

Workforce Participation in Active Labour Market Policies: A Comparative Analysis in EU Member States

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Abstract

In this scientific endeavour, the issue of workforce participation in active labour market policies (ALMP) is investigated. The mission of ALMPs is to help the workforce in difficulty, outside the labour market, to reintegrate as quickly as possible into the professional environment. In this case, the Public Employment Service (PES) is the government institution that manages and implements ALMPs at the national level. Thus, different programs related to ALMPs can be implemented, these being different from one country to another which can be grouped into: vocational training, subsidizing jobs, stimulation for start-up creation, assisted employment and vocational rehabilitation of the workforce from disadvantaged categories.

In order to highlight the similarities and differences regarding ALMPs in the EU member states, statistical data provided by the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission were used. In this sense, several indicators characterizing ALMPs in the EU member states are presented.

Keywords: workforce, unemployed, labour market, active, labour market policies, public employment services, European Union.

JEL classification: J24; J48; J64; J68.

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1. Introduction

On the labour market, there are people who require support from government institutions to maintain or reintegrate into a job. Moreover, in the conditions of economic instability and the various crises to which a country's economy is exposed, the labour market is directly affected, with the labour force from vulnerable categories suffering the most. In such situations, government institutions get involved through various mechanisms and tools to support the struggling workforce for a certain period of time. The ALMPs represent the tools applied by the government institution to facilitate the professional reinsertion of people out of employment. In this context, Fredriksson (2020) argues that ALMPs are the main tools through which welfare states attempt to improve the employment prospects of the unemployed. Unlike benefit systems that aim to financially support individuals due to loss of income, ALMPs are implemented against the risk of

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becoming unemployed (Jackman, 1994). However, the quality and contribution of ALMPs can be appreciated by measuring the unemployment absorption in a certain period (Clasen et al., 2016). ALMPs aim to improve mobility and adapt the labour market by facilitating the redeployment of workers to productive activities, providing the workforce with new employment opportunities as they arise (OECD, 1994). For the most part, ALMPs are aimed at the unemployed registered with the public employment service (Fredriksson, 2020).

ALMPs can contribute to improving the matching process in the labour market in order to reduce unemployment, by eliminating the mismatch between the skills required by employers and the labour demand, implementing vocational training programs (Vooren, 2019). According to Bonoli (2013), ALMPs try to change the nature of incentives so that unemployment is less attractive compared to employment. Similarly, ALMPs aim to remove obstacles to employment by: 1) providing training programs to the unemployed, 2) providing job search assistance, 3) supporting job creation. In this case, an important role belongs to the public employment service which:

- participate in improving the match between the unemployed and potential employment opportunities (Hägglund, 2014);
- offers training programs for the development of professional skills among the unemployed, in order to increase their employability (Abrassart, 2015);
- provide incentives to employers in the form of wage subsidies for hiring more workers (Martin & Swank, 2004).

The European Union's decision-makers have been permanently concerned with the level of employment in the member states. Likewise, many researchers in EU member states have addressed the issue of employment, including activation policies (Mailand, 2008; Bonoli, 2010; Graziano, 2011; 2012; Van Vliet & Foster, 2011; Verschraegen et al., 2011).

For the European Commission (2017), the main objective of ALMPs is to increase employment opportunities for jobseekers and improve the correlation between job vacancies and the workforce (unemployed). As stated in that document: "ALMPs can help increase employment and GDP and reduce unemployment and dependence on social benefits" [34]. In this context, Pelucha et al. (2019) argue that the evaluation of ALMPs in EU member states are necessary and supported by the European Commission, as the EU frequently funds this process.

2. Literature review

The term ALMP covers a series of public programs aimed at increasing employment, enabling the workforce to take on specific jobs, as well as achieving a better match between labour demand and supply (Clasen et al., 2016). ALMPs first appeared in Sweden, where the Rehn-Meidner model focused on employment and wages was credited with achieving high productivity, full employment and low

inflation through active labour market interventions by unions and the state (Haapanala, 2022).

ALMPs are closely related to the concept of activation. Van Berkel & Borghi (2008) have defined the activation as social policies and programs aimed at promoting the (more or less mandatory) participation of people dependent on unemployment benefits or social assistance in work. Estevão (2003) mentions five channels through which ALMPs influence employment in the EU countries selected for research. First, ALMPs can generate a more efficient match between job vacancies and unemployed people. Second, employee productivity can be increased through professional training programs. Third, ALMPs can keep the unemployed attached to the labour force, even after a long period of inactivity. Fourth, some employment programs may have windfall effects, making ALMPs ineffective. Fifth, ALMPs can reduce the disutility of being unemployed, as they provide an occupation, some income and a hope of retaining work skills.

According to the European Commission (2018), ALMPs are grouped into 5 major categories: (1) employment stimulation; (2) job creation; (3) stimulating start-ups; (4) vocational training; (5) assisted employment and rehabilitation. In turn, Card et al. (2018) classify ALMPs based on the main objective of the policy instruments. Their analysis, which included 207 activation programmes, focuses on vocational training, job search assistance, private employment or public employment subsidies.

Starting from the tools used, Haapanala (2022) classifies ALMPs into "soft" and "hard". ALMP hard tools include public or private sector job creation and employment service strategies that act as "sticks in finding a job", such as monitoring and sanctioning job seekers, workplace with poor performance (Graversen & van Ours, 2011). According to Haapanala (2022), their objective is to minimize the unemployment duration, making it less attractive than the job by placing job seekers directly at jobs. ALMP soft tools include upskilling, supported employment and rehabilitation, as well as personalized employment services, characterized as "inclusive" methods that address skills shortages, long-term unemployment or social exclusion of vulnerable jobseekers (Rasmussen et al., 2019).

Bergemen et al. (2017) argue that the participation effectiveness in ALMPs would depend on the level of development of the economy. The authors mention that „in periods with low job destruction rates and relatively high job offer arrival rates the opportunity costs of participating in an ALMP might be relatively high, i.e., searching for a job could be more beneficial because the probability of finding a regular job is high”.

The large number of researches focused on ALMPs proves their economic and social importance for each country. There are many researches addressed to ALMPs as a whole, but at the same time, papers in which only one tool of ALMPs is analysed. In this context, some researchers have been concerned with: participation in vocational training programs (Bergemann et al., 2009; Duranti et al. 2018; Kruppe & Lang 2018); job creation (Caliendo, 2008; Bergemann et al.,

2017; Ivanov et al., 2020); subsidizing jobs (Van Ours, 2004; Schünemann et al., 2015; Bredgaard & Halkjaer, 2016), creating start-ups (Caliendo & Kunn, 2015; Behrenz et al. 2016). Investigating the interplay between different ALMP tools, Fredriksson, (2021) finds that job creation and on-the-job training are more effective in promoting employment in countries that invest heavily in public employment services.

In the process of implementing different programs related to ALMPs, employers have an essential role. Thus, Martin & Swank (2004) believe that in countries where employers are coordinated by employers' organizations and cooperate with the state and unions, they will support ALMPs more strongly to make them more effective.

People's participation in ALMPs has beneficial effects at both macro and microeconomic levels. In the opinion of Arranz et al. (2013), microeconomic analysis is used to determine whether a particular program helps targeted individuals improve their employment prospects, while macroeconomic analysis is concerned with verifying whether ALMPs have any effect on aggregate indicators such as employment rate, unemployment rate or transitions from unemployment to employment.

Most research has been devoted to the relationship between ALMPs and the unemployment rate, including the impact of ALMPs on the evolution of unemployment. In principle, ALMPs activate the unemployed and help them enter employment (Armingeon, 2007). In this context, Franzese & Hays (2006) argue that reducing support for the unemployed, by moving from passive to active measures, tends to reduce the duration of unemployment. Similarly, several researchers have found that ALMPs lead to a decrease in the unemployment rate (Layard et al., 2005; Fialova & Schneider, 2005; Basanini, 2006; Escudero, 2018; Sahnoun. & Abdennadher 2018; Hur, 2019).

Regarding the microeconomic impact of ALMPs, the applied measures had a significant influence on the employment of the directly targeted persons (Bánociová. & Martinková, 2017). Moreover, ALMPs can reduce the disutility of being unemployed (Madsen, 2017).

The implementation of ALMPs had different effects, depending on the programs implemented in each country. Even though ALMPs have also been criticized by some researchers, for the most part, they have proven their effectiveness.

3. Methodology

In this paper, we aimed to highlight the aspects related to the implementation of programs related to ALMPs in the EU member states. This will allow us to establish certain conclusions regarding the involvement of the public employment service in each EU member state in the promotion and implementation of one or another ALMP program. The statistical data were extracted from the website of the Directorate for Employment, Social Affairs and

Inclusion of the European Commission. Since the statistical data for the year 2020 are not available for all countries, in the paper we will refer to the year 2019. In this context, the following indicators characterizing the participation of the workforce in the ALMP programs were analysed:

- participation rate in professional training programs;
- rate of beneficiaries of employment incentives;
- rate of beneficiaries of job creation incentives;
- rate of beneficiaries of assisted rehabilitation and employment.

The indicators mentioned above are calculated per 100 people registered at the Public Employment Service who want to work. That is why we considered it necessary to present the number of people and the unemployed registered with the Public Employment Service (PES) in the EU member states.

4. Results and discussions

For the most part, jobseekers are the main clients of PES, whose mission is to help and reintegrate them into a job in the shortest possible time. Table 1 shows the information on the number of people registered with the PES in the EU Member States.

Table 1. Evolution of people and the unemployed registered at the SPO in the period 2013-2019, in the EU member states

Countries	Years					
	2013			2019		
	Persons registered with PES	Unemployed registered with PES	Share of the unemployed in the total number of registered persons, %	Persons registered with PES	Unemployed registered with PES	Share of the unemployed in the total number of registered persons, %
Austria	332 846	287 207	86,3	314 798	301 328	95,7
Belgium	572 428	572 428	100	479 730	341 687	71,2
Bulgaria	371 695	371 380	99,9	189 984	185 266	97,5
Czechia	564 093	564 093	100	212 409	212 409	100
Cyprus	;	;	;	;	;	;
Croatia	346 777	345 112	99,5	129 167	128 650	99,6
Denmark	194 281	134 694	69,3	131 602	96 112	73,0
Estonia	35 845	35 680	99,5	32 898	32 126	97,7
Finland	504 993	294 136	58,2	528 138	240 381	45,5
France	5 082 237	3 503 159	68,9	5 869 226	3 591 776	61,2
Germany	5 066 410	2 950 338	58,2	4 254 766	2 266 720	53,3
Greece	1 039 242	1 039 242	100	1 016 275	1 016 275	100

Countries	Years					
	2013			2019		
	Persons registered with PES	Unemployed registered with PES	Share of the unemployed in the total number of registered persons, %	Persons registered with PES	Unemployed registered with PES	Share of the unemployed in the total number of registered persons, %
Ireland	418 950	418 950	100	191 552	191 552	100
Italy	;	;	;	;	;	;
Latvia	101 397	101 397	100	56 951	56 858	99,8
Lithuania	254 856	201 322	79,0	170 224	144 898	85,1
Luxemburg	;	17 213	;	19 557	15 383	78,7
Malta	8 558	7 385	86,3	3 678	1 698	46,2
Netherlands	920 500	762 400	82,8	633 310	633 310	100
Poland	2 216 309	2 174 715	98,1	926 947	903 200	97,4
Portugal	850 781	671 716	78,9	464 423	314 627	67,7
Romania	477 726	476 165	99,7	283 945	266 124	93,7
Slovakia	423 517	415 006	98,0	260 857	259 318	99,4
Slovenia	122 696	119 827	97,7	83 614	74 178	88,7
Spain	6 347 812	4 845 302	76,3	4 469 919	3 148 752	70,4
Sweden	706 384	404 036	57,2	594 948	349 646	58,8
Hungary	527 624	527 624	100	250 947	250 947	100

Source: Processed by the author based on information from [47].

Analysing the information in Table 1, we find that France is the only country in the EU where both the number of people and the number of unemployed people registered with the PES increased, during the analysed period. If 2013 is considered the year with the highest unemployment rate in all EU Member States, after which a continuous decrease of the unemployed followed, in France their number increased by almost 90 thousand, during the analysed period. We also note that not all persons registered with the PES have received the status of unemployed. In some EU Member States, the share of the unemployed among the total registered persons was less than 50% in Finland and Malta. At the same time, in some EU Member States, the unemployed status was obtained by all persons registered with the PES (Czechia, Greece, Ireland and Hungary).

The PES in the EU Member States organize and implement different measures for the registered unemployed, with the objective of reintegrating them into the professional environment. In 2019, the EU Member States organized and implemented a lot of measures for the unemployed registered with the PES (Table 2).

Table 2. The ratio between ALMPs participants and the registered unemployed in 2019

Countries	Unemployed registered with PES, persons	ALMPs participants, persons	The ratio of participants in ALMP measures and registered unemployed, %
Austria	301 328	161 727	53,7
Belgium	341 687	433 591	126,9
Bulgaria	185 266	24 183	13,1
Czechia	212 409	;	;
Cyprus	;	2 587	;
Croatia	128 650	28 559	22,2
Denmark	96 112	228 127	237,3
Estonia	32 126	38 986	121,3
Finland	240 381	129 379	53,8
France	3 591 776	1 410 019	39,3
Germany	2 266 720	801 178	35,3
Greece	1 016 275	54 258	5,3
Ireland	191 552	116 989	61,1
Italy	;	1 222 984	;
Latvia	56 858	8 310	14,6
Lithuania	144 898	13 758	9,5
Luxemburg	15 383	24 804	161,2
Malta	1 698	2 806	165,2
Netherlands	633 310	360 090	56,9
Poland	903 200	546 907	60,6
Portugal	314 627	201 896	64,2
Romania	266 124	26 318	9,9
Slovakia	259 318	74 012	28,5
Slovenia	74 178	13 602	18,3
Spain	3 148 752	2 948 757	93,6
Sweden	349 646	212 998	60,9
Hungary	250 947	179 041	71,3

Source: Processed by the author based on information from [47].

According to Table 2, the number of participants in ALMP measures differs from one country to another. Thus, we can observe that in some EU Member States the number of participants in ALMP measures is higher than that of

the registered unemployed. This demonstrates the fact that in some countries (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia Luxembourg and Malta) the unemployed registered with the PES were involved in several active measures on the labour market. At the same time, we note that in other states, less than 10% of the registered unemployed participated in the active measures on the labour market (Greece, Lithuania and Romania). The wide existing gap in the participation of the unemployed in active labour market measures can be determined by the legal framework that differs from one country to another, as well as the capabilities of PES regarding the implementation of labour market policies.

The mission of the PES consists not only in registering jobseekers, but also in offering help, by involving them in various measures. Thus, Figure 1 presents the information on participation in active measures on the labour market for 100 jobseekers, in 2019.

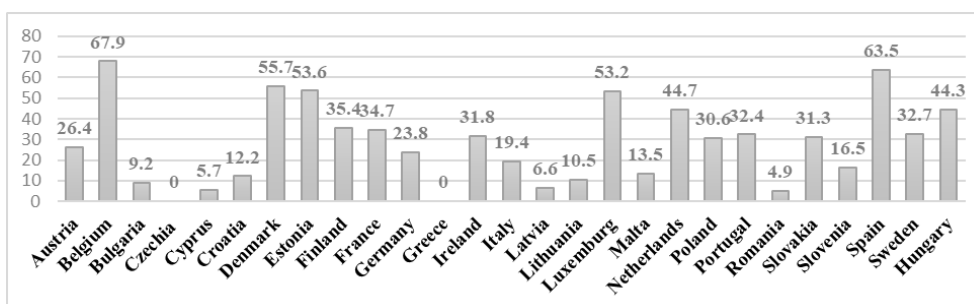


Figure 1. Participation rate in active measures per 100 jobseekers, in 2019 (%)

Source: Developed by the author based on information from [47].

As shown in Figure 1, the participation of jobseekers differs from one country to another. In some countries, active measures are widely implemented among jobseekers, unlike in other countries. In 2019, out of 100 jobseekers registered with the PES, more than 50 of them were involved in various active measures on the labour market in countries such as: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Luxembourg and Spain. At the opposite side, there are Bulgaria, Cyprus, Latvia and Romania, where out of 100 jobseekers, registered with the PES, less than 10% have been involved in various active measures carried out on the labour market. Regarding the Czechia and Greece, the information is not available for that year.

Of the ALMPs, participation in vocational training programs is the active measure most frequently used by PES among jobseekers. Figure 2 shows the participation rate in vocational training programs per 100 jobseekers.

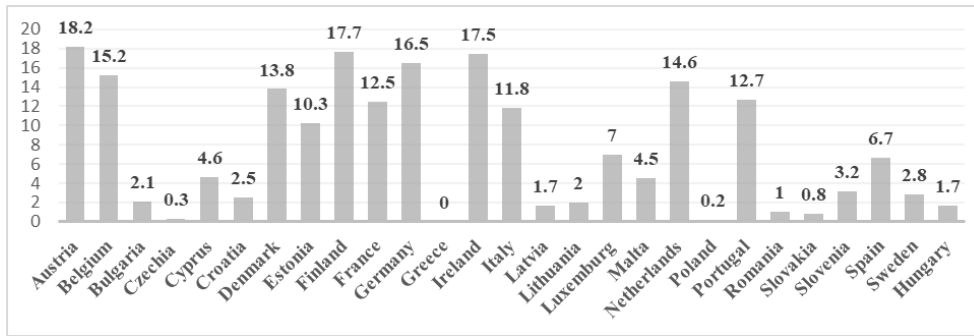


Figure 2. Participation rate in vocational training programs per 100 jobseekers in 2019, %

Source: Developed by the author based on information from [47].

From Figure 2, we see that vocational training programs are used more in Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany and Ireland. In these countries, out of 100 jobseekers, registered with the PES, more than 15% of them are attracted to various vocational training programs, depending on the needs of the labour market. On the other hand, there are EU Member States where out of 100 jobseekers less than one person is attracted to vocational training programs (Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia).

Providing employment incentives is another active measure practiced on the labour market, the beneficiaries of which can be both job seekers and employers. Figure 3 shows the rate of employment incentives beneficiaries per 100 jobseekers.

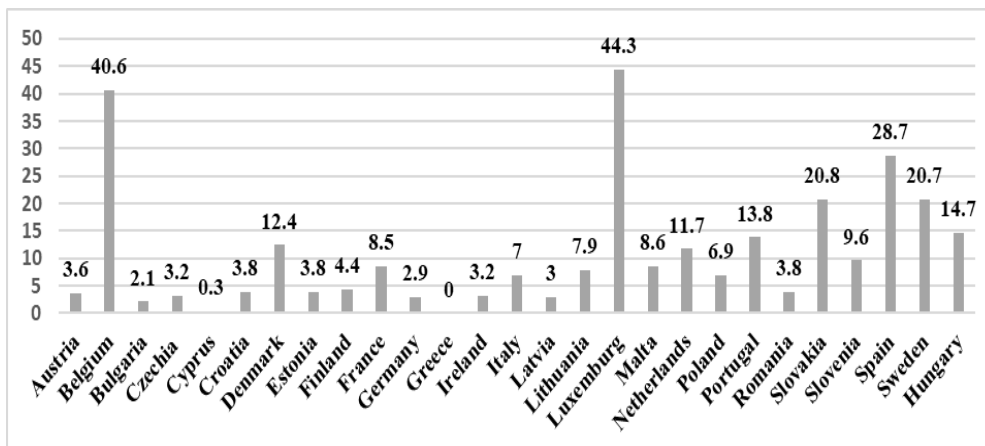


Figure 3. The rate of employment incentives beneficiaries per 100 jobseekers in 2019, %

Source: Developed by the author based on information from [47].

The information presented in Figure 3 demonstrates that Belgium and Luxembourg are the countries that most frequently apply employment incentives. In Luxembourg, out of 100 people registered with the PES, 44.3% benefited from employment incentives, and in Belgium – 40.6%. In Spain, almost every third person benefited from employment incentives, and in Slovakia and Sweden – every 5th person. By comparing figures 2 and 3, we find that while some countries place more emphasis on vocational training programs for jobseekers, other countries focus more on providing incentives for employment the work.

A comparative analysis of Figure 2 and Figure 3 shows that while some countries focus on vocational training programs for jobseekers, other countries use employment incentives to a greater extent.

Job creation is another active measure promoted on the labour market, the beneficiaries of which are the persons registered with the PES. Figure 4 shows the information on the beneficiaries of job creation per 100 jobseekers.

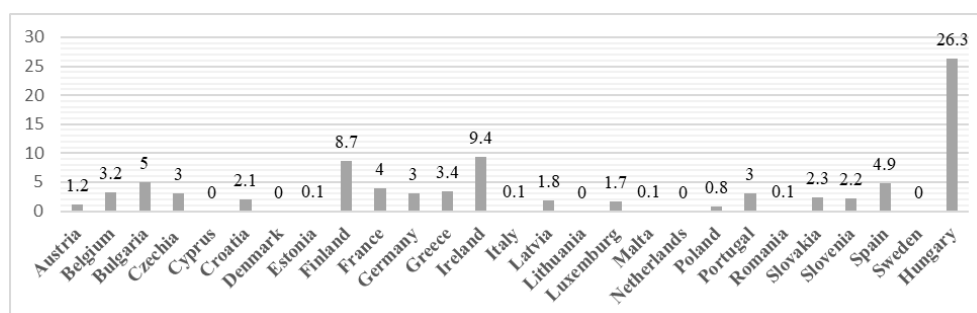


Figure 4. The rate of incentives for job creation per 100 jobseekers in 2019, %
Source: Developed by the author based on information from [47].

Hungary is the country that widely applies incentives for job creation. According to Figure 4, practically, every 4th jobseeker benefited from this measure. At a great distance are Ireland and Finland that apply this active measure, whose beneficiaries were 9.4% and 8.7%, respectively, per 100 jobseekers.

Business start-up incentives is a program within ALMPs less practiced by EU Member States (Figure 5). This may also be due to the quality of the workforce that addresses the PES, a fact that causes the respective institution to be more reluctant.

From Figure 5, we notice that Spain is the only country in the EU that pays special attention to this program. Practically every 5th unemployed person registered with PES benefits from incentives for starting their own business, followed by France, Slovakia and Croatia. In most EU Member States, less than one person in 100 jobseekers benefit from this programme.

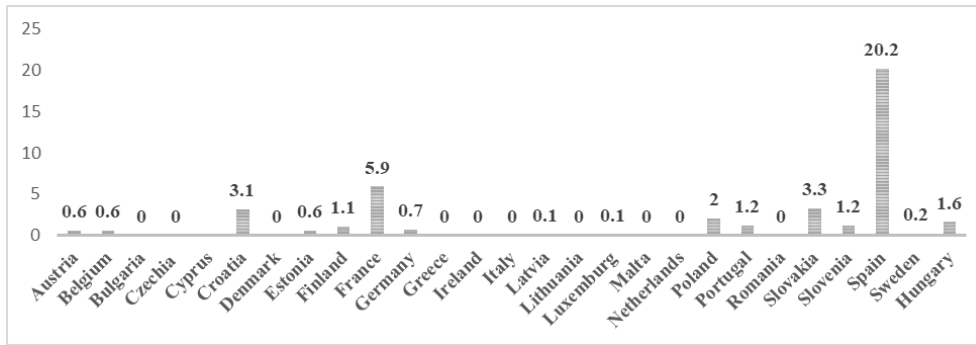


Figure 5. Rate of beneficiaries of business start-up incentives per 100 jobseekers in 2019, %

Source: Developed by the author based on information from [47].

Vocational rehabilitation and assisted employment are another measure and targets people from vulnerable groups who face employment problems as a result of job loss. Figure 6 shows the number of beneficiaries of vocational rehabilitation and assisted employment per 100 job seekers.

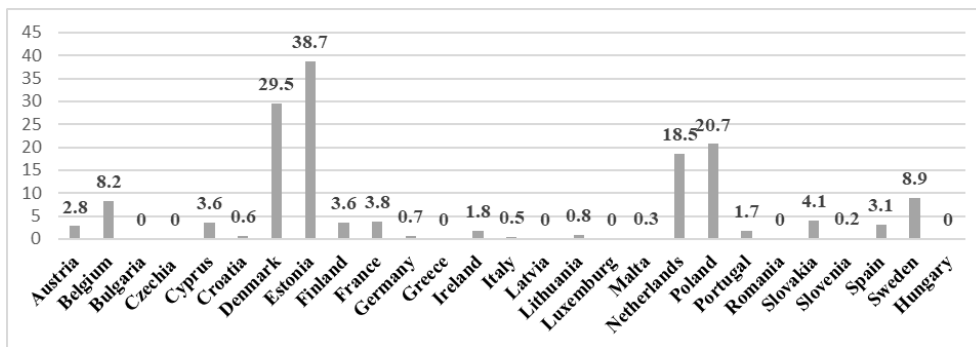


Figure 6. Rate of beneficiaries of vocational rehabilitation and assisted employment per 100 jobseekers in 2019, %

Source: Developed by the author based on information from [47].

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Regarding vocational rehabilitation and assisted employment, as an active measure on the labour market, it is applied most frequently in four EU Member States. From Figure 6 we can see that in Estonia 38.7% of 100 jobseekers benefited from this active measure, in Denmark – 29.5%, Poland – 20.7% and the Netherlands - 18.5%. In the other EU Member States, vocational rehabilitation and assisted employment are used less by PES.

5. Conclusions

ALMPs have an essential role for the labour market reintegration of the labour force in difficulty. Depending on the composition of the unemployed and jobseekers, each EU Member State sets its priorities for ALMP programs to implement at national or regional level. For the most part, the unemployed registered with the PES have priority for participation in ALMPs. At the same time, it should be mentioned that a registered unemployed person can participate in several programs related to ALMPs. The obtained results prove that the unemployed registered with the PES in Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Luxembourg and Malta participate in more than one program related to ALMPs. At the same time, less than 10% of the unemployed registered with the PES in Romania, Lithuania and Greece participate in ALMPs.

Vocational training is the most common program attended by the unemployed registered with the PES. This program is applied with greater frequency in Austria, Finland, Ireland, Germany and Belgium. The participation rate in this program is over 15% per 100 people who want to work.

Employment incentives is the second most frequently used program in EU member states. This program is most commonly used in Luxembourg and Belgium. Out of 100 jobseekers, more than 40% benefit from employment incentives. According to the frequency of application of this program, Spain, Slovakia and Sweden is the next group of countries. In these countries, the beneficiaries of employment incentives vary between 20-30% of 100 jobseekers.

Incentives for job creation is the next ALMP program applied in EU Member States. Of all the EU Member States, Hungary applies this program most frequently – 26.3% of 100 jobseekers. In the other EU member states, incentives for job creation have little applicability.

Vocational rehabilitation and supported employment target the disadvantaged workforce, especially the disabled. Estonia, Denmark and Poland are the countries that most frequently apply this program. In these countries, the participation rate in this program is higher than 20% per 100 jobseekers.

Therefore, each EU Member State can apply the ALMPs differently, focusing on those programs that have greater effectiveness, in the sense of increasing the probability of reintegration of the unemployed into the labour market. The main limit of this paper is that it only presents the number of participants in ALMPs, without showing their employment rate on each program, which would represent further research directions for the author.

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