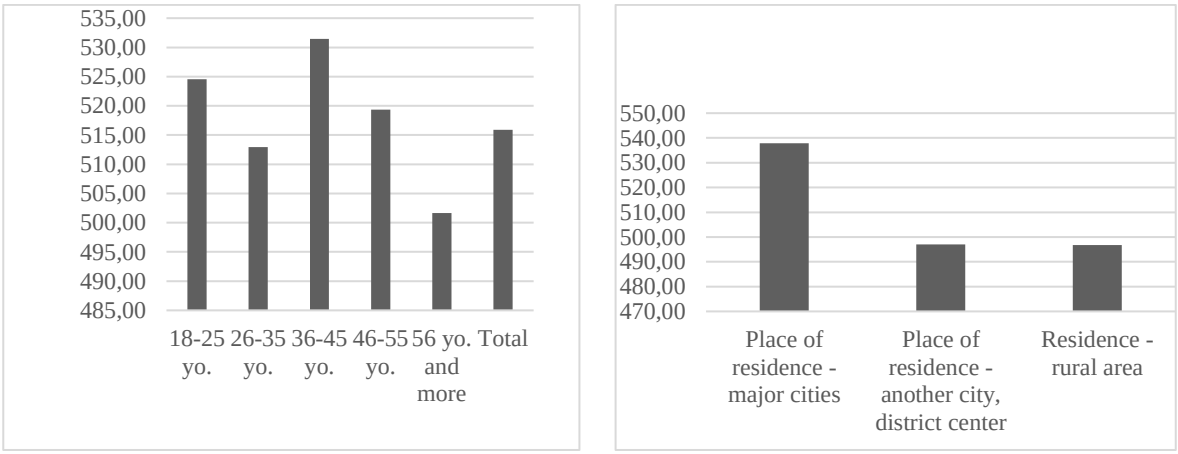

Fig. 3. Respondents' opinion on what the minimum amount of state-paid cash social support benefit should be for a low-income individual to meet their basic needs (amount in euros per month) (Source: compiled by the authors**)**

In summary, the average amount of social support payment that would meet an individual's minimum needs was 515 EUR. Higher amounts were indicated by the unemployed, students, and specialist employees living in large cities. Lower amounts were reported by managers, small business owners, and those living in smaller towns or rural areas.

The mentioned survey revealed that 37% of the population believes that current social support benefits are too low and do not protect against poverty. 21% stated that they are balanced, while 28% believe that they are too high and do not encourage work. Those who think that social support benefits are too high are more often representatives of higher income brackets, while those who believe they are too low are respondents from lower income brackets.

The survey respondents were asked what amount of unemployment (unemployment social insurance) benefits a person who lost their job and received a minimum wage should receive during the first three months of unemployment (at the time of the survey, the net minimum wage was about 550 euros).

Summarising the results obtained during the survey, it is evident that respondents' attitudes towards financial security, how it can be ensured, and their views on minimum guaranteed income and recommended support amounts vary relatively insignificantly. This allows for an indirect assumption that the citizens of the country similarly perceive the necessity of ensuring a minimum level of welfare for all. The majority's trust and expectations are focused on the state, particularly on the benefits that are provided at the national level to ensure welfare.

The results of the analysis suggest that the state's role in ensuring welfare extends beyond social support alone. The findings from the correlational analysis showed that government spending (the direct state contribution to minimal economic welfare) in Lithuania increases with economic growth. However, government spending is also crucial for working individuals and those receiving wages, as it influences changes in wages: it is the most significant factor for MW and one of the three main factors for AW, alongside the number of hours worked and foreign direct investment per capita (Fig. 4).

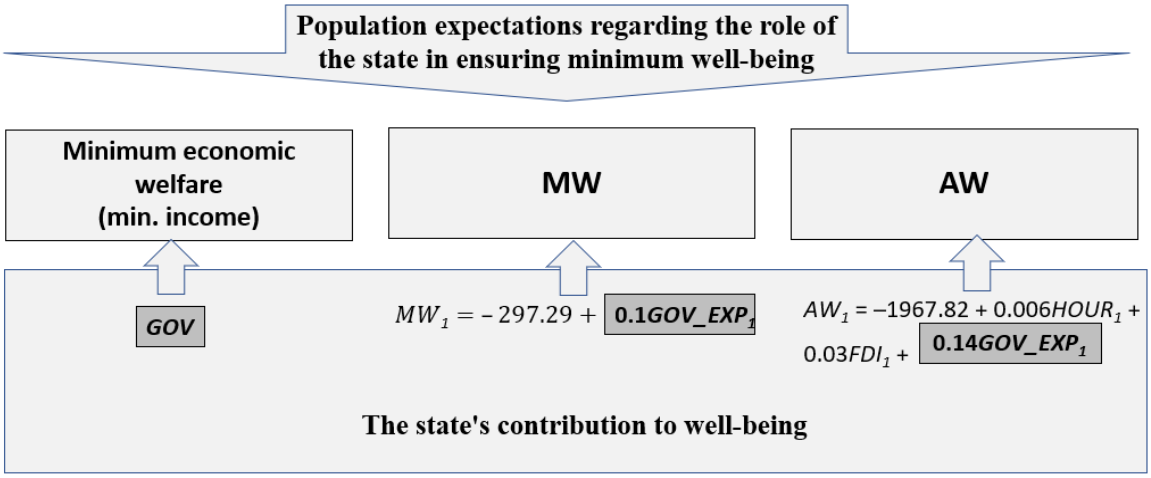

Fig. 4. Summary of Research Results (Source: compiled by the authors**)**

The importance of the state's contribution to the creation of minimal welfare through government spending, as demonstrated by the calculations, is supported by the survey results: citizens trust and positively assess the state's contribution, with expectations for welfare provision relatively uniformly focused on the state. This indicates that even though the current social security and social support system, the state contributes to the welfare of individuals with various labour market statuses—both unemployed and employed—and this is accepted, understood, and regarded as the norm by all citizens.

Due to the constantly changing socio-economic situation of countries, and the continuous emergence of new challenges, the social security systems of all European nations are being improved. This is to avoid radical decisions or revolutionary system changes. It's a relatively safe, albeit slow process, characterised by a rather significant inertia. The provision of additional activities and conditions means additional functions, making the system increasingly complex and, at the same time, more expensive from an administrative perspective. Simplicity, clarity, and transparency, along with lower administrative costs – key advantages of UBI – encourage the consideration of UBI implementation as an alternative.

This allows us to conclude that both alternatives – improving the social security system and introducing UBI – can be considered viable solutions for ensuring minimal welfare. The choice between improving the existing social security system or adopting a new welfare model will depend on administrative decisions.

The results and conclusions of this study align with findings from other researchers published in recent years on the following topics: formation of social policy decisions (Cookson et al., 2024; Gubello, 2024), welfare provision (Bruhn, 2024; Rao & Enelamah, 2024), income inequality and poverty reduction (Karvar, 2024; Lindner et al., 2024; Perera et al., 2022; Popova, 2023), minimum income (Wijngaarden et al., 2024), and UBI (Luduvice, 2024; Wijngaarden et al., 2024, and others). Currently, the systems for ensuring minimum income in European countries differ based on the conditions of monetary support linked to employment; however, efforts to impose greater obligations to seek employment generally indicate a departure from the idea of the European social model (Bennett, 2024; Haagh, 2024; Soler-Buades, 2024; and others). UBI is increasingly recognised as an effective strategic model for implementing welfare (and minimum income) in modern times (Conesa et al., 2023; Daruich & Raquel, 2024; Haagh, 2024; Jaimovich et al., 2024; Reed et al., 2023; and others), ensuring minimum welfare through financial security and public health (Endo & Choi, 2023; Haagh, 2024; Howard et al., 2024; Johnson et al., 2023; Thompson, 2022; Steinbaum, 2023; and others). The results of the UBI experiment in Finland also indicated that the prevention of potential financial stress due to income loss, ensured at a national level, is an effective psychological factor for positive well-being and financial and economic behaviour (Kangas et al., 2021).UBI, as an alternative to traditional minimum welfare provision through

the social protection system, fosters trust in the recipient and avoids inefficient costs associated with employment-linked support (Endo & Choi, 2023; Nesti et al., 2024, and others).

Conclusions

Lithuania, like other European countries, faces challenges related to poverty reduction, income inequality, cash social support, and ensuring minimum welfare standards in its efforts to ensure the well-being and security of its citizens. Improving the existing social protection system is one of the options. As one of the alternative solutions equivalent to cutting the Gordian Knot, the introduction of Universal Basic Income (UBI) should be considered—an alternative whose implementation would ensure minimal income while reducing the inefficient costs of a large system's operation.

The results of the correlation analysis confirm that in Eastern European countries, the share of funds allocated to social protection is more strongly correlated with GDP growth rates. In economically strong countries, expenditures on minimal social protection stabilise at a certain level and do not "keep up" with the results of economic growth, leading to a weaker correlation with GDP growth rates. However, both types of countries are committed to ensuring a minimum level of well-being for their citizens—providing income that guarantees survival.

The results of the regression analysis indicate that government spending influences changes in wages. It is the most important factor for MW (Minimum Welfare) and one of the three main factors influencing changes in AW (Average Welfare), along with the number of hours worked and foreign direct investment per capita. This means that, even at present, through the functioning social security and social support system, the state contributes to the distribution of welfare among individuals with various statuses in the labour market – both unemployed and employed.

The State Social Insurance System and free healthcare (from the possible measures applied in Lithuania) are trusted by individuals living in households across all income groups (regardless of residence, whether they receive social benefits or not) as the best protection for those facing hardship in old age and during their working years. This allows us to conclude that there is a historically formed vector of behaviours, social, and economic attitudes and expectations – a guaranteed system operating at the state level. The fact that minimal guarantees are recognised by society as a necessary commitment at the state level illustrates the relatively homogeneous attitudes of the Lithuanian population regarding the amount of monetary social support for disadvantaged individuals (during the survey, 400 – 500 euros) so that they can meet their basic needs. Therefore, it is expected, desired, and accepted that there is a commitment at the state level regarding minimal welfare.

Social inclusion, occupational health and safety, stakeholder engagement, product quality, and consumer protection, the behaviour of market participants (particularly in relation to risk management, stakeholder trust, and the long-term value creation of businesses) – factors, which can enrich the understanding of welfare mechanisms and allow for a more integrated assessment of their socio-economic impact. These are possible directions for further research that could continue and deepen research on the topic of ensuring well-being.

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