

## **Investigating the penetration of the activation paradigm in EU labor market policies: a cross-country comparative analysis and a case study in Italy**

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This contribution focuses on Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs), a relatively recent stream of public intervention in the management of labor market dynamics, and it aims at providing evidence about the extent to which and the modalities through which ALMPs have been diffusing in European countries for the past 20 years.

At the crossroads between policies aimed at supporting job placement and contrasting unemployment and policies aimed at strengthening workers' skills and competitiveness, ALMPs are gaining increasing relevance as a tool to govern the turbulent process of transformation of the contemporary economic model. The convergence of the deep reconfiguration of the production structure with the pressuring energy transition strategies and the succession of crisis that have suddenly as well as profoundly destabilized Western countries, resulted in fact in the current social and economic context characterized by a high degree of uncertainty and unpredictability. Traditional tools to contrast unemployment and to mitigate its consequences have shown to be less and less capable of grasping the deep roots of the problems and promoting their solutions. ALMPs, understood as a set of interventions aimed primarily at strengthening the employability of workers through the promotion of their activation and characterized by a delicate balance between the universality of services and the specificity of treatments, are getting momentum as an innovative tool guided by the ambition to promote an integrated and holistic approach to solving the causes of exclusion from the labor market. But despite this relevance and this potential has now found full recognition in European and national policy guidelines, ALMPs can still be considered a 'frontier policy', because they allow to experiment unprecedented solutions and because of their contiguity with (at least) three social policy domains respectively labor market, education and training and welfare.

ALMPs represent therefore a relatively recent sector of public intervention. Although it is possible to identify their origin already in the first years after the Second World War, it is only in the nineties of the XX century that they diffuse in most of the economically developed countries as an innovative approach to deal with the increase in structural unemployment that was significantly raising from the late eighties and thanks to the contribution of some supranational bodies such as the ILO, the OECD and the EU that promoted to varying degrees the logic of activation.

The development and diffusion of ALMPs in European countries has obviously been grafted onto the development pathways of the national welfare systems, that based on a wide literature can be clustered around a few idealtypical models: the nordic, inspired by a general protection of the workers as citizens with attention paid to both the job protection, the subsidies and the empowerment of unemployed; the anglo-saxon, inspired by a strong deregulation of the labor market and a focus on the market mechanisms to guarantee both the turnover of workers and the social insurance; the continental, characterized by a strong focus on social insurance differentiated along occupational and status distinctions with employment record is decisive for acquiring social rights. and the Mediterranean similar to the previous with higher attention on the employment protection and much more fragmented social insurances and an highly pronounced role of the family in social protection and an under-developed social assistance system.

These differences in the contexts of ALMPs development around Europe require that any transnational comparative exercise is treated with caution, but the codification adopted by the OECD and Eurostat can help a lot in this exercise since it allows to clearly distinguish between active and passive labor market policies, the former identified with employment services and measures aimed at increasing workers in searching a job, the latter with supports to mitigate the consequences of job loss.

Based on these premises, the contribution aims primarily at a comprehensive exploration of the penetration rate of the ALMPs in European countries in the last 20 years. Through the use of institutional datasets (OCED and Eurostat) data on public expenditure and population coverage will help in highlighting the main common trends and the most relevant differences among the different countries for what concerns the adoption of the activation paradigm. Specific attention will be paid on the role played by the welfare model adopted by the specific countries and an in-depth description of the Mediterranean model implementation will be provided through a few case studies of ALMPs projects targeting disadvantaged people in Italy.