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Active Labour Market Policy Expenditure by Age and Gender – New data and its benefits

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The Horizon-Europe-funded Project NEXT-UP *Navigating the Next Normal: Innovative Approaches to Enhancing Youth's Education-Employment Transitions in Post-COVID-19 Europe* aims to explore and forecast the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the transition of youth from school/education to work/employment (YTSTW), focusing on co-creating evidence-informed, future-oriented policies and programmes, alongside innovative stakeholder engagement. The NEXT-UP Working Paper Series is published online (https://www.nextup-project.eu/resources/) and serves as a forum for the (pre)publication and dissemination of research results.

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Abstract: Active labour market policies (ALMP) are an important instrument in the toolbox of modern welfare states, yet comparative research typically relies on aggregate spending measures that obscure how resources are distributed across target groups. This paper addresses this limitation by developing a new method to disaggregate ALMP expenditure by age group (15–24 and 25+) and gender, drawing on measure-level participant data for EU countries and Norway from 1998 to 2023.

Using descriptive evidence, the paper documents substantial cross-national variation in the relative generosity of ALMP spending across age groups and between men and women, demonstrating that total ALMP expenditure is a poor proxy for the distribution of policy effort. These patterns challenge established assumptions in the comparative ALMP literature while helping to explain previously unresolved findings, particularly regarding the human-capital orientation of ALMP. The new data open up promising avenues for research on policy targeting, programme evaluation, and the political economy of youth-centred welfare regimes.

Keywords: Active labour market policy, comparative politics, comparative political economy, youth, gender

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Introduction

Active labour market policies (ALMP) are used to integrate unemployed and inactive individuals into employment and support those at risk of losing their jobs in the first place. They encompass a wide range of measures, from job search assistance to training programmes and employment subsidies. They can be open to all job-seekers or targeted at groups with specific labour market needs, such as younger and older or long-term unemployed persons, women, single parents, or people with disabilities (OECD, 2019; DG EMPL, 2018). Developed as part of the Rehn-Meidner model in post-World War II Sweden, ALMPs have become a crucial instrument in the toolbox of modern welfare states to pursue strategies like 'activation', 'social investment' and 'human capital formation' (Iversen & Stephens, 2008; Bonoli, 2013; Palier, Garritzmann, & Häusermann, 2022).

As such, ALMP expenditure has become an important research indicator, for example in policy studies evaluating the effect of ALMP expenditure on (un)employment (Cefalo & Scandurra, 2023; Ronchi, 2023), inactivity and poverty (Chevalier, 2023) and in comparative studies explaining variation in the use of activation policies between countries and over time (Bonoli, 2013; Bonoli, 2024; Clasen, Clegg, & Goerne, 2016; Cronert, 2022). In other comparative studies, ALMP expenditure is used to categorise countries in World of Human Capital formation (Iversen & Stephens, 2008), growth models (Chevalier, 2021), and school-to-work transition schemes (Hadjivassiliou, Tassinari, Eichhort, & Wozny, 2019).

Over the last two decades, however, comparative scholars realised that not all ALMPs are the same. It is essential to differentiate between the various types of measures and design features to understand their use and effects (Calmfors, 1994; Bonoli, 2010; Clasen, Clegg, & Goerne, 2016). New insights have been gained by disaggregating ALMP expenditures by programme types such as training programmes or employment incentives (Bonoli, 2013; Vlandas, 2013; Tepe & Vanhuysse, 2013; Nelson, 2013). Researchers have also distinguished between measures based on their effect on participants' employment statuses (Cronert, 2017), mode of production (Cronert, 2018), or whether they target employed, unemployed or inactive individuals (Cronert, 2022).

However, so far, there has been no comparative data on ALMP expenditure by participants' age and gender. The lack of the former is especially surprising given that age is an important factor in many labour market policies. For example, out of 831 measures included in the European Commission's LMP database in 2023, 132 named young people as their target group and 44 older workers (DG EMPL, 2025).

To address this shortcoming, this paper proposes a novel method for disaggregating Eurostat data on annual ALMP spending by age group and gender using measure-level participant data. For each intervention, the amount of spending benefiting young (15–24-year-old) and older workers (25 and older), as well as men and women, is estimated based on each group's share among the total number of participants. Where participant data is missing, spending for each group is estimated based on their share in the country's unemployment population. The expenditure data for various interventions is then reaggregated at the country level and presented as a percentage of GDP and as a percentage of per

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capita GDP per unemployed individual. The approach follows the recommendations of Clasen et. al. (2016) to use information on participants alongside spending data to develop better comparative indicators. It also aligns with Cronert's recommendation (2022) to consider programmes' varying target groups to improve our understanding of ALMP politics.

The paper presents descriptive statistics on disaggregated ALMP expenditure for the 1998-2023 period, showing significant variation in the amount and share of spending by age group and gender across countries. The data indicate that while the Scandinavian countries spent most on ALMP for older unemployed persons, Germany, France and Austria spent most on ALMP per unemployed person under the age of 25. Furthermore, most European countries spent more on ALMP for unemployed women than men. It is argued that this variation does not match existing welfare state theories and that new explanations are required.

Thereafter, it is argued that this data can help advance analyses in several fields of research based on the assertion that labour market measures for young and old and, to a lesser extent, for men and women, often differ, and that total ALMP expenditure is thus an imperfect indicator of policy effort directed at only one of those target groups. This particularly applies to the evaluation literature, where studies on the effects of ALMP on youth (un)employment have so far had to rely on aggregated spending data. Furthermore, for comparative studies on the use of activation policies, disaggregated data pose new puzzles (for example, why do some countries spend more on young people or women?) and may help answer yet unresolved questions regarding variation in ALMP expenditure across countries. Finally, age-disaggregated data may prove to be a superior indicator for classification schemes such as school-to-work transition regimes.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: The next section describes different types of active labour market policies as documented by Eurostat and the OECD, followed by a discussion of the proposed disaggregation methods. Subsequently, descriptive statistics are presented, and it is discussed how age and gender-disaggregated data can enhance research. Finally, a conclusion summarises the key arguments presented.

Active labour market policy

The most widely used data on public expenditure on active labour market policies published by Eurostat and the OECD differentiate between labour market services, measures, and supports (DG EMPL, 2018). The services category includes programmes that help individuals with their job search, such as placement services. In addition, services cover expenditure on other activities by public employment services that do not directly target beneficiaries, most notably the administration of labour market measures and supports. Labour market policy measures include five distinct categories. Training (cat. 2) includes spending on institutional, workplace-based and alternate training programmes., i.e. measures combining instructions in training institutions and at the workplace. This category also includes spending on support measures for apprenticeships, such as financial incentives for employers

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to hire apprentices and training allowances for disadvantaged groups. Employment incentives (cat. 4) cover measures to incentivise the hiring of individuals, for example, through temporary subsidies, employment maintenance incentives to support the continued employment of at-risk individuals, as well as job-rotation and job-sharing programmes. Employment incentives also include payments to private employers to provide jobseekers with work experience. Category 5, sheltered and supported employment and rehabilitation, covers measures intended to support the labour market integration of individuals with reduced working capacity, for example, due to disability, (prior) illness or drug addiction. Sheltered and supported employment provides work opportunities for individuals with permanent or long-term reduced work capacity, whereas rehabilitation prepares individuals for work or training opportunities. Direct job creation programmes (cat. 6) create additional non-market employment opportunities, for example, subsidies to NGOs to create jobs for long-term unemployed individuals. Such programmes are mostly aimed at benefiting the community in which they are implemented. Direct job creation measures also include work experience programmes for young people or individuals far from the labour market in the public or non-profit sector. Start-up incentives (cat. 7) are aimed at supporting unemployed individuals or other target groups in becoming entrepreneurs through financial support, access to facilities or targeted training (e.g. business advice). Lastly, labour market supports cover expenditure on out-of-work benefits (cat. 8), most notably unemployment insurance, and early retirement payments (cat. 9).

Box 1: Eurostat and OECD categorisation of labour market policies

LMP services
1. Labour market services
1.1 Client services (Information services, individual case management)
1.2 Other activities of the PES (Administration of LMP measures, administration of LMP supports, other services / activities)
LMP measures
2. Training
4. Employment incentives
5. Sheltered and supported employment and rehabilitation
6. Direct job creation
7. Start-up incentives
LMP supports
8. Out-of-work income maintenance and support
9. Early retirement

Source: (DG EMPL, 2018)

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The interventions classified as LMP measures (categories 2-7) are generally considered active labour market policies (Bonoli, 2013; Cronert, 2017). Furthermore, while services such as job search assistance are generally considered ALMPs (Bonoli, 2013), some researchers have disregarded spending on services because subcategory 1.2 also covers spending on the administration of passive measures (Vlandas, 2013; Clasen, Clegg, & Goerne, 2016; Cronert, 2017). However, for this paper, the question of which types of measures are active is less relevant because the proposed method can be easily adjusted to include or exclude (sub)categories. Therefore, a comprehensive approach is used, and spending on all measures (categories 2-7), labour market services (category 1) and client services (category 1.1) is considered ALMP expenditure.

Method: disaggregating expenditure with participant data

The proposed method relies on annual programme-level expenditure and participant data on ALMP provided by Eurostat. The Eurostat database covers 1863 measures and services across 27 EU countries and Norway from 1998 to 2023 and contains information on annual expenditure and the number of participants by sex (male, female, total) and age group (15-24 years old, 25 and older, total).[1]

Disaggregation and imputation of missing values

Expenditure data is disaggregated by allocating expenditure for each programme and year to four groups – young/old and male/female – based on participant numbers.[2] For simplicity, the method is presented using the example of disaggregation by age group. Disaggregation by sex follows the same logic.

When complete participant data is available as shown in the example in Table 1, the share of young people aged 15-24 (S_y) is calculated based on the participant 'stock' (DG EMPL, 2018), i.e., the annual average number of young participants in each measure at a given point in time (Par_y) divided by all participants (Par_t). The share of old participants (S_o) is logically derived by subtracting the share of young participants from 1. The participant shares are then multiplied by the total expenditure on the measure (Exp_t) to calculate the amount of spending that benefited each group (Exp_y, Exp_t).

[1] Data on the UK is excluded because the time series was discontinued in 2010. Norway is covered in the database as the only non-EU country.

[2] The idea of using participant numbers to identify ALMPs for specific target groups has also been proposed by Langenbucher, Puymoyen and Xenogiani with respect to long-term unemployed individuals (OECD, 2019).

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Table 1: Disaggregation with complete participant data

Geo	Year	ID	Exp_t	Par_y	Par_o	Par_t	S_y	S_o	Exp_y	Exp_o
AT	2020	1	50,000€	200	400	600	$\frac{Par_y}{Par_t}$	$1 - S_y$	$Exp_t * S_y$	$Exp_t * 1 - S_y$

Unfortunately, participant data by age group and gender are missing[3] or incomplete, respectively, for 32.8% and 32.4% of programme years (Table 4 below). Where participant data is missing only for some years (measure ID 2 in

Table 2), the missing values are imputed based on data for other years using linear interpolation in STATA.[4] For missing values at the beginning or end of the observation period (measure ID 3), interpolation is not available, and extrapolation can result in logically impossible values above 1 or below 0. Therefore, such missing values are replaced with the mean value of the respective share of participants across the entire observation period.

Table 2: Disaggregation with participant data missing for some years

Geo	Year	ID	Par_y	Par_o	Par_t	S_y	S_o
AT	2021	2	480	310	790	$0.608 = \frac{480}{480 + 310}$	$0.392 = 1 - 0.608$
AT	2022	2	.	.	.	*Intrapolate*	1- S_y
AT	2023	2	520	300	820	$0.634 = \frac{520}{520 + 300}$	$0.366 = 1 - 0.634$
AT	2021	3	1020	8900	9920	$0.103 = \frac{1020}{1020 + 8900}$	$0.897 = 1 - 0.103$
AT	2022	3	950	8700	9650	$0.098 = \frac{950}{950 + 8700}$	$0.902 = 1 - 0.098$
AT	2023	3	.	.		$0.101 = \frac{0.103 + 0.098}{2}$	$0.899 = 1 - 0.101$

For 23.5% (age group) and 23.3% (gender) of measure-years, no participant data is available for any years. In this case, illustrated in Table 3, it is assumed that all unemployed individuals have an equal chance to benefit from the measure. Therefore, the expenditure shares to be allocated to young (S_y) and older people (S_o) are calculated based on the numbers of young and older persons (U_y, U_o) among all

[3] In some instances, participant data is reported as zero for all participant groups, which likely indicates data entry errors. Such cases are treated the same as missing values.

[4] https://www.stata.com/manuals/dipolate.pdf

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unemployed individuals (U_t). The exceptions are employment maintenance incentives, which are targeted at people in employment. In the latter case, spending is allocated based on employment data.[5]

Table 3: Disaggregation if participant data is missing for all years

Geo	Year	ID	Par_y	Par_o	Par_t	U_y	U_o	U_t	S_y	S_o
AT	2021	4	.	.	.	20450	82000	102450	$0{,}199 = \frac{20450}{102450}$	$0.801 = 1 - 0.199$
AT	2022	4	.	.	.	20100	81500	101600	$0{,}197 = \frac{20100}{101600}$	$0.803 = 1 - 0.197$
AT	2023	4	.	.	.	19400	80000	99400	$0{,}195 = \frac{19400}{99400}$	$0.805 = 1 - 0.195$

After disaggregating expenditure at the measure level, spending for each (sub)group is reaggregated to the level of ALMP category (*services*, *training*, *employment subsidy*, *sheltered and supported employment & rehabilitation*, *direct job creation* and *start-up incentives*) and country. As validation, the reaggregated expenditure was cross-checked with aggregated Eurostat data on annual expenditure at the country and category level. Only country-years for which information on total ALMP expenditure is available from Eurostat were included in the dataset.

Table 4 shows the number of measure-years for which expenditure data were estimated using the three different approaches by ALMP category. In total, the data covers 17 884 measure-years. About two-thirds – 67.3% for age and 67.6% for gender – of disaggregated expenditure data was estimated based on complete participant data. For another 9.3% and 9.1%, expenditure data by age and sex, respectively, were estimated based on imputed participant data. For the remaining measure-years, disaggregated spending was estimated based on unemployment data.

The accuracy of expenditure data estimates is positively related to the completeness of participant data, which is about the same across age and gender but varies across measure categories. Training programmes, employment incentives, and direct job creation programmes have the highest share of measure-years with complete participants (75-89%), followed by sheltered and supported employment and rehabilitation programmes and start-up incentives, with around 60-65%. In contrast, for services, participant data by age and gender is available for only around 27-29%. Data availability also varies across countries (Table 7 in the Appendix). Bulgaria, Sweden, Slovakia and Malta provide complete participant data by gender and age group for around 85% of measure-years, the Netherlands for only 30%. Data availability improved slightly over time, from around 54% measures having complete participant data in the early 2000s to at least 70% between 2013 and 2023.

[5] Employment data for France is missing for 1998-2002 which affects spending on two measures. For those years, the relative shares are based on the mean share of young/old/male/female persons in employment across the entire observation period.

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The proposed method rests on two assumptions. First, it assumes that expenditure within each measure is allocated equally among all participants. This assumption may not hold in some instances. For example, it is likely that a training programme open to all unemployed individuals provides more intensive training to younger or older participants. Yet, this is unlikely to be the norm as many countries have dedicated youth programmes with age-based eligibility requirements. Second, allocating spending based on the demographics of the unemployed population assumes that each unemployed person has an equal chance of benefiting from those measures, even when no participant data are available. While this may appear to be a strong assumption, it is justified because most measures for which participant data is missing are labour market services, such as job search assistance, which tend to have no eligibility requirements and are not focused on any specific group. Hence, services are more likely than other measures to benefit all unemployed individuals equally. Furthermore, absent any other information on participant demographics, the assumption that all unemployed individuals benefit equally from any specific program is arguably the most plausible one.

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Table 4: Number of measure-years for which disaggregated expenditure data exists by ALMP category and disaggregation method

Labour market policy category	Measure-years for which expenditure was estimated based on												Total measure-years
	complete participant data				imputed participant data				(un)employment data				
	Age		Gender		Age		Gender		Age		Gender		
	N	% of total	N	% of total	N	% of total	N	% of total	N	% of total	N	% of total	
1. Client services	803	27.8%	849	29.4%	289	10.0%	285	9.9%	1795	62.2%	1753	60.7%	2887
2. Training	3820	75.1%	3926	77.2%	455	8.9%	381	7.5%	810	15.9%	778	15.3%	5085
4. Employment incentives	3910	76.1%	3876	75.4%	398	7.7%	420	8.2%	832	16.2%	844	16.4%	5140
5. Sheltered and supported employment & rehabilitation	1242	66.6%	1214	65.1%	242	13.0%	263	14.1%	380	20.4%	387	20.8%	1864
6. Direct job creation	1456	88.9%	1461	89.2%	125	7.6%	98	6.0%	57	3.5%	79	4.8%	1638
7. Start-up incentives	796	62.7%	769	60.6%	151	11.9%	187	14.7%	323	25.4%	314	24.7%	1270
Total	**12027**	**67.3%**	**12095**	**67.6%**	**1660**	**9.3%**	**1634**	**9.1%**	**4197**	**23.5%**	**4155**	**23.2%**	**17884**

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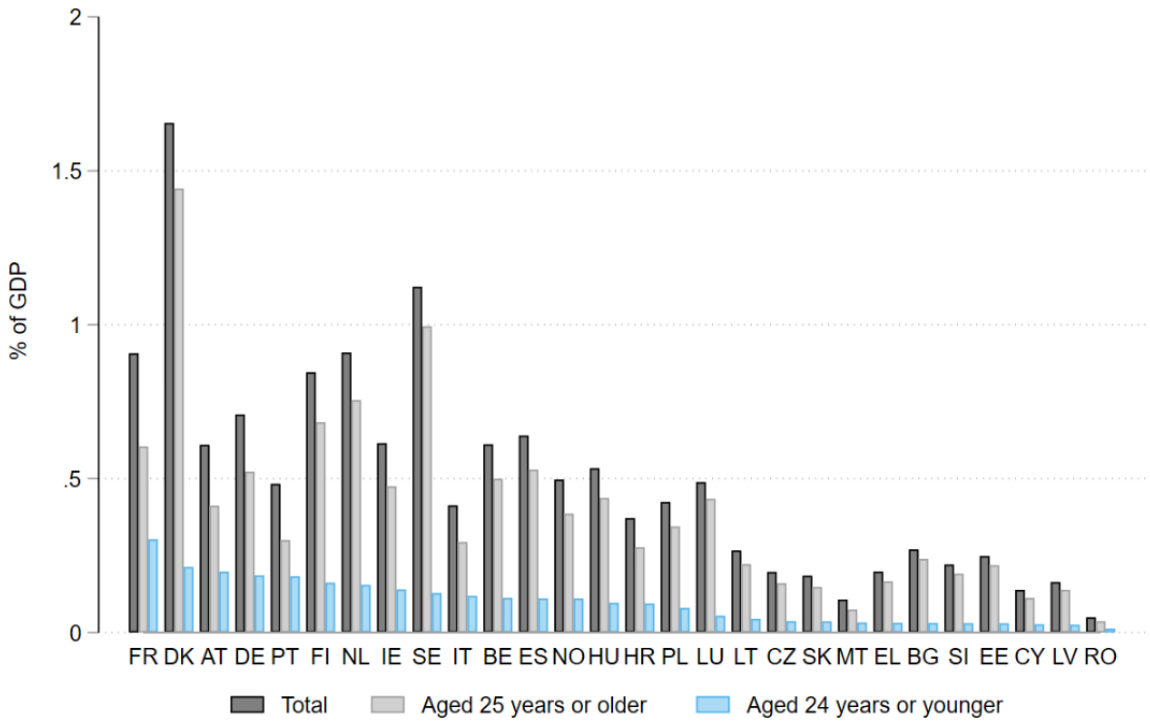
Results: ALMP expenditure by age and gender

In the following, data on ALMP expenditure by age and gender are presented – first as total spending and then per unemployed person. Thereby, two observations are highlighted. First, age-disaggregated spending varies differently across countries than total ALMP expenditure suggesting that the former should not be used as a substitute for research interested in spending on only one age group. Second, variation in spending on youth measures and ALMPs benefiting women does not fit neatly with dominant welfare-state models, suggesting that new explanations are required.

Total expenditure by age group and gender

To ensure cross-country comparability and following common practice (Bonoli, 2013; Martin & Swank, 2012; Cronert, 2018), ALMP expenditure is reported as a percentage of GDP. Figure 1 shows average ALMP expenditure by age group from 1998 to 2023, with countries sorted from left to right based on their spending on measures for young people.

Figure 1: Average spending (1998-2023) in % of GDP by age group*



**Data availability varies between countries. See Table 7.*

Expenditure on young people was lower in all countries, which is unsurprising because there were fewer people aged 15-24 than 25 and older. As expected from the traditional welfare-state literature (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1990), total ALMP expenditure was highest in countries with social democratic welfare states like Denmark, Sweden and Finland as well as the Netherlands, followed by continental

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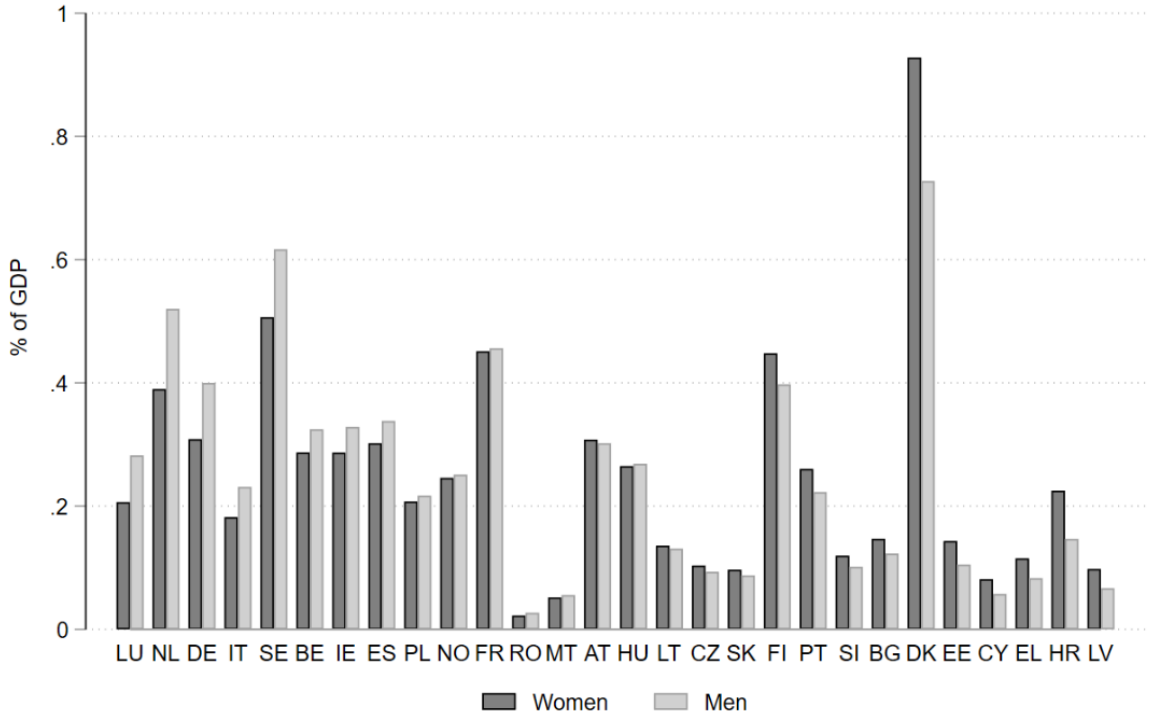
welfare regimes like France, Germany, Austria and Belgium. ALMP expenditure in Central and Eastern European countries, in contrast, was comparatively low.

Age-disaggregated data, however, paints a different picture. Whereas Sweden and the Netherlands were among the biggest spenders on programmes for older workers, they spent less on youth programmes. In contrast, France, Austria, Germany, Portugal and Ireland spent comparatively more on measures for younger people. Denmark and Finland were among the highest spenders across both age groups, but the share of their overall ALMP budgets dedicated to young people was comparatively low, at 13% and 19%, respectively (Table 6in the appendix). Other countries that allocated only a small share of ALMP spending to the youth include Sweden (12%), Luxembourg (13%), Slovenia (14%), Estonia (14%), and Latvia (16%). At the other end of the spectrum, Portugal (38%), France (33%), Austria (31%) and Malta (31%) spent around one-third of their ALMP budgets on the youth.

Figure 2 shows average ALMP expenditure between 1998 and 2023 by gender, sorted from left to right based on the ratio of spending for men over women (see also Figure 5). No obvious patterns or outliers are visible. About half of the countries spent more on measures for men, whereas spending in the other countries was biased towards women. The two extremes are Luxembourg, which allocated 58% of its ALMP budget to measures benefiting men, and Latvia, where 60% of spending benefited women.

Figure 2: Average spending (1998-2023) in % of GDP by gender*



**Data availability varies between countries. See Table 7.*

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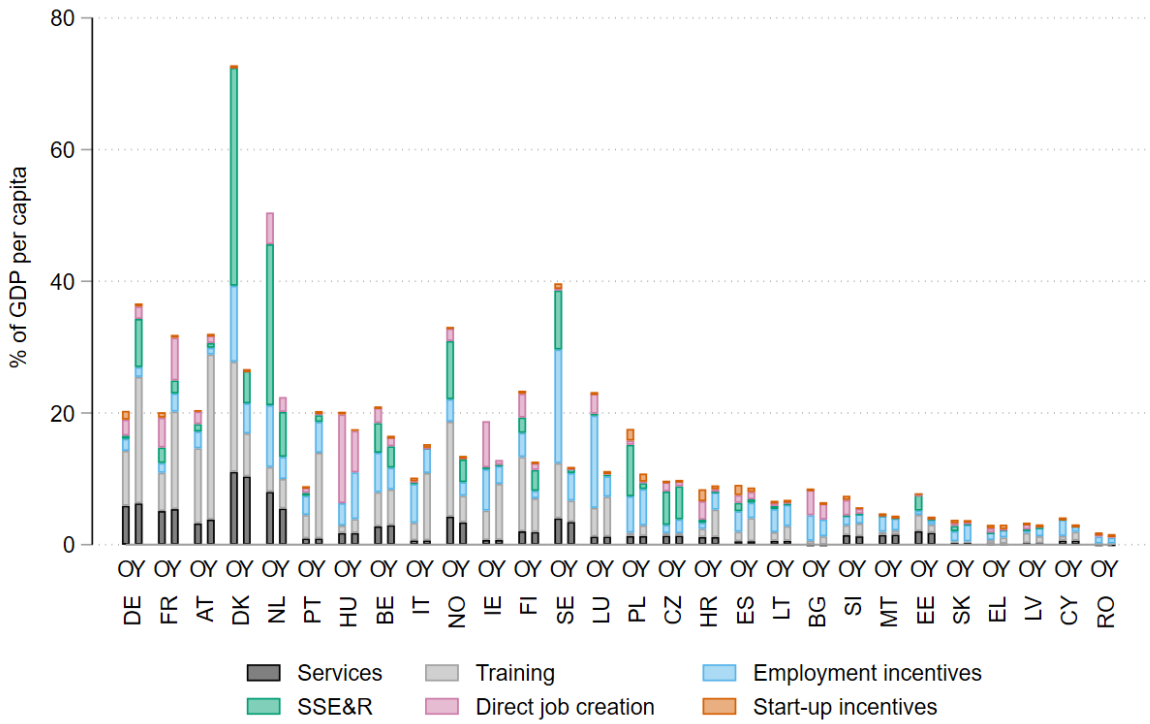
Expenditure per unemployed person, by age group, gender and ALMP category

To control for differences in unemployment between groups and countries, expenditure is next presented as a percentage of per capita GDP per unemployed person. For additional nuance, spending by age group and gender is further disaggregated by type of active labour market policy, based on the earlier-described Eurostat classification.

The data presented in Figure 3 confirms the position of the Scandinavian countries - Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland - and the Netherlands, as (among) highest spenders in terms of ALMPs targeting *older* workers. However, controlling for unemployment also further strengthens the impression that ALMP budgets in those countries are strongly biased towards supporting older workers, as all five spent significantly more per unemployed person aged 25 or older than per younger unemployed person. In contrast, several other countries were more generous towards young unemployed individuals. The most extreme example is Portugal, where spending per young person was twice that per older unemployed person. Other countries that showed similar patterns include Germany, France and Austria, which had the highest spending per unemployed young person during the observation period. Additional examples of countries favouring youth spending include Italy, Croatia, and Greece.

Figure 3: Average spending (1998-2023) per unemployed person by age group*



Note: O = individuals aged 25 or older, Y = individuals aged 24 or younger

**Data availability varies between countries. See Table 7.*

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In some countries, the relative generosity of ALMP expenditure per unemployed young and adult worker varies over time, while it is remarkably stable in others (Figure 5 in the Annexe). In Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Slovenia, expenditure on young people was below that on older individuals throughout the observation period, whereas the opposite was true in Austria, Portugal and Italy. In both cases, this consistency suggests structural explanations. In Luxembourg, Germany and Norway, ALMPs were more generous for the youth, but spending levels equalised or began favouring adults over time, whereas the opposite trend was evident in Belgium and Cyprus.

A closer look at the types of measures used shows that expenditure differences by age group in Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Poland and Estonia were driven in large parts by high spending on sheltered and supported employment and rehabilitation programmes (SSE&R) for older workers. Germany and Finland were the only countries with higher SSE&R spending on young people. An interesting commonality among the Scandinavian countries is that all four spent more per person on training programmes for *older* workers. In contrast, training expenditure for young people was higher in Germany, France, Austria, Portugal, Luxembourg, Italy, Lithuania, Spain, and Cyprus. In Portugal, Germany, France, Austria and Italy, the generosity of youth training programmes goes a long way in explaining their higher overall expenditure on young people. Expenditure on employment incentives by age group also varied, with most countries – especially Sweden, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – spending more per older unemployed person, and several Central and Eastern European countries – Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Croatia and Slovakia – spending more per younger unemployed person. Expenditure on direct job creation measures and start-up incentives accounted for only a small share of total spending but tended to favour older workers.

Overall, there is significant variation across countries in the total and relative amounts of per-person expenditure on young and older people, as well as in the use of programmes used for each age group. Furthermore, the use of measures targeted at older people confirms the stereotype of Nordic welfare states as the most generous in the use of ALMPs and, in particular, measures aimed at improving human capital – i.e., training (Vlandas, 2013). However, this stereotype clearly does not apply to youth measures, on which the same countries spend comparatively little, especially in training programmes.

Controlling for unemployment also paints a different picture of relative spending by gender (Figure 4). One notable finding is that only five of the 28 countries – Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, and Sweden – spent more, on average per person, on measures for men than for women. Furthermore, in most countries, the bias towards higher spending on women was stable over time (Figure 5 in the appendix). Again, it is difficult to explain this pattern with traditional welfare regimes, as in Esping-Andersen's Worlds of Welfare States (Esping-Andersen, 1990). While higher per-person spending on women in Denmark and Finland might be understood as attempts to support female employment in line with social democratic ideals of gender equality, it is unclear why ALMP expenditure in Sweden, a prototypical social democratic welfare state, would be biased towards men. It is also notable that there appear to be no significant differences between the measures used for men and women. Overall, cross-country variation in spending levels does not appear to follow any clear pattern.

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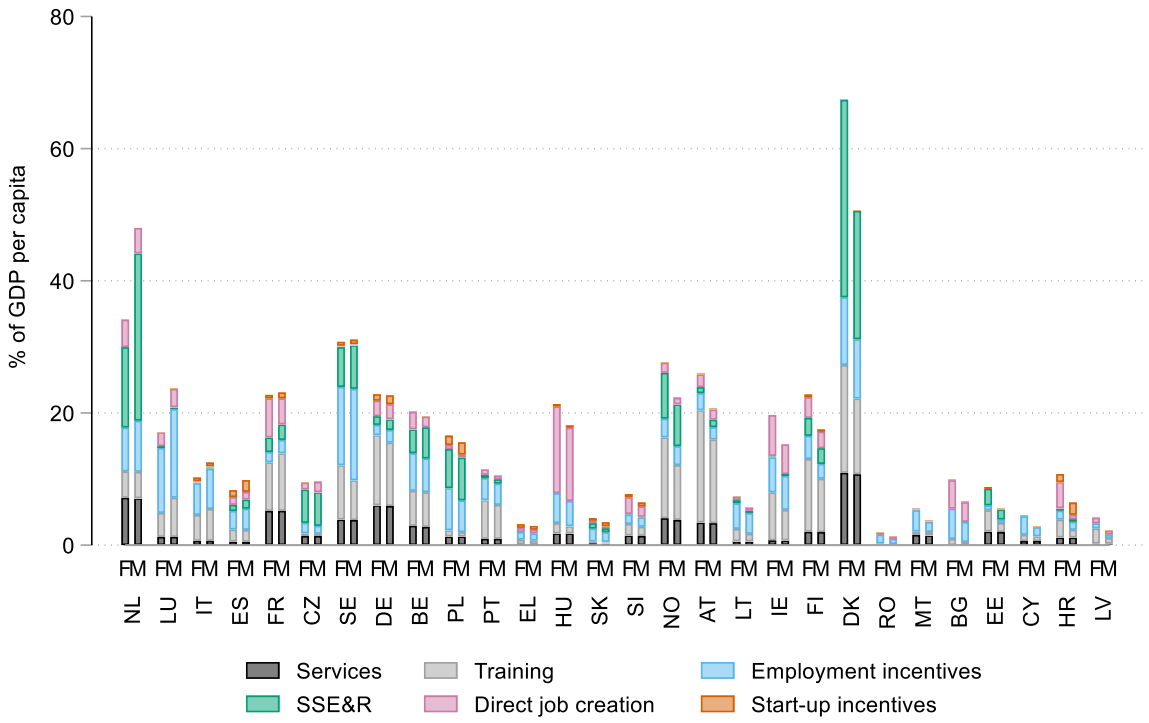
Figure 4: Average expenditure (1998-2023) per unemployed person by gender and ALMP category*



**Data availability varies between countries. See Table 7.*

Relevance - when and why is disaggregated data superior?

After presenting the data, the paper now turns to the relevance of disaggregating ALMP expenditure by age group and gender. Put bluntly, why should we care, and what kind of research can benefit from it? The first answer to this question is that not all measures are the same and, hence, should not be treated as such. Young and older people have different labour market needs. First-time labour market entrants often lack the personal and professional networks that help them find a job and, by definition, have no work experience to signal to prospective employers their productive skills and ability to integrate into existing workplaces (O'Higgins, 2017; Geyer, 2022). At the same time, they are likely to have lower salary expectations and may be more mobile than older workers who have financial and care obligations towards family members (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). Furthermore, while young people may require training to learn skills in demand by the labour market, re-skilling and re-orientation programmes can be necessary for older workers whose skills have become obsolete. Policymakers acknowledge these differences and try to support young and older workers through programmes designed to address each age group's specific needs, as illustrated, for example, by so-called 'youth guarantee' programmes.

Active labour market policies targeted at men or women are less common. Only 19 of 841 measures listed in the European Commission's LMP database explicitly mention women or female workers as beneficiaries. However, there are also gender specific challenges to (re)entering paid employment,

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which are addressed through ALMPs. Most importantly, women, who continue to bear the brunt of child raising and care work, can face challenges stemming from a lack of recent work experience and skill depreciation when re-entering paid employment. Age and gender differences are also acknowledged in the evaluation literature as evidenced by several studies on the ALMP effects on women and young people (Caliendo, Künne, & Schmidl, 2011; Caliendo, Schmidl, & Ricarda, 2015; Knize & Wolf, 2024; Bergemann & Van den Berg, 2006).

In short, labour market needs vary with age and gender, which is often reflected in policy design. Thus, total ALMP expenditure is a suboptimal measure for research interested in policy effort directed towards only young or older, or only to men or women. In the following section, examples of research areas that can be advanced with more fine-grained data are provided.

ALMP expenditure as dependent variable

A central question in the comparative literature on ALMP is what determines policy effort. Having originated in Sweden, some scholars regarded activation policies as inherently linked to a social democratic welfare and growth model (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Boix, 1998; Huber & Stephens, 2001). This perspective was turned on its head by the dualisation literature, which argued that ALMP expenditure benefits labour market 'outsiders' at the expense of unionised 'insiders' who constitute the core membership of social democratic parties (Rueda, 2007). In the early 2010s, several studies proposed a more nuanced perspective based on disaggregating expenditure by different categories of measures, such as training programmes, subsidies, or direct job creation measures (Bonoli, 2013; Vlandas, 2013; Tepe & Vanhuysse, 2013; Nelson, 2013). At the core of these efforts was the argument that trade unions and politically left-wing parties support some types of measures, but not others, and that acknowledging differences between programmes can help us better understand why and how they are used. In 2016, Clasen, Clegg and Goerne drew upon a list of yet unresolved questions regarding variation in the use of activation policies across countries and recommended exploiting Eurostat's programme-level data for an even more nuanced analysis (2016). Subsequent studies by Axel Cronert took this recommendation to heart and further advanced the literature by differentiating expenditure on programmes according to participants' employment statuses and the measure's effect on labour supply and skill levels (Cronert, 2017), whether the measures is implemented jointly with employers or not (Cronert, 2018) or whether they target employed, unemployed and/or inactive individuals (Cronert, 2022).

Disaggregating expenditure by beneficiary age and gender thus follows a significant and fruitful tradition in ALMP research. However, how specifically can the proposed method advance the literature? As argued in the last section, spending on youth measures shows different patterns of cross-country variation than spending on older workers, which strongly suggests that both are at least partially driven by distinct factors. Consequently, to better understand *total* ALMP expenditure, it seems advisable to understand what drives spending on measures for younger and older individuals and how the drivers

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differ. For example, one continuously debated yet unanswered question in the ALMP literature regards the determinants of 'human capital orientation' of activation policies (Bonoli, 2013) and the question of what drives spending on training programmes. Despite several accounts of who should support such measures and why (Bonoli, 2013; Vlandas, 2013; Tepe & Vanhuysse, 2013; Nelson, 2013; Cronert, 2017), no conclusive results have been reached.

Age-disaggregated expenditure data may help answer these open questions. In countries with dual training systems, ALMPs are widely used to integrate young people into apprenticeships, support them during their training period or provide alternative training options for those unable to find a firm-based apprenticeship (Geyer, 2022; Durrazi & Geyer, 2022). This may explain why Austria and Germany have more generous training measures for younger than for older people. In contrast, Scandinavian countries, notably Sweden, provide much of the training through the regular education system (Olofsson & Wadensjö, 2012; Geyer, 2022). Following the use of massive labour-market training programmes for young people in the early 1990s, Swedish policymakers became convinced that better, less expensive results could be achieved by trying to reintegrate youths without upper secondary education into the regular education system. Consequently, the goal of activation policies shifted from directly teaching labour-market skills to motivating those youths to return to school (Geyer, 2022). In contrast, as shown in the last section, labour market training expenditure is comparatively high in Nordic welfare states like Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland – a pattern more in line with a traditional power resource approach, which sees strong left parties and trade unions as principal proponents of such measures (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Boix, 1998).

Age and gender may also interact with other factors. For instance, Bonoli (2022) proposed that future research on the determinants of Active Labour Market Policy (ALMP) expenditure should examine perceptions of the 'deservingness' of beneficiaries. It is worth considering that these perceptions may vary between young and older workers, as well as between men and women. Similarly, age-disaggregated data can advance the dualization literature. Since Rueda's (2007) seminal work, some studies have argued that left-wing parties and/or trade unions oppose measures that benefit outsiders (Vlandas, 2013; Tepe & Vanhuysse, 2013), but there is some disagreement about which measures these are. Disaggregated data can help in this because young people targeted by ALMPs are mostly in the process of entering the labour market for the first time and are thus, by definition, outsiders. As such, all spending on youth measures should be considered expenditure benefiting outsiders.

Lastly, comparative data on ALMP spending by age group and gender allow for the study of the use of measures aimed at specific target groups, like young people or women, as research fields in their own right. Research on the use of youth ALMPs relied on qualitative analysis and the number of measures as an indicator of policy effort (Tosun, Unt, & Wadensjö, 2017; Tosun, Treib, & De Francesco, 2019), while analyses of the gender dimension of ALMP seem to have been limited to case studies of individual programmes (e.g. Månsson & Delander, 2011). In both areas, the new data should open possibilities for further inquiry. One obvious question to explore, for example, would be why most countries spend more on measures for women than for men.

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ALMP expenditure as independent variable

Regarding the use of ALMP expenditure as an independent variable, one obvious field of study relates to the effect of such measures on employment. There have been several micro-level analyses of the effects of various types of youth ALMPs on participants' employment outcomes focussing on one or more measures (Caliendo, Schmidl, & Ricarda, 2015; Caliendo, Künne, & Schmidl, 2011; Madoń, Palczyńska, Magda, & Smoter, 2021; Knize & Wolf, 2024). However, macro-level analyses exploring the aggregate effects of ALMP expenditure on young people have been more limited and, to the extent that they do exist, rely on arguably inferior data. For example, Juznik Rotar (2022) and Cefalo and Scandurra (2023) estimate the effect of active labour market policy on youth employment within the EU, while van Vugt, Levels and van Velden (2024) assess its effect on preventing low-literate young people from becoming long-term NEET. In the absence of better alternatives, all studies used ALMP expenditure across all age groups as an explanatory variable. This approach not only overestimates actual spending on young people – which accounts for only 12-38% of total spending – but also misjudges cross-country variation in expenditure levels. Similarly, the only cross-national analysis of ALMP use on women's employment, unemployment and inactivity I am aware of uses aggregate expenditure data (Nieuwenhuis, 2022).

Speckesser et. al. (2019) use accommodation ratios – the stock of participants aged 15-24 divided by the average number of unemployed individuals in that age group – in addition to total spending to assess the effect of ALMPs on youth unemployment. While this approach helps disaggregate policy effort by age group, it comes with two limitations. First, accommodation ratios do not differentiate between interventions, which means participation in a low-intensity course is treated the same as in a costly vocational training programme. Second, accommodation ratios will be affected by missing participant data, which, as described above, affects about one-third of measure years. For both reasons, ALMP expenditure on young people is arguably a better indicator.

ALMP support for young people has also been used to cluster countries into different 'types' or 'regimes'. However, the data presented in this paper suggest that some of these classifications should be reconsidered. For example, Chevalier (2016) sees ALMPs expenditure in Sweden as an important element of the country's 'enabling youth welfare citizenship' model, and he argues that the Nordic welfare states use ALMP to improve young people's skills as one element of human capital centre growth regimes (Chevalier, 2021). However, as shown in Figure 3, training expenditure in the Nordics primarily benefits older workers, and spending on youth measures is similar to other Western European countries. Similarly, Hadjivassiliou et. al. (2019) see Nordic welfare states as intensively using ALMPs for young people as part of a 'universalistic' school-to-work transition system – an assessment which, given the data presented in this article, seems to overstate the generosity of youth ALMPs in these countries. Other studies that used aggregate ALMP spending as a proxy for policy effort and that could benefit from age-disaggregated data include analyses of young people's economic vulnerability and

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youth poverty in Europe (Lauri, Toots, Chevalier, Broka, & Hofäcker, 2025; Chevalier, 2023) or occupational upgrading and social inclusion in training systems (Durazzi & Tonelli, 2024).

Conclusion

Public expenditure on ALMPs for young and older unemployed individuals, and for men and women, differs from total expenditure, and the latter should thus not be used for research interested in policy effort directed at only one of those target groups. This is the central argument of this paper, building on a new method for disaggregating ALMP spending by age group and gender based on programme-level participant data from the Eurostat LMP database.

The proposed method follows a trend in comparative studies on ALMP that made significant contributions to our understanding of politics of and variations in the use of these policies between countries and over time (Vlandas, 2013; Cronert, 2018; Nelson, 2013; Calmfors, 1994) and the recommendation to exploit qualitative and programme-level information compiled by Eurostat (Clasen, Clegg, & Goerne, 2016; Cronert, 2022).

This more fine-grained data will likely be of most value for comparative studies on the use of ALMPs where it poses new questions – Why do some countries spend more on young unemployed persons and others on older ones? Why do most countries have more generous ALMP for women than for men? – and may help answer some of the remaining unknowns, such as the variation in the human capital orientation of activation policy. As Cronert puts it, ALMPs are multi-purpose tools, and key to understanding their politics is to pay attention to their differences and shift from “analyses of aggregate indicators on ALMP spending to theoretically founded comparisons of disaggregated groups of programmes” (2022, p. 13).

The second field is evaluation studies, particularly the plentiful analyses exploring ALMPs’ effects on youth (un)employment, which so far have had to rely on arguably inferior indicators for policy effort. However, as argued in the last chapter, there are many other research areas that currently use ALMP spending as a dependent or independent variable for which disaggregated spending is likely a more appropriate indicator.

Finally, while the focus of this paper is on disaggregation by age group or gender, the same approach can theoretically be used to (further) disaggregate ALMP expenditure for other participant groups on which data is collected (see DG EMPL, 2018, p.33). This may include disaggregation by age *and* gender or unemployment duration to estimate spending e.g. on young men or long-term unemployed individuals (see also OECD, 2019). Such further refined data may produce additional puzzles and help advance research in additional fields.

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Appendix

Table 5: Data and sources

Data	Source	Link
Annual expenditure on labour market policies (LMP) intervention in EUR	Eurostat: Lmp_expme	https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/empl/redisstat/databrowser/bulk?lang=en
Annual stock of participants by LMP intervention	Eurostat: Lmp_partme	https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/empl/redisstat/databrowser/bulk?lang=en
Qualitative information on LMP by intervention	Eurostat: LMP Qualitative Reports	https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1143&intPageId=3227&langId=en
Number of employed persons by age group and sex	Eurostat: fsi_emp_a_h for 1998-2008; lfsi_emp_a for 2009-2023	https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bulk?lang=en
Number of unemployed persons by age group and sex	Eurostat: estat_lfsa_ugates for 1998-2008; une_rt_a for 2008-2023	https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bulk?lang=en
GDP in EUR at current prices	Eurostat: nama_10_gdp	https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bulk?lang=en
Population on January 1st	Eurostat: demo_gind	https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bulk?lang=en

The data files and the Stata code used to generate them are available at https://www.nextup-project.eu/resources/.

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Table 6: Average ALMP expenditure by age group and gender

	Total ALMP expenditure (in % of GDP)	**Share of total**		**Ratio** (Young /Older)	**Share of total**		**Ratio** (Men /Women)
		Young (15-24)	Older (>25)		Men	Women	
AT	0.61%	32%	68%	0.47	50%	50%	1.02
BE	0.61%	18%	82%	0.23	53%	47%	0.89
BG	0.27%	13%	87%	0.16	44%	56%	1.27
CY	0.14%	22%	78%	0.30	44%	56%	1.36
CZ	0.20%	19%	81%	0.24	47%	53%	1.11
DE	0.71%	26%	74%	0.35	57%	43%	0.77
DK	1.66%	13%	87%	0.14	44%	56%	1.29
EE	0.25%	14%	86%	0.17	43%	57%	1.34
EL	0.20%	18%	82%	0.23	41%	59%	1.46
ES	0.64%	18%	82%	0.22	53%	47%	0.90
FI	0.85%	19%	81%	0.24	47%	53%	1.13
FR	0.91%	33%	67%	0.50	50%	50%	0.99
HR	0.37%	27%	73%	0.37	41%	59%	1.48
HU	0.53%	19%	81%	0.23	49%	51%	1.04
IE	0.62%	23%	77%	0.30	53%	47%	0.89
IT	0.41%	29%	71%	0.43	56%	44%	0.79
LT	0.27%	18%	82%	0.23	49%	51%	1.06
LU	0.49%	13%	87%	0.16	58%	42%	0.73
LV	0.16%	16%	84%	0.19	40%	60%	1.49
MT	0.11%	31%	69%	0.48	51%	49%	1.01
NL	0.91%	16%	84%	0.20	58%	42%	0.74
NO	0.50%	24%	76%	0.33	51%	49%	0.97
PL	0.42%	19%	81%	0.24	51%	49%	0.96
PT	0.48%	38%	62%	0.63	46%	54%	1.17
RO	0.05%	24%	76%	0.33	51%	49%	1.01
SE	1.12%	12%	88%	0.13	55%	45%	0.81
SI	0.22%	14%	86%	0.16	45%	55%	1.23
SK	0.18%	19%	81%	0.24	48%	52%	1.12
Mean	**0.50%**	**21%**	**79%**	**0.28**	**49%**	**51%**	**1.07**

**Data availability varies between countries. See Table 7.*

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Table 7: Availability of expenditure data by country and year

	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	Total
AT	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	26
BE	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	22
BG	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
CY	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
CZ	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	22
DE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	26
DK	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	24
EE	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	21
EL	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	19
ES	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
FI	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	26
FR	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	26
HR	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	10
HU	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
IE	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	19
IT	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	17
LT	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	21
LU	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	22
LV	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	21
MT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
NL	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	26
NO	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	23
PL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
PT	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	21
RO	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	18
SE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	25
SI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
SK	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Total	6	6	9	9	10	16	23	25	27	27	27	27	27	26	28	28	27	27	28	28	28	28	28	27	25	22	589

'1' data is available, '-' data is missing.

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Table 8: Number of measure-years for which disaggregated expenditure exists by disaggregation method and country

Country	Measure-years for which expenditure was estimated based on																Total measure-years
	complete participant data				imputed participant data						(un)employment data						
	Age		Sex		Age			Sex			Age			Gender			
	N	% of total	N	% of total	N	N serv.	% of total	N	N serv.	% of total	N	N serv.	% of total	N	N serv.	% of total	N
AT	546	77.2%	569	80.5%	84	19	11.9%	52	19	7.4%	77	52	10.9%	86	52	12.2%	707
BE	1162	69.1%	1173	69.7%	311	76	18.5%	350	63	20.8%	209	96	12.4%	159	68	9.5%	1682
BG	778	90.9%	782	91.4%	30	0	3.5%	31	0	3.6%	48	1	5.6%	43	1	5.0%	856
CY	223	70.1%	249	78.3%	46	0	14.5%	38	0	11.9%	49	18	15.4%	31	18	9.7%	318
CZ	178	62.0%	154	53.7%	30	0	10.5%	54	0	18.8%	79	41	27.5%	79	41	27.5%	287
DE	882	69.8%	929	73.5%	79	10	6.3%	85	26	6.7%	303	136	24.0%	250	118	19.8%	1264
DK	252	70.6%	243	68.1%	43	4	12.0%	37	4	10.4%	62	38	17.4%	77	38	21.6%	357
EE	337	77.8%	337	77.8%	15	6	3.5%	15	6	3.5%	81	36	18.7%	81	36	18.7%	433
EL	344	52.2%	378	57.4%	72	2	10.9%	75	2	11.4%	243	39	36.9%	206	39	31.3%	659
ES	512	63.4%	483	59.9%	104	20	12.9%	141	19	17.5%	191	67	23.7%	183	67	22.7%	807
FI	462	70.1%	462	70.1%	25	3	3.8%	25	3	3.8%	172	172	26.1%	172	172	26.1%	659
FR	728	55.3%	672	51.0%	170	14	12.9%	169	11	12.8%	419	218	31.8%	476	222	36.1%	1317
HR	234	62.4%	234	62.4%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	141	128	37.6%	141	128	37.6%	375
HU	220	65.7%	220	65.7%	100	33	29.9%	100	33	29.9%	15	7	4.5%	15	7	4.5%	335
IE	316	69.9%	318	70.4%	75	18	16.6%	73	18	16.2%	61	58	13.5%	61	58	13.5%	452
IT	357	47.0%	340	44.8%	64	0	8.4%	23	0	3.0%	338	67	44.5%	396	67	52.2%	759
LT	201	58.1%	202	58.4%	30	1	8.7%	29	0	8.4%	115	62	33.2%	115	62	33.2%	346
LU	339	64.9%	299	57.3%	35	0	6.7%	28	0	5.4%	148	44	28.4%	195	44	37.4%	522
LV	271	69.8%	271	69.8%	19	14	4.9%	19	14	4.9%	98	88	25.3%	98	88	25.3%	388
MT	265	85.2%	265	85.2%	10	0	3.2%	10	0	3.2%	36	33	11.6%	36	33	11.6%	311
NL	122	30.0%	122	30.0%	58	11	14.3%	49	9	12.1%	226	60	55.7%	235	60	57.9%	406
NO	307	46.9%	305	46.6%	8	0	1.2%	4	0	0.6%	340	71	51.9%	346	71	52.8%	655
PL	334	49.1%	437	64.3%	57	0	8.4%	38	0	5.6%	289	86	42.5%	205	86	30.1%	680
PT	971	80.5%	968	80.3%	76	0	6.3%	79	0	6.6%	159	42	13.2%	159	42	13.2%	1206
RO	191	56.3%	187	55.2%	20	11	5.9%	12	11	3.5%	128	51	37.8%	140	51	41.3%	339
SE	707	85.1%	708	85.2%	22	3	2.6%	21	3	2.5%	102	50	12.3%	102	50	12.3%	831
SI	450	83.8%	450	83.8%	32	18	6.0%	32	18	6.0%	55	28	10.2%	55	28	10.2%	537
SK	338	85.4%	338	85.4%	45	26	11.4%	45	26	11.4%	13	6	3.3%	13	6	3.3%	396
Total	**12027**	**67.3%**	**12095**	**67.6%**	**1660**	**289**	**9.3%**	**1634**	**285**	**9.1%**	**4197**	**1795**	**23.5%**	**4155**	**1753**	**23.2%**	**17884**

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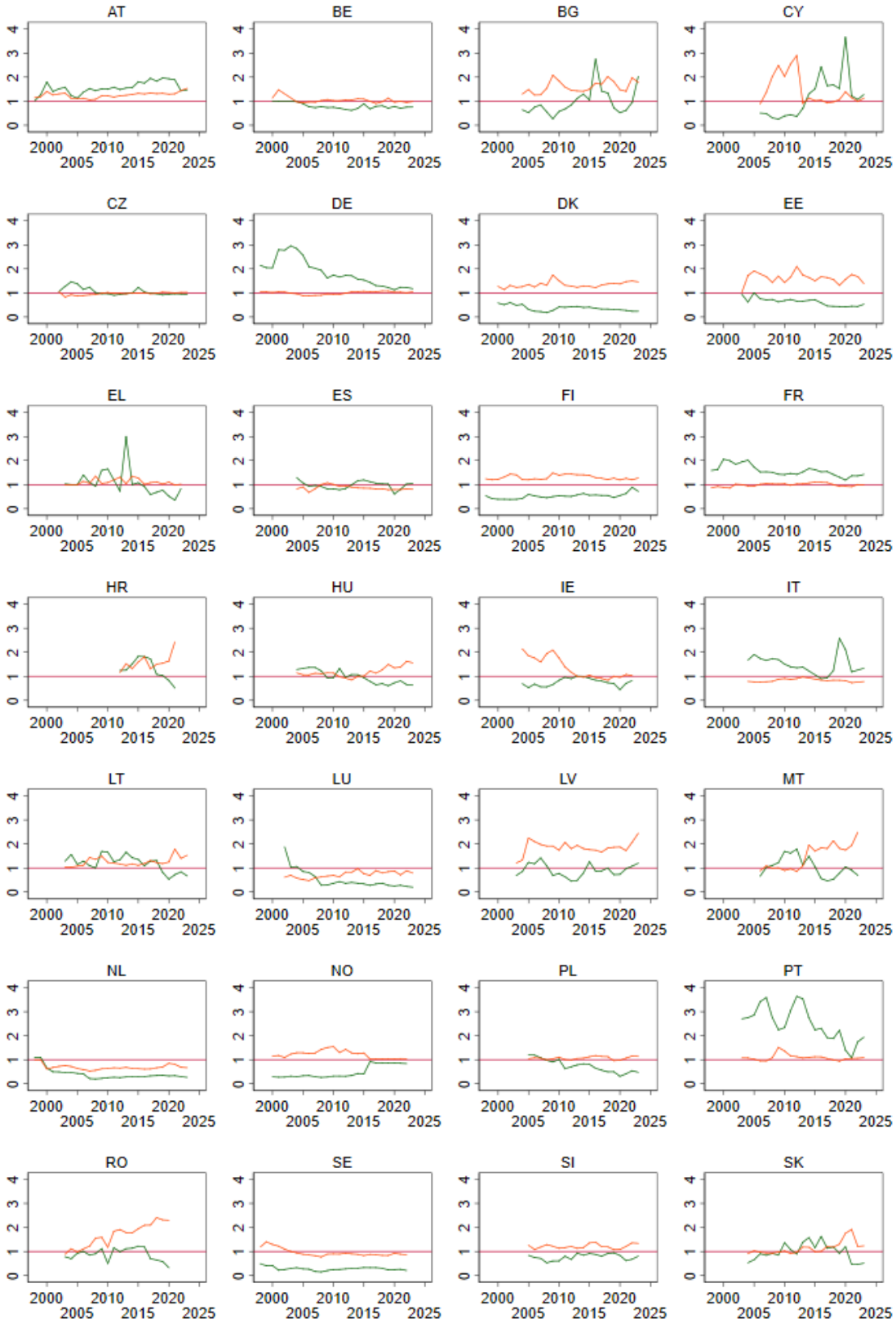
Figure 5: Per unemployed person expenditure ratios: youth/adult and women/men



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