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### **Lithuanian Active Labour Market Policy in 2009–2020: a Social Investment Perspective**

### **Aktywna polityka rynku pracy na Litwie w latach 2009–2020: perspektywa inwestycji społecznych**

#### **Introduction**

The Social Investment Package (SIP) was adopted in the EU in 2013. The main principles defined in the SIP were the more effective use of social budgets and enhancing people's capabilities to participate in the society and labour market. A more integrative and accessible aid for the job searchers is seen as an objective and the development of their skills is emphasized in the SIP. Thus, the social investment policy is focused on active measures or investment in knowledge and skills. From the social investment perspective, the active labour

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market policy is one of the most important measures during unemployment periods of an individual's life course.

In Lithuania, the active labour market policy was started in 1991 (Moskvina, 2008), and research on it has been conducted since then (Moskvina (2008); Moskva and Okunevičiūtė- Neverauskienė (2010; 2011)). Their analysis focused on the measures of active labour market policy and their development. However, it is still unclear what lessons Lithuania learned from the world financial crisis in 2008-2009 regarding the development of active labour market policy and employees' skills. Moreover, it is not clear either how the situation in Lithuania is facing the Covid-19 pandemic. Although expenditures on social investment, the role of social benefits reducing poverty have already been studied by Skuciene et al. (2018), Skuciene and Lazutka (2019), the active labour market policy from a social investment perspective has not been broadly analysed yet. The analysis of active labour market policy measures from a social investment perspective allows one to evaluate its development pattern and significance in reducing unemployment and better protecting the workers at risk of unemployment during the crisis. Good investments in human capital ensure more stable employment over the life course and better resilience during the shocks.

Therefore, this paper aims to analyse the active labour market policy from social investment in Lithuania in 2009-2020. For the implementation of the aim, the following objectives were formulated: first, to review the prior literature on social investment, active labour market; second, to evaluate the active labour market policy development in 2009-2020; third, to analyse the expenditure on active labour market measures in 2009-2020.

## **Prior literature**

Social investment focuses on strengthening people's knowledge and skills to ensure their employment and social life (Hemerijck, 2017). According to Cooke and Gazso (2009), the main idea of social investment is the transition from passive social security to the active one. Jenson (2010) listed the principles of social investment in more detail: learning to increase the human capital over the life course; the focus on the future, especially on the children; investment in people's success and prospect seeking benefits for the society. The analysis of social investment has to include income compensation and human capital

development programmes ensuring participation in the labour market as stated by Nolan (2013); Pintelon et al. (2013); Kvist (2014); Kuitto (2016). The new social welfare policy covers higher inclusion in the labour market and adequate social security (Pintelon et al., 2013). Kvist (2014) stated that the heart of social investment is the policy enhancing people to work, use their skills, create families, and grow up children. The return of social investment is very different during the life course stages (Kuitto, 2016). According to Hicks (2008), the life course perspective allows understanding the relationship between policy measures and individual choices and the return and looking from the social investment perspective.

The social investment concept emphasizes employment as the primary measure for reducing poverty. Education and good health can reduce permanent poverty between generations (Nelson, Sandberg, 2016) because poverty is related to education, employment status, and family type (Ferrarini, et al., 2016). The social investment focuses on the active policy during unemployment because low qualified employment is unstable (Rovny, 2014). Thus, active labour market policy is the main instrument reducing poverty among low educated employees (Rovny, 2014).

Bonoli (2010) distinguished two types of the active labour market: one increases human capital, and the other helps to recall people from social assistance to employment. According to Bonoli (2010), the second type or the policy, seeking to return people to employment, has the highest impact on the labour supply. Based on these types of active labour market policies, Bonoli (2010) classified the measures of active labour market policies. He stated that the first measure of the active labour market referred to as "Promotion of incentive" is devoted to strengthening the incentive of benefits receivers. It can be implemented in two ways: reducing either the benefit amount or its duration. The sanctions or benefit combination with work can be applied as well. "The promotion of incentive" is solid in the Anglo-Saxon countries, as Bonoli, (2010) stated. "The aid to get a job" includes job searching programmes, services to get a job through ensuring the contact between the unemployed and employer (Bonoli, 2010).

Meanwhile, "Counselling and Job Subsidies" are significant for long-term unemployed or never worked persons. The childcare services and the aid to get a job could be found under this measure as well. All these interventions result in a lower increase in human capital but help to use it (Bonoli, 2010). This

type of measure is popular in Anglo-Saxon, North, and Continental Europe. The third type of measures includes “Employment”, which aims to keep the employment of people and avoid wasting human capital during unemployment. “Employment” includes job creation, job experience programmes in public and non-profit sectors. Sometimes it offers short training but, in principle, does not change the current employment. It is spread in Continental Europe. Furthermore, finally, “New skills or professional training for the unemployed” is a measure offering a new opportunity for those losing skills (Bonoli, 2010). Professional training is widely used in the Northern countries.

Bonoli (2010) defined the level of investment in human capital. According to him, the strong investment provides basic education or training, and a weak one creates new jobs, job subsidies, counselling, services for getting the job, job searching programmes, benefits, and taxes allowances. The structure of expenditures on active labour market policy measures can explain different strategies of the country (Bonoli, 2010). The Scandinavian countries pay more attention to the training of job searchers, while the Anglo-Saxon states prioritize the “job first” strategy. It means that a person gets training at work, as concluded by Champion and Bonoli (2011).

Tepe and Vanhuyse (2013) stated that the differences in the development of active labour market policy in the European countries depended on the previous policy, unemployment level, activity of trade unions, and governments’ attitude. Scandinavian countries assign the largest expenditure to the active labour market policy compared to other countries (Tepe, Vanhuyse, 2013).

Training is one of the most expensive kinds of active labour market policies, and it usually equals one-third or one-quarter of all expenditure (Immervoll, Scarpetta, 2012). However, following Immervoll and Scarpetta (2012), that measure is only one-tenth of all spending on the active labour market in the Eastern European countries. Generally, active measures aim at avoiding the risk of dependency on benefits, losses of human capital, and lower expenditures on social policy, as stated by Immervoll and Scarpetta (2012). Thus, the aid for searching and getting a job is the principal pillar of active labour market policy (Immervoll, Scarpetta, 2012).

Immervoll and Scarpetta (2012) pointed out that job subsidies and other job demand incentives were growing among the OECD countries, whereas the expenditure on job creation (public work programmes) showed a decreasing trend (Immervoll, Scarpetta, 2012). They found that a small part of total

expenditure was for start-ups, but it was high in Eastern Europe during its transition.

In the opinion of Immervoll and Scarpetta (2012), the training measures had a positive impact on employment, but that effect was observed sometimes after training. They found that basic educational programmes were less efficient than training at work. Public work programmes had a mostly negative impact on employment. During the crisis, the investment in long-term learning was spread in the Nordic countries (Immervoll, Scarpetta, 2012). The same researchers stated that although it is expensive during the crisis, the “job first” strategy is less effective when unemployment is high.

The aim of activation is not only to get a job but to help to search for a higher quality job for the unemployed. It is known that if a person has a low salary after activation and does not have better prospects of a career, they are prone to poverty (Immervoll, Scarpetta, 2012). A similar conclusion was made by Vlandas (2013), who pointed out that activation incentives support low-paid works and employment in any job. So, the active labour market policy becomes a financial subsidize for enterprises employing a cheap labour force.

According to Vlandas (2013), the training schemes have an explicit goal to increase human capital. The upgrading of knowledge and possibilities of getting the desired job is ensured in training schemes. Training is essential for employers and, in general, for the economy of the country. The expenditure on public works is arguable because the evidence shows that employment is low after such programmes. Vlandas (2013) stated that job creation has a positive impact on wages and employment.

## Data and methods

The methodology suggested by Bonoli (2010) is used to define the level (strong/weak) of investment in human capital in this research. Under this methodology, the training is a strong investment, while other measures make weak investments in human capital.

The active labour market policy development by strong/weak dichotomy was evaluated from 2009 through 2020. The choice of the period was determined by the time of the world financial crisis in 2009 and the Covid-19 pandemic crisis in 2020. The active labour market policy was evaluated using two research methods: qualitative document analysis and secondary data analysis. The Law

of Employment Promotion 15/06/2006 and its amendments from 2009 to 2016 and the Law on Employment 21/06/2016 and its amendments until 2020 were analysed. The documents analysis was based on the strong/weak social investment themes. Additionally, the meta-analysis of Social Reports 2009-2017 was used. This meta-analysis supplements the document analysis with additional insights.

Eurostat data in 2009-2018 was chosen for the secondary analysis of the expenditure structure on different kinds of measures. The same classification (strong/weak) was used for the evaluation of statistical data. The data on spending on Lithuania's active labour market policy was evaluated compared to that of other Baltic States. The choice of the data of other Baltic States allows a better understanding of the Lithuanian active labour market policy development compared with the neighbouring countries. This method was used to implement the third research objective. The chosen combination of two data collection methods allows to confirm the findings out of each other.

## **Research results and discussion**

Lithuania's active labour market policy measures are divided into four groups: professional training, supported employment, support for job creation, and support for mobility of unemployed (Užimtumo Įstatymas, 2016). Professional training to enhance new skills and knowledge is regarded as a strong investment in human capital, and the other three measures are said to support human capital and are considered weak investments in human capital. They embrace support for acquiring job skills, subsidized employment, job rotation, and public works. The support for job creation, including support for job creation subsidies, local employment incentive projects, and support for self-employment, can be evaluated as a weak investment in human capital as well.

### *Strong investment in human capital*

The possibility of getting a training scholarship was provided for the redundant employees in 2009 (Užimtumo Rėmimo Įstatymas, 2006). Solving the unemployment problem as a consequence of the world financial crisis, the more targeted groups were involved in being supported.

The framework of professional training vouchers for the unemployed was legitimated in 2012 during the recovery of the country's economy. The

employee warned that redundancy was entitled to such a training voucher (Lietuvos Respublikos Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministerija. Socialinis pranešimas, 2009–2017 m). However, the accessibility to training scholarship was restricted only for the unemployed, while employees warned about redundancy lost that entitlement in 2014. The unemployed had the right to participate in training again only after three years with some exceptions (if the health conditions did not allow them to work on the previous qualification or if the person had no certificate) (Užimtumo Rėmimo Įstatymas, 2006).

The new active labour market policy measures were provided in 2016, including professional training internships. The main goal of the internship was to increase job skills and renew or develop professional qualifications (Užimtumo Įstatymas, 2016). The conditions for professional training were ensured for the unemployed and employees in 2020 (Užimtumo Įstatymas, 2016).

Hence, the development of strong investment in human capital in active labour market policy since the world financial crisis to Covid-19 pandemic has emphasized professional training and broader accessibility of services for the unemployed and potentially unemployed. However, the reduction of eligibility to professional training was observed during the inter-crisis period.

### *Weak investment in human capital*

According to Bonoli (2010), weak investment in human capital prevailed during the world financial crisis, and, following Keynes (Tobin, 1975), it was a usual practice to reduce unemployment and promote consumption. Thus, job and wages subsidies were provided, the support for job skills development programme for the unemployed was reduced up to three months (previously it was six months). The support for the mobility of the unemployed was legitimated in 2009. Covering travelling expenses with salary was foreseen to support mobility. The restrictions were reduced for the employers who were employing registered unemployed persons in 2009.

During the after-crisis period in 2010, some measures for the unemployed were provided. If the unemployed terminated the registration at the Labour Exchange Agency, the right to register again was granted only after six months. The measures for motivation encouragement and individual employment plans were used just after the registration in 2010. Unemployed people up to 29 years old are entitled to subsidies up to 6 months, and the first enters the labour market according to their qualification. For the participants in job skills

development programmes, subsidies are provided up to 12 months (Užimtumo Rėmimo Įstatymas, 2006).

The duration to maintain work for the employees was restricted from 12 months to 6 in 2014. The more detailed responsibilities of the participant in training were defined in 2014. Following it, the participants in training had the right to get a new qualification or develop it, and the new possibility of terminating the professional training voluntary was granted in 2014 as well. A particular measure for young persons up to 29 years old was provided. They had more opportunities to organize their business and acquire more job experience. The three other measures were legitimated: subsidization for job creations, an agreement to get job skills, and voluntary practice. In 2014 an employer was entitled to higher compensation if a newly hired employee was older than 50 years and a new entrant was younger than 29. That measure was introduced to keep older employees in the labour market and to recruit younger ones. (Užimtumo Rėmimo Įstatymas, 2006). The measures adopted in 2014 reflect the “job first” strategy and focus on the weak investment in the human capital strategy.

Employment as apprenticeship was a new measure approved in 2016 (Užimtumo Įstatymas, 2016) and provided a person with the possibility of obtaining new workplace skills. Although this measure focuses on training, according to Champion and Bonoli (2011), it is not the principal acquisition of knowledge. Thus, *apprenticeship* is assigned to weak investments in this research.

The training scholarship was restricted according to the participation hours in 2018. The funding of active labour market measures was legitimated in 2018 as well. In 2019 it was defined as additionally supporting persons in the labour market, and the services, helping to get employment, were also determined. In more detail, subsidized employment was defined (Užimtumo Įstatymas, 2016).

The subsidies for employment of the unemployed for the open-ended time were approved in 2020. These subsidies were confirmed for the employees in outage up to 607 euro with gradual decrease, starting from the third month – 50 percent and, then, from the fifth month – 30 percent. If the enterprise is included in the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and Economics and Innovation list, the ceiling could be 1214 euro and subsidy, respectively, 70/50/30 percent (Užimtumo Įstatymas, 2016). The fixed-term or seasonal



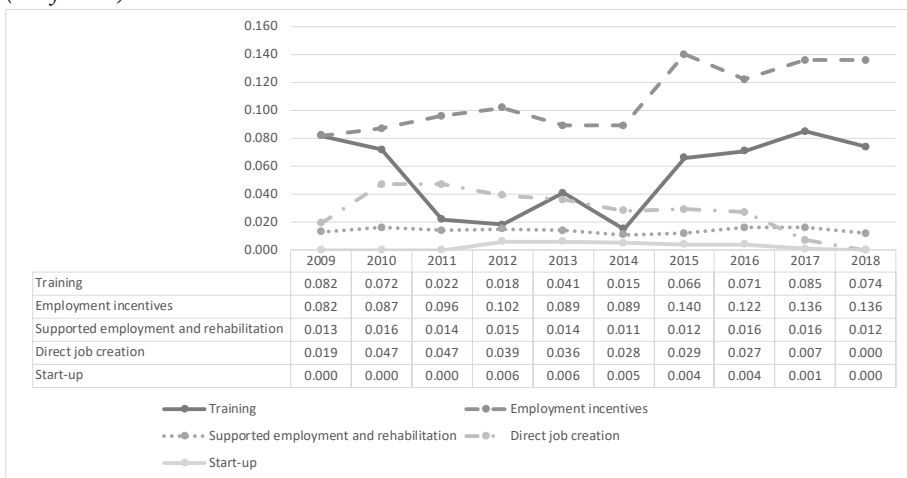
works subsidy was 100 percent during the first two months, 50 percent for the 3-4 months, and the ceiling was 303.5 euro (Užimtumo Įstatymas, 2016).

The apprentice was compensated 70 percent of apprentice and 20 percent of master salary in 2020. The support for job creation was 18.8 thousand euro for one workplace and 6.9 thousand euro for the activity change in 2020 (Užimtumo Įstatymas, 2016). The temporary job searching benefit of 200 euro was confirmed if the unemployed had no entitlement to unemployment benefit. In case they got unemployment benefit, the job searching benefit was 42 euro in 2020. The payment duration of job searching benefit was confirmed for up to 6 months (Užimtumo Įstatymas, 2016).

The active labour market measures to the unemployed are reducing mainly during the inter-crisis period in Lithuania. During the crisis, strong investment in human capital is emphasized as well. Nevertheless, a weak investment strategy or the “job first” was prevailing in Lithuania, looking at the dynamic of measures in 2009-2020.

The expenditures on active labour market measures can provide additional findings evaluating the active labour market policy strategy.

**Figure 1.** *The structure of expenditure on active labour market policy in 2009–2018 (% of GDP)*

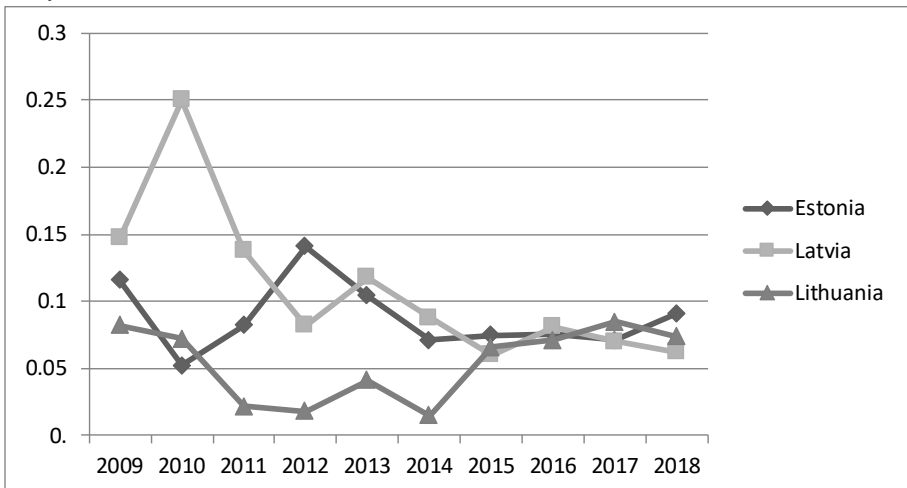


Source: Eurostat.

The expenditure structure on active labour market policy shows that its most significant proportion was allocated to employment incentives and training in 2009. However, the part of expenditure on training was more less starting with 2010 and it significantly decreased in 2011. The allocations to expenditure on training increased in 2015, and in 2016 the same level as in 2010 was observed. The level of expenditure on training was slightly higher in 2017 compared with 2009. Furthermore, finally, the level of it decreased by about 0.011 percentage points in 2018.

Meanwhile, the expenditure for employment incentives started to grow with 2010, and it was the largest proportion of the whole expenditure. The expenditure for supported employment and rehabilitation increased in 2010 and fluctuated between 0.02 and 0.03 percentage points less or more during the analysed period. The expenditure for direct job creation increased in 2010-2011 and started to decrease permanently starting with 2012 and reached its lowest level in 2017. The expenditure for the start-up was assigned in 2012-2016 and reached the minimum in 2017.

**Figure 2.** Expenditure on training in the period of 2009–2018 in the Baltic States (% of GDP)



Source: Eurostat.

From 2009 to 2016, the expenditure on training was the lowest in Lithuania among the Baltic States. However, it increased and was higher compared to Latvia and Estonia in 2017. Nevertheless, the expenditure on training was already higher in Estonia compared to Lithuania in 2018. Thus, investments in training in Lithuania were most significant among the Baltic States only for one year in nine years, and, in general, this indicator in Lithuania is lower than in Latvia and Estonia.

## Conclusions

Social investment focuses on the importance of investment in human capital over the person's life course, especially during childhood. During unemployment, social investment is focused on active labour market policy. However, the measures of active labour market policy have a different impact on human capital. One is a strong investment, and the other is a weak investment, sometimes calling the "job first" strategy.

The analysis of Lithuanian active labour market policy measures revealed that both strong and weak social investments in human capital were balanced during the crises (the world financial crisis and Covid-19-related one). However, more focus was observed toward the weak social investment in the inter-crisis period. In other words, the "job first" strategy has been prevailing in Lithuania. The spending on the training was the lowest in Lithuania, compared with Estonia and Latvia. An unsustainable level of expenditure on training allows the concluding of a predominance of weak investment strategy in human capital, which does not ensure a more stable inclusion of the unemployed in the labour market. The focus on the weak social investment strategy means that low-quality employment and permanent fluctuation between job and unemployment are non-directly supported. The use of both strategies in the period of crisis is fire extinguishing. The sustainable choice of the increasing vulnerable human capital during inter-crisis could ensure the benefit both at micro and macro levels by reducing spending on unemployment.

The political decisions analysis toward active labour market policy and cost-benefit analysis at the individual level after strong social investments in human capital would be helpful in further researches. The comparative analysis of policy and the outcomes would be interesting as well.

**Abstract:** An active labour market policy is an integral part of social policy, ensuring support for the unemployed to search for a job through developing their skills. Thus, the active labour market policy is part of the social investment, focusing on investment in people's knowledge. The heart of social investment is the design of policy-enhancing people to work, use their skills, create families and grow up children. The active labour market policy was analysed, focusing on the measures and their development in Lithuania. At the same time, the analysis from the social investment perspective was missing. Thus, this research aims to analyse Lithuania's active labour market policy from the social investment perspective between 2009 and 2020. The choice of the period was determined by the time of the world financial crisis in 2009 and the Covid-19 pandemic crisis in 2020. The analysis of legal documents and Eurostat data for 2009-2018 was used to attain the formulated aim. Additionally, the meta-analysis of the Ministry of Social security and Labour's Social Reports in 2009-2017 was used to analyse active labour market policy development. The research is based on methodology, which suggests classifying the active labour market measures into the strong and weak investments in human capital. A strong investment provides basic education or training, and a weak one creates new jobs, job subsidies, counselling, services for getting the job, job searching programmes, benefits, and taxes allowances. The analysis of the Lithuanian active labour market policy measures revealed that both strong and weak investments in human capital were balanced only during the crises. However, during the inter-crisis period, Lithuania's active labour market policy measures were more focused on the weaker investment in human capital measures or the "job first" strategy. The strong investment in human capital was the lowest in Lithuania among other Baltic countries during the analysed period.

**Keywords:** active labour market policy, social investment, Lithuania

**Streszczenie:** Aktywna polityka rynku pracy jest ważnym elementem polityki społecznej zapewniającym bezrobotnym wsparcie w poszukiwaniu pracy przez rozwijanie ich umiejętności. Podstawą inwestycji społecznych jest projektowanie polityki zachęcającej ludzi do aktywności zawodowej, zastosowania ich umiejętności, założenia rodziny i wychowania dzieci (Kvist, 2014). W związku z tym badania aktywnej polityki rynku pracy dokonują się na podstawie analizy instrumentów i ich rozwoju. Brakuje jednak badań przeprowadzanych z perspektywy inwestycji społecznych. Biorąc pod uwagę powyższe, celem niniejszego badania jest analiza aktywnej polityki rynku pracy na Litwie z perspektywy inwestycji społecznych w latach 2009–2020. Wybór okresu badawczego zdeterminowany był wybuchem światowego kryzysu finansowego w 2009 roku oraz pandemii COVID-19 w roku 2020. Dla realizacji sformułowanego celu zastosowano analizę aktów prawnych i danych Eurostatu za lata 2009–2018. Jako metodę badawczą kształtowania aktywnej polityki rynku pracy wykorzystano ponadto meta-

analizę Raportów Społecznych opublikowanych przez Ministerstwo Ubezpieczeń Społecznych i Pracy w latach 2009–2017. Badanie zostało zrealizowane z zastosowaniem metodologii Bonolego (2011), wskazującej klasyfikację mierników aktywnej polityki rynku pracy na podstawie dużych i małych inwestycji w kapitał ludzki. Według Bonolego (2011) wykształcenie podstawowe lub szkolenia zapewniają duże inwestycje w kapitał ludzki, podczas gdy małe są generowane przez tworzenie nowych miejsc pracy, subsydiowanie, doradztwa, pomoc w poszukiwaniu pracy, świadczenia oraz ulgi podatkowe. Analiza litewskich instrumentów aktywnej polityki rynku pracy wykazała, że zarówno duże, jak i małe inwestycje w kapitał ludzki były zrównoważone podczas kryzysów. Mimo to interwencje aktywnej polityki rynku pracy na Litwie w latach 2009–2020 były bardziej skierowane na małe inwestycje w środki kapitału ludzkiego lub realizację zasady „najpierw praca”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** aktywna polityka rynku pracy, inwestycje społeczne, Litwa

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Date of the submission of article to the Editor: 08.09.2021

Date of acceptance of the article: 10.12.2021