

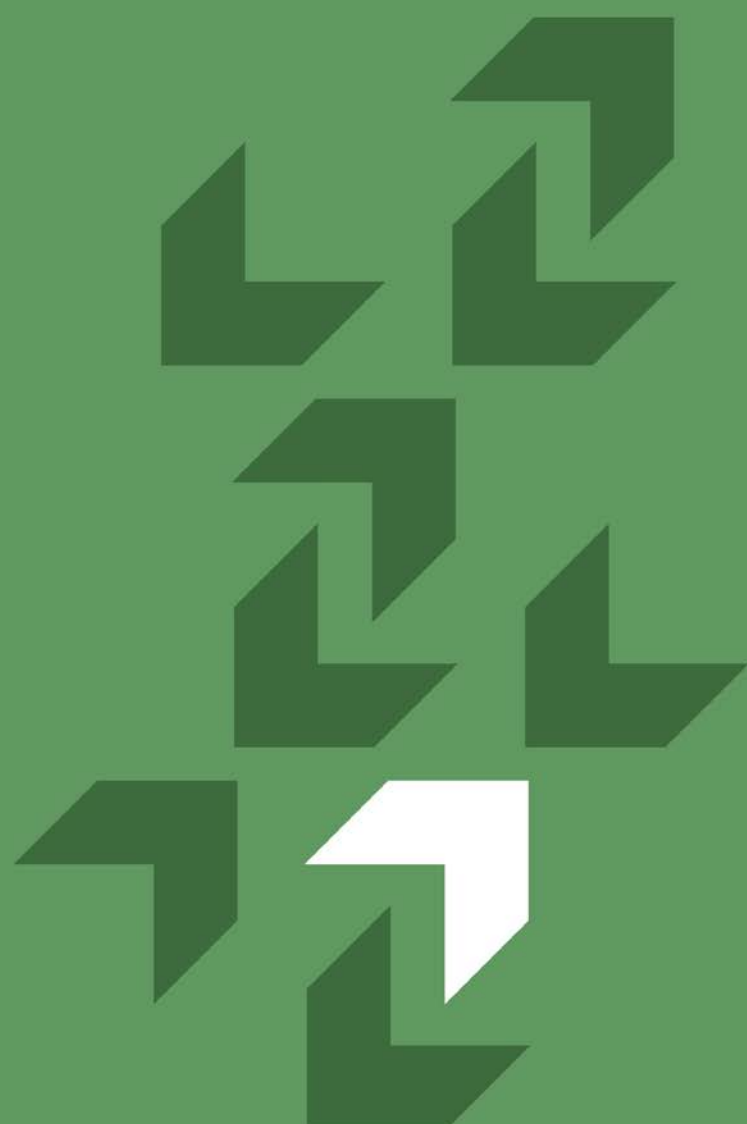
What works against poverty?

A systematic review of active labour market policies and their impact on households with children and adolescents

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Projecte de recopilació, anàlisi i transferència d'evidència per a millorar les polítiques públiques destinades a mitigar la pobresa infantil

Un projecte de:



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1. Introduction

This report adopts an international perspective to systematically review the literature on the potential of active labour market policies (hereinafter, ALMPs) to reduce poverty and, in particular, child poverty. To do this, it examines the impact of the main ALMPs on variables such as employment, income and poverty of the beneficiaries of these programmes. The report also reviews the main characteristics of the most effective programmes, and the contexts in which they operate. In those cases where the existing literature does not measure the effects of a specific programme within the scope of poverty, it is sought to correlate as closely as possible the impacts measured in the evaluations with the potential impact that factors such as employment or income may have on the poverty of households. This summary report seeks to understand how improving the employment of parents can reduce child poverty, identifying the mechanisms behind this relationship and extracting practical implications for our context.

2. Purpose

According to the 2023 EU SILC, 26.8% of children and adolescents in Catalonia under the age of eighteen were in a situation of relative poverty (using the poverty threshold of 60% of the average income in the autonomous community). Of these, one in three (35.4%) lived in households with at least one unemployed person, and 18% in households with low work intensity (this is, households where the adults of the household work below 20 % of their work-time potential).

Employment, and in particular quality employment, is considered crucial to lifting people and their households out of poverty. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 8 of the 2030 Agenda focus on the eradication of poverty (goal 1) and decent work and economic growth (goal 8). According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO): "Decent work for all, including social protection, is therefore the main path out of poverty for individuals, communities and countries". Along these lines, the European Pillar of Social Rights also reaffirms the commitment of the European Union (EU) to the fostering of quality employment, decent work and social protection. This pillar establishes a set of fundamental principles, such as the right to fair working conditions, equal opportunities and access to social protection, with the aim of building a more inclusive and equitable Europe.

Driving employment to reduce poverty also has a crucial gender component. In Spain, according to data from the Labour Force Survey (The “EPA” in Spain), the employment rates of women aged 25 to 49 with children under the age of twelve are lower than the employment rates of women of the same age without children (INE, 2023), while the opposite occurs in the case of men. For women, the employment rate decreases as the number of children under twelve increases. While 77.9% of childless women in this age range are employed, the rate drops to 71.5% for women with children under twelve (74.3% for those with one child, 70.4% for two children, and 52.2% for women with three or more children).

Spain is also one of the EU countries with the lowest employment rates among women with children, according to Eurostat data (2021), which reflects a significant inequality in access to the job market. A relevant example of this dynamic can be found in Catalonia, where nine out of ten people on parental leave are women (89%) (Gender Equality Observatory, 2024).

In this context, ALMPs are crucial in economically stimulating the population, but also in improving access to employment for the economically inactive or unemployed, as well as to help them obtain quality jobs. An ALMP that helps to reduce child poverty should be expected to do so by providing job support or bettering the jobs of the adults in the household, which would lead to economic conditions that allow people to sustainably emerge from the risk of poverty and therefore reduce child poverty rates.

In the current context, where child poverty remains a critical challenge, it is essential to review and better understand the impact of ALMPs. Not only is this necessary to determine the design of current public policies, but also to guide future research and assessments in this area. In this regard, conducting a systematic review of the operation and outcome of ALMPs with a poverty perspective allows both the consolidation of existing knowledge and the identification of existing knowledge gaps. This analysis has particular relevance for Catalonia, as it will provide a more solid basis for the design of interventions that can truly make a difference in the fight against child poverty.

The sections below will explore which policies are considered ALMPs, what are their characteristics, and what impact they have had on furthering the employment of their participants and on their living conditions and poverty, both for themselves and for their households, with a special focus on those homes with children, as well as ALMPs that include people with dependent children.

3. Description of the programmes explored

ALMPs comprise a wide variety of programmes, each with different implications, both in terms of creating or improving employment for the participants and in their potential impact on reducing poverty. Throughout this summary, the analysis will focus both on the aggregate effect and impact of ALMPs and on specific programmes. For the analysis of specific programmes, the ALMP typology developed by Brown and Koettl (2015) will be used as a basis for categorisation and analysis. The programmes that will be analysed are listed below, as well as their main characteristics.

3.1. Aggregate ALMP analysis

This category refers to a global analysis of ALMPs, assessing the cumulative effect of a country or region's total investment in this type of policy. The aim is to understand how the sum of several interventions, such as hiring incentives or training programmes within a specific context, can influence job creation and the reduction of poverty for individuals and households, taking into account factors such as the scope and design of policies, as well as the socio-economic context in which they are implemented.

3.2. ALMPs aimed at increasing labour demand

This category includes policies and programmes whose main objective is to stimulate the creation and retention of employment by employers, especially in periods of economic crisis or in declining sectors. The main example of this category is wage cost grants for employee hiring or retention. The two main subcategories of this type of policy are defined below.

3.2.1. Programmes that offer incentives for retaining employees

These programmes focus on providing financial incentives to employers in order to maintain their employment relationship with existing workers. The aim is to reduce the outflow of employment, especially at times when the economy or certain sectors experience difficulties. The main programmes within this subcategory are wage subsidies and reductions in non-wage labour costs, as well as reduced working hours or job sharing.

These policies allow companies to keep workers, offering them temporary job and income security. In essence, these measures seek to ensure that companies are not encouraged or forced to lay off workers in the face of economic hardship, thus providing stability for both companies and workers.

3.2.2. Programmes that offer incentives for job creation

This subcategory includes measures that provide incentives to employers to increase the inflow into employees. These measures support people outside the labour market, such as the unemployed, inactive and informal workers, and often target specific groups of unemployed workers, such as the long-term unemployed and disadvantaged workers with outdated skills.

The most important programmes within this subcategory include wage and hiring grants aimed at private employers. These grants reduce employers' labour costs (such as wages or social insurance contributions) and thus provide incentives to hire new workers. In addition, it also includes incentives for self-employment or entrepreneurship, which provide financial incentives and advisory services to unemployed workers to start their own businesses.

3.3. ALMPs oriented toward the labour supply

The policies included in this category have the main aim of improving workers' capacity and incentives to enter and remain in the labour market. These policies are particularly aimed at workers who are excluded from the labour market or are in low-quality jobs, and seek to increase their employability, improve their jobs and enhance their human capital through improving their skills and competencies. This includes programmes such as tax credits (aid for low-income working families that reduce their tax burden as their work hours increase). It also includes training programmes to improve the participants' job opportunities.

3.3.1. Programmes that offer incentives to find and keep a job

This subcategory of programmes provides incentives to workers who may be disconnected from the labour market or in low-quality jobs, such as low-wage, unemployed, unmotivated, or inactive workers. In addition, these programmes

have an explicit and clear redistributive objective, and seek not only labour integration, but also the improvement of the participants' economic conditions.

The programmes included in this category mainly include financial aid and grants, such as benefits for people who are working (in-work benefits) or tax credits that reduce taxes for working families. These instruments are paid directly to workers as income supplements, for example in the form of in-work benefits that supplement income from employment.

3.3.2. Programmes that offer incentives for the improvement of human capital

Programmes in this subcategory focus on providing tools and incentives for improving human capital by upgrading workers' skills. These initiatives can be provided directly or fund classroom training and cover both basic employment skills and specific vocational skills, as well as on-the-job training. These measures are designed for both unemployed and active workers, with the aim of aligning their skills with the needs of the labour market.

3.4. ALMPs to improve job matching in the labour market

This category includes programmes that seek a better fit between supply and demand in the labour market. These programmes seek not only to increase workers' chances of finding a suitable job, but also to meet the specific needs of employers. Included within this category are:

- **Job search assistance:** programmes designed to provide direct support to workers in their job search. The aim is to improve the chances of workers, especially the unemployed, to find a job that matches their skills and needs.
- **Employment mediation by employers:** policies that help connect employers with potential workers, which facilitates job placement and helps fill vacancies with suitable workers, thereby increasing the efficiency of the labour market.
- **Advice:** career advice and guidance programmes that help workers define and achieve their career goals within the labour market.

4. Questions that guide the review

The aim of this summary review is to analyse the best available evidence from countries with per capita income and GDP levels similar to those of Catalonia - Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia - on the potential impact of active labour market policies in reducing child poverty. Although the contexts of these countries are not always comparable to the Catalan one from an economic or institutional point of view, they do represent the closest case studies from which learning experiences can be derived. The project focuses on collecting, reviewing and summarising quality evidence that informs the effects of these policies. In addition, and more specifically, this review aims to answer the following key questions:

- What are the most important services, resources and active labour market policies (guidance, training, mentoring or hiring grants, among others) to promote quality employment for parents with children at risk of poverty or social exclusion?
- What dimensions and outcome measures do these policies employ? How do they relate to child poverty? Are these measures effective?
- What are the main pillars/challenges that must be taken into account to implement policies of this kind so that they can improve the economic situation of families with children and adolescents at risk?
- Are there examples of best practices that can be taken as models to improve the design of these policies at home?

5. Review of existent evidence

This section will review the evidence related to the programmes described in section 3, guided by the questions formulated above. Table 1 presents a summary of the policies included in the review, as well as the results analysed and the evidence found.

Table 1. Programmes, outcomes and results analysed

Category	Outcome analysed	Analysed groups	Evidence
Aggregate ALMP analysis	Employment	General population, women, single mothers	Positive effects on the general population and women, negative effects for single mothers
	Poverty	General population	Inconclusive evidence
ALMPs aimed at increasing labour demand	Employment	General population	Positive effects
	Income	General population	Positive effects
Programmes that offer incentives to find and keep a job	Employment	Mothers, single mothers	Positive effects
	Quality of life	Children in single-parent families	Positive effects (<i>results based on a single case</i>)
	Income	Single mothers	Negative effects (<i>results based on a single case</i>)
Programmes that offer incentives for the improvement of human capital	Employment	General population, women, single mothers	Positive effects
	Income	General population	Positive effects
ALMPs to improve job matching in the labour market	Employment	General population, women	Short-term positive effects, both positive and negative effects in the medium and long term
	Income	General population	Positive effects

5.1. Aggregate ALMP analysis

In relation to the aggregate impact of ALMPs, the meta-analysis conducted by Card, Kluve and Weber (2018) on more than 200 studies concludes that the effects of ALMPs on employment are manifested mainly in the medium and long term. Thus, while the average impacts of ALMPs are practically null in the short term, they become more positive two or three years after the end of the programmes.

Several studies have analysed the impact on aggregate spending on ALMPs on employment levels. In a study covering nineteen welfare states between 1985 and 2013, including Spain, Fredriksson (2020) found that increased ALMP spending translates into an immediate decrease in the unemployment rate, at least in the short term. Bauman (2021), focusing on the impact of ALMPs on women's employment, found that ALMP spending as a percentage of the GDP has a positive relationship with full-time employment, as well as a negative in terms of involuntary part-time employment. However, the relationship between ALMPs and employment is not direct for all socio-demographic groups. Sakamoto (2024), in an analysis of eighteen Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries between 1998 and 2017, found that public expenditure on ALMPs is negatively related to employment rates of single mothers. This result indicates that the effect of ALMPs can vary significantly between different demographic groups and does not always result in improved employment for all groups.

Regarding the impact of ALMPs on poverty reduction, there is evidence with conflicting results. On the one hand, Rovny (2014), in a study of eighteen OECD countries done in 2004, concludes that ALMPs are one of the employment policies that best predicts the reduction of poverty among people with low qualifications. According to this study, the odds of poverty for young people with low qualifications decrease by 80% for each one standard deviation increase in ALMP spending, with a larger effect on low-skilled men aged 55 to 64. On the other hand, a more recent study by Vaalavuo and Sirniö (2022), which analyses thirty European countries between 2010 and 2017, concludes that although getting a job reduces poverty, ALMP spending does not seem to have an influence on this reduction. This contradicts their hypothesis that, with more spending on ALMP, escaping poverty through employment would be more likely.

In summary, the literature so far has found a mostly positive impact of ALMPs on employment, although it might be diluted in cases of particularly vulnerable

groups, such as single mothers. In terms of poverty reduction, the evidence is inconclusive on the effect of ALMPs, with studies pointing in different directions.

5.2. ALMPs aimed at increasing labour demand

5.2.1. What impacts do they have? Do they work?

This section discusses job retention and job creation incentives together (see Section 3.1), since these types of programmes are often jointly implemented. Such incentives can apply to both new and existing contracts, such as bonuses for hiring young people or people with disabilities, aid for on-the-job training or discounts on social insurance contributions for employers that maintain employment in times of crisis. The effects of these policies have been measured primarily in terms of employment-related outcomes. The vast majority of studies on the subject do not directly examine the relationship with poverty, but instead focus on the ability of these programmes to generate employment.

A meta-analysis of 137 programmes in nineteen European countries finds that private sector incentive programmes for job creation and job retention have a positive effect on employment, being shown to be more effective than other types of programmes, such as training. This meta-analysis concludes that assessments of these types of programs tend to be 30 to 50 per cent more likely to estimate a significant positive impact compared with training programmes (Kluve, 2010). In addition, a meta-analysis of 33 empirical studies finds that these types of incentive programmes are the most effective in improving the labour market outcomes of people of migrant origin (Butscheck & Walker, 2014).

Regarding specific programmes, most studies point to positive effects, although the magnitude of such effects varies by programme:

In Germany, the impact of private sector incentives appears to have evolved positively over time, although this improvement is inferred from different studies and methods. Schünemann, Lechner and Wunsch (2015) analysed income support for the long-term unemployed between 1989 and 2002, and the results suggest that there was no significant impact on the labour market outcomes of the target group. However, a study by Jacobi and Kluve (2006) on the labour market reforms in Germany between 2003 and 2005, which involved simplifying the eligibility conditions for what are referred to as *integration grants*, found modestly positive effects. The results indicate that integration grants increased the probability of being employed six months after losing one's job by 2 per cent, although these effects were mainly concentrated in East Germany, while in West

Germany the effects were practically nil. The authors associate these regional differences with the worse baseline conditions of the East German job market.

Another prominent example is the Employ.me programme in Slovenia, implemented during the 2008 recession. This income support programme covers approximately 50% of the participants' gross salary and is aimed at people over fifty, the long-term unemployed, people with a low level of education and young people under thirty who have been unemployed for over 6 months. People taking part must work full-time in a programme for a minimum of 12 months (or 24 months for the long-term unemployed). The effects of the programme were significant: at 24 months, participants' likelihood of employment increased by 30%, with a very positive effect on wages, higher than other programmes. 24% of the treatment group secured permanent contracts one year after their participation and, four years later, their cumulative earnings exceeded those of the control group by around €9,500. Although there is no direct assessment of household income or poverty, these increases in income point to a possible positive effect on poverty reduction.

Another example of positive results from demand-side programmes can be found in Belgium. An analysis based on a natural experiment studied the effects of tax breaks for employers hiring manual workers in the late 1990s. The results show that these grants increased full-time manual employment between 5% and 8%, and that gross wages rose between 1% and 3% (Goos & Konings, 2007).

One of the potential problems of demand-side programmes is displacement effects or "crowding out", in which the creation of subsidised jobs can replace unsubsidised jobs. In Sweden, an analysis of programmes and evaluations conducted in the 1990s by Calmfors, Forslund and Hemström (2001) on hiring and employment grants found that although these policies have positive effects on employment rates, these effects may appear at the expense of the displacement of non-subsidised jobs. However, this effect was not found in the study by Goos and Konings (2007) in Belgium.

In short, these types of programmes have been shown to have positive effects on both employment and income, although the analyses focus on the general population, and not on specific groups such as parents or single mothers. Moreover, the evidence is inconclusive as to whether these increases in employment occur as a result of the destruction of unsubsidised jobs.

5.2.2. What makes them work? Key characteristics of the most effective programmes

Based on the programmes analysed, a series of common characteristics can be identified that may be related to how they function and how effective they are in increasing employment and income. However, it is important to note that assessments focus primarily on measuring outcomes and not so much on analysing the specific characteristics that make these programmes effective.

One of the main features of both the Slovenian and Belgian programmes is the focus on full-time workers, as the wage subsidies in both cases applied only to this type of contract. This is key from a perspective of poverty reduction, as it ensures that workers have a full-time income.

The second most important feature of these programmes is their duration. In Slovenia, for example, the programmes had a minimum duration of 12 months, while for the long-term unemployed they lasted for 24 months. In Germany, the duration of the grants ranged from 6 to 24 months. A longer duration can help stabilise workers in the workplace until the grant runs out. In this regard, according to Fredriksson's aggregate analysis of nineteen countries, an important design feature of wage subsidies is the prevention or reduction of misuse by employers, for example by providing incentives for employers to shift participants to regular employment contracts after the subsidy ends (Fredriksson, 2020).

In general terms, the features that make these programmes successful are linked to the promotion of quality jobs, both in terms of working hours and duration. Thus, we see there is a dual positive synergy in which, with the right design, wage subsidies and incentives for job creation and job retention not only lead to improvements in the employment rate, but also to the greater stability of participants in the labour market. This, in cases like the Slovenian one, can lead to substantial improvements in workers' incomes.

5.3. ALMPs aimed at increasing the labour supply

5.3.1. Programmes that offer incentives to find and keep a job

5.3.1.1. What impacts do they have? Do they work?

The two main programmes in analysing the impact of policies that provide incentives to find a job and stay employed in developed countries are the UK's Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC), established in 1999, and the US welfare system, which since the 1990s has been significantly reformed, moving from a programme that provided continued support to a much more restrictive programme, providing only temporary assistance and stressing rapid employment. These programmes have focused their assessments on the impact on the outcomes of single-parent families, especially in terms of employment and income.

In the UK, the WFTC was established in October 1999, a generous tax credit designed to improve work incentives for low-income families with children. This programme introduced significant improvements compared to the previous system, such as an increase in the value of the credit for children from zero to ten years of age by 34% and a rise in the income threshold by 14%, from £79 to £90 per week, making it easier for more families to access the programme. To be eligible, a family had to meet three requirements: have at least one adult working 16 hours or more per week, have at least one dependent child, and that the family's savings and net income were below a certain limit. The credit was modulated according to income, with a proportional reduction for families with income above the threshold, including a childcare allowance that covered up to 70% of expenses, with a maximum of £100 for one child and £150 for two or more children per week. According to Francesconi and van der Klaauw's (2007) analysis, the programme led to a 5.1 per cent increase in labour force participation among mothers who worked 16 hours or more per week (the threshold to be eligible for benefits), a statistically significant increase. These results are in line with those found by other studies (Brewer et al., 2005; Gregg & Harkness, 2003). In addition, it found that the increased employment was due to the greater participation of single mothers in the labour market, rather than an increase in the hours worked by already employed mothers.

The strongest increase in employment was observed in the case of single mothers with a preschool-aged child. For these, the probability of being employed for 16 or more hours per week increased by 10 per cent, while for a mother with a child aged five to ten, the increase was about 8 per cent. In contrast, for a single mother with one child in the older age group, the increase was only about 3.5 percentage points. These results are consistent with the findings of Eissa and Liebman (1996) and Meyer and Rosenbaum (2001) for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in the United States, as well as with Gregg and Harkness (2003) for the case of the WFTC, who also reported larger employment outcomes for mothers with younger children.

In addition to increases in employment, Gregg, Harkness and Smith (2007) have estimated that the reform also had a profound impact on the quality of life of children in single-parent families. Specifically, using a difference-in-differences methodology, the authors found that the reform halved the gap between children who benefited from the reform and the control group in terms of self-esteem, unhappiness, and conduct such as smoking or thinking about leaving the education system at age sixteen.

In the United States, reforms carried out during the 1990s led to increased employment among single mothers of 55% in 1993 to 73% in 2000 (Lower-Basch & Greenberg, 2009). These reforms, within the framework of the PRWORA law, introduced stricter work-related requirements for public aid recipients, limiting the options to count education or training activities as part of the work requirements and applying severe penalties for lack of participation, such as the loss of all financial aid. In addition, almost all states established a five-year maximum duration for receiving aid. Although these reforms led to a large increase in participation, most families (estimated between 50 and 70%) who left the programme continued to work in low-wage or unstable jobs or ended up leaving the job market altogether. Thus, the expectation that the reform would lead to better employment and a successful career was largely unfulfilled. Along these lines, Meyer and Sullivan (2008) found a notable drop in earnings for single mothers with incomes well below the poverty line following the reform, while earnings increased significantly for single mothers at higher points in the distribution. This suggests that this policy is effective if the goal is employment, but not if the goal is poverty reduction.

5.3.1.2. What makes them work? Key characteristics of the most effective programmes

Based on the evidence presented, the UK WFTC is positioned as the most effective example of such programmes in improving employment outcomes for mothers, particularly single mothers. According to Francesconi and van der Klaauw (2007), the main feature of this policy that contributed to its very positive outcomes was the generous childcare tax credit component of the WFTC. The childcare credit associated with the WFTC covered 70% of childcare costs, subject to an overall cap of £100 weekly for one child and £150 per week for two or more children. This meant that the maximum childcare allowance was £70 weekly for a family with one child, and £105 per week for a family with two or more children.

This reform led to an increase of 35% in use of paid childcare services. Around 60% of the increase in the number of mothers starting work in occupations with specific requirements was attributed to single mothers who also chose to use paid childcare services. The effect was particularly concentrated among mothers with preschool children. Similarly, among single mothers who continued to work, more than 50% of those who increased their participation in the labour market after the reform did so by using paid childcare services.

This parameter also differentiates the British programme from its American counterpart where, in practice, the possibility of childcare grants is much lower. In the United States, most families have only 20% of their childcare costs covered (Francesconi & van der Klaauw, 2007). Another crucial difference between the UK and US systems is that the childcare credit associated with the WFTC is paid monthly in the UK, while in the US it is a single payment at the end of the year, which can be particularly problematic for families who do not have sufficient cash flow.

5.3.2. Programmes that offer incentives for the improvement of human capital

5.3.2.1. *What impacts do they have? Do they work?*

Programmes linked to the improvement of human capital have proven to have positive effects on employment, especially in the medium and long term. A meta-analysis of 97 studies by Card, Kluve and Weber (2010) finds that both classroom and on-the-job training programmes are not particularly effective in the short term but have a more positive impact two years after they finish. It is important to point out that the lack of immediate effects of these programmes is a natural consequence of their design, since in many cases they are programmes incompatible with the start of a new job due to the volume of hours dedicated to training, in what is known as a *lock-in effect* (OECD, 2023).

The positive outcomes of these kinds of programmes in the medium and long term are aligned with those obtained by Hotz, Imbens and Klerman (2006) in California, who point out that human capital development programmes have long-term advantages, with higher employment rates compared to other ALMPs, such as those aimed at better matching in the labour market. They are also found in an evaluation conducted by the OECD in Finland for the 2012-2014 period, which demonstrates the positive effects of labour market training, both in employment, with an approximate increase of 5% in the probability of finding a job, and in the income of the participants, two years later (OECD, 2023).

In Germany, positive outcomes of this type of programme are also evident. A study based on administrative data from 2005 finds that vocational training has a positive impact: it reduces the proportion of unemployment benefit recipients and increases the medium-term employment rate by up to 13 per cent (Bernhard & Kruppe, 2012). In a specific analysis of the impact of training programmes on single mothers, Zabel (2013) finds that vocational training is the only programme among a range of ALMPs that consistently increases the chances of finding a job with an income high enough to stop receiving social benefits, a key aspect when it comes to climbing out of poverty.

Similarly, in Slovenia, Burger et al. (2022) find positive outcomes both in institutional training programmes, which are training courses given by public or private entities with the aim of developing specific skills in a classroom or workshop environment, and in on-the-job training programmes conducted at the employer's premises with participants doing actual work at a specific

location under the supervision of an experienced worker. The effects of institutional training programmes include an 5.4% increase in the likelihood of employment, while on-the-job training increases this probability by up to 20%. In addition, both programs lead to increased wages as compared to both the baseline and the control group. In both types of training, the total proportion of employment among the participants (employed with a permanent or temporary contract) increases steadily during the observation period, reaching 56% and 67% after five years for institutional training and on-the-job training, respectively.

It is important to bear in mind that the effects of these types of programmes may vary depending on the context, economic circumstances or the target group to whom they are directed. According to Kluve (2010), the impact of training programmes could be influenced by the economic circumstances in which they are developed, which reflects positive impacts especially in times when unemployment is high. In addition, the effect may also vary depending on the target group. A meta-analysis of voluntary training programmes in the United States between 1962 and 1998 looked separately at men, women, and youth, and found that, on average, earnings effects tended to be larger for women, more modest for men and not at all for young people (Greenberg, Michalopoulos & Robins, 2003). Likewise, the evaluation of the Finnish case finds that women and people over fifty years of age obtain more positive results from this type of programme (OECD, 2023). In Spain, Arellano (2010) points out that training programmes are more effective for women than for men.

5.3.2.2. What makes them work? Key characteristics of the most effective programmes

Training programmes that focus on the acquisition of practical skills, of medium or long-term duration and aimed at an intermediate level, have proven to be particularly effective. The literature reviewed suggests that a focus on skills training is critical to achieving positive outcomes. Greenberg, Michalopoulos and Robins (2003) found that general training is not effective, while training focused on practical and classroom skills is almost always effective. This conclusion is reinforced by the experience of Germany, where the vocational training programme focuses on practical skills, thus contributing to the programme's success (Bernhard & Kruppe, 2012). Evidence also indicates that vocational programmes of medium or long-term duration are particularly effective. In Germany, Zabel (2013) finds a positive effect of vocational training of medium and long-term duration (from three months onwards) on the

employment of single mothers, an effect not seen in shorter programmes (up to twelve weeks). Such programmes could be particularly effective for mothers who have interrupted their careers for extended periods to attend to other obligations, such as childcare. Vocational training had stronger positive effects on employment entry rates for single mothers than for single people without children.

Regarding the level of the courses, Arellano (2013) found in an analysis of training in Spain between the years 2000 and 2001 that mid-level courses (specifically, the courses aimed at unqualified workers to provide them with knowledge and skills to maintaining a job, and courses for skilled workers who need to train for a new job) reduce the duration of unemployment more than courses at other levels, such as basic or more advanced. More specifically, the reduction in the period of unemployment is nearly six weeks for intermediate-level training compared to three and a half weeks for high-level training. This is in line with Greenberg, Michalopoulos and Robins' (2003) findings on the ineffectiveness of basic and general training.

In addition to these general aspects, it is important to look at specific examples of programmes with a high degree of success. For example, on-the-job training in Slovenia has significantly increased the likelihood of employment, while vocational training in Germany has had a positive impact, especially for single mothers, which is key to reducing child poverty. In the case of Germany, both Zabel (2013) and Jacobi and Kluve (2006) indicate that, in addition to the aforementioned duration and content of the courses, a key aspect of the success of this training is the wide variety of courses and training for those who participate, thanks to professional training. People on unemployment benefits receive a voucher which they can use to enrol in a course offered by a certified provider, opening up the possibility of participating in a wide range of organised external programmes.

In the case of Slovenia, Burger et al. (2021) emphasise that the success of the programme is due to the way it brings job seekers closer to a real working environment. This would explain, according to the authors, why the most successful ALMPs in this country are the Employ.me programme (see section 5.2.2) and on-the-job training, as well as the difference in purposes of this training and institutional training. After 24 months, the increase in the likelihood of employment is 20% for on-the-job training, compared to 5.4% for institutional training. Wage increases are also four times higher for on-the-job training compared to institutional training. In addition, this programme stands out for its generosity, since the employment office pays employers a lump sum to cover

the training costs (for example, in 2012 this cost amounted to €222 for two months' training and €354 for three months). Participants also receive reimbursement for transportation costs and a training stipend to attend the courses.

5.4. ALMPs to improve job matching in the labour market

5.4.1. What impacts do they have? Do they work?

ALMPs aimed at improving the match between workers' skills and the needs of the labour market have shown to have generally favourable impacts, especially in the short term. According to the meta-analysis by Card, Kluve and Weber (2010), job search assistance programmes and related programmes tend to have positive effects, especially initially after their implementation. These short-term results are also reflected in the Fredriksson's nineteen-country analysis (2020).

Some studies have also identified positive effects of these programmes in the medium and long term. In Denmark, Maibom, Rosholm and Svarer (2017) present experimental evidence from 2008, finding that one-on-one biweekly meetings between recently unemployed workers and job counsellors can increase employment rates by 10% during the following two years. The cumulative effect of these meetings is significant for both men and women, although it materialises much earlier for women than for men.

Similarly, Manoli, Michaelides and Patel (2018), using experimental evidence from a programme conducted in Nevada in 2009, note that participants who receive employment services show greater increases in employment and earnings in compared with the control group during the six years following the intervention. Nevada's REA programme required participants to meet with program staff within the first few weeks after applying for unemployment benefits to review their eligibility and, if eligible, to receive mandatory job counselling services. This programme increased employment by 5.1 per centage points in the first full year after entry in the programme and by 2.9 to 4.5 per centage points in the following five years. In terms of income, the programme increased income by \$1,361 during the first full year after entering the program, and between \$1,413 and \$2,087 in the following five years.

Despite these positive results, the evidence is inconclusive, as the medium and long-term effects could be diluted. In Switzerland, a two-level randomised trial conducted by Cheung et al. (2019) to assess the effect of job search assistance

for the long-term unemployed found that, after six months after starting, employment is between four and five per cent higher, and receipt of unemployment benefits is approximately six per cent lower for jobseekers assigned to the programme, compared to those in the control group. However, the gain in employment during the first twelve months dries up in the second year after allocation, becoming significantly negative by the third year. Allocation to job search assistance produces a sinusoidal pattern in employment: immediate gains followed by later job losses. Better understanding the long-term effects of this policy is key from the point of view of poverty reduction, since, if the emergence from joblessness is only short-term, the impact of these programmes on the poverty in the medium and long term could be limited.

In addition to the direct effects on employment and income, it is relevant to consider the synergies with other types of policies. Specifically, Fredriksson (2020) indicates that increased allocation of resources to these services, provided by employment services, proved to improve the environment for other types of ALMP. The effects of training spending, which are associated with lower unemployment rates, are reinforced by higher investment in public employment services, at least when short-term effects are considered.

5.4.2. What makes them work? Key characteristics of the most effective programmes

Given the inconclusive evidence on the medium- and long-term effects of these types of programmes, it is critical to understand the characteristics that make the most successful programmes work. The case of Denmark is particularly relevant in this context, as the aforementioned study compares four experiments with differently designed interventions (weekly group meetings, fortnightly individual meetings, early activation and group meetings combined with early activation). According to the authors, the analysis shows that frequent and early individual meetings with unemployed workers are the most efficient way to assist them in the early stages of unemployment (Maibom, Rosholm & Svarer, 2017).

In the Nevada case, although the authors do not specifically assess features that make the program effective, the programme stands out for its broad range of services. These services include an individual assessment, counselling, provision of job market information, an employment services workshop, development of an individual re-employment plan, assistance with job search and CV writing, matching employment with state and federal position databases, and the provision of information on job training options (Manoli, Michaelides & Patel, 2018).

In addition, Cheung et al. (2020) draw a lesson from the Swiss case in that the persistence of long-term effects depends heavily on the programme's ability to provide substantial training gains to jobseekers, who, without the programme, would not have found an occupation. Programmes that succeed in inserting more jobseekers into an occupation, such as Nevada's programme, produce persistently positive effects. In contrast, programmes that simply accelerate job attainment improve employment in the short term, but not permanently.

6. Summary

This section summarises the main results and implications developed in section 5. First of all, it should be noted that the amount of evidence on the effect of ALMPs on the employment of parents is particularly small. Except for specific cases focusing on single mothers, this group has not been a central focus of analysis in the literature on the assessment of ALMPs. Furthermore, studies rarely discuss the characteristics of successful policies in relation to how they may specifically affect the employment of parents.

Overall, there is a positive impact of ALMPs on employment levels, especially in the medium and long term. In addition, there are studies that find positive effects on job quality indicators such as full-time employment levels. However, the evidence is less conclusive regarding poverty reduction, with outcomes pointing in opposite directions.

With regard to specific programmes, the ALMP groups that are most effective in the literature are those aimed at increasing labour demand, as well as ALMPs aimed at improving human capital. On the other hand, supply-side programmes that provide incentives to find and keep a job, such as tax credits, are highly effective in increasing employment, but their effect on earnings and the quality of employment depends largely on the design and generosity of the programme. Finally, programmes to improve labour market matching show strong positive effects in the short term, but the evidence is inconclusive about their medium and long-term effects.

Among the most successful programmes, incentives aimed at increasing labour demand have shown positive effects in a large number of developed countries, not only in increasing employment, but also in doing so with full-time and long-lasting occupations, which is key to reducing poverty levels. In addition, the most effective programmes in this regard have incentives for employers to shift participants onto regular employment contracts once the subsidy runs out.

On the other hand, the programmes aimed at improving human capital stand out for their positive long-term effects. Although these programmes may delay initial entry into the labour market due to the "pause" involved in completing a training course, participants enjoy more job stability and income in the medium and long term. Among these programmes, Slovenia's approach is particularly noteworthy, with its on-the-job training programme, which is particularly successful thanks to bringing participants closer to a real work environment.

Finally, it is important to highlight, especially from the perspective of child poverty, the tax credit established in the United Kingdom in 1999. This programme has a particularly suitable design for parents, as it incorporated a generous subsidy covering up to 70% of childcare costs. This program was particularly effective for single mothers.

Table 2 presents a summary of the programmes that have been most effective in achieving increases in quality employment and income levels, breaking down their effects in the short, medium and long term. The classification of short, medium and long term follows that established by Card, Kluve and Weber (2010) and gives an understanding of the temporal evolution of the effect of these programmes.

Table 2. Short, medium and long-term effects of the most effective programmes

Category	Programme	Short term (< 12 months)	Medium term (13-36 months)	Long term (> 37 months)
ALMPs aimed at increasing labour demand	Incentives to the private sector in Germany (Jacobi & Kluve, 2006)	2% increase in the likelihood of employment six months after entering joblessness		
	Employ.me in Slovenia (Burger et al., 2021)		30% increase in the likelihood of employment after 24 months	Four years after the start of the programme, the cumulative income of the participants exceeded the income of the control group by approximately €9,500
Programmes that offer incentives to find and keep a job	Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC) in the United Kingdom	Increase in labour participation of 5.1 per centage points among mothers (Francesconi &		Five years after the reform, there is a 9.7% increase in labour force participation (Gregg & Harkness, 2003)

Category	Programme	Short term (< 12 months)	Medium term (13-36 months)	Long term (> 37 months)
		van der Klaauw, 2007)		
Programmes that offer incentives for the improvement of human capital	Training programme (labour market training) in Finland (OECD, 2023)		5% increase in the likelihood of finding a job and in the income of the participants two years later	
	On-the-job training in Slovenia (Burger et al., 2021)		Two years later, a 20% increase in the likelihood of employment	Five years later, 67% of participants employed
ALMPs to improve job matching in the labour market	Bimonthly individual meetings in Denmark (Maibom, Rosholm & Svarer, 2017)		10% increase in employment rates during the following two years	
	REA program in Nevada (Manoli, Michaelides & Patel, 2018)	Employment increased by 5.1% in the first full year after entering the programme, plus increased income of \$1,361		Increased employment between 2.9% and 4.5% in the following five years, plus increased income between \$1,413 and \$2,087

7. Practical implications

Based on the literature review presented, this section offers five practical implications for public policy design, and highlights key considerations for designing, implementing and assessing ALMPs aimed at reducing levels of child poverty through increased labour participation.

7.1. There is not always a direct relationship between employment and poverty

The first lesson to consider when designing ALMPs aimed at reducing child poverty is that the relationship between finding a job and climbing out of poverty is not always direct or automatic, as has been observed throughout the review. Nieuwenhuis et al. (2020), focusing on female employment rates, find that, among fifteen OECD countries between 1971 and 2013, a 10% increase in the female employment rate was associated with an approximately 1% reduction in poverty in these countries. However, in countries where female employment has stabilised after an initial increase, such as Spain, the authors consider that the potential of following an employment-based strategy to reduce poverty in OECD countries has been greatly depleted. A similar conclusion is reached by Orsini, Mertens and Büchel (2003), who in an analysis of seven European countries indicate that political measures to expand the participation of mothers in the labour market with the aim of reducing the risk of poverty will become less efficient with mothers' increased labour participation. In the specific case of single mothers, a study by Jaehrling, Kalina and Mesáros (2015) of four European countries finds that although participation rates among single mothers increased during the period of growth prior to the financial and economic crisis, their poverty rate remained the same or even increased.

Vaalavuo and Sirniö (2021) stress that the quality of employment is crucial for it to play a role in reducing poverty. For example, short-term or part-time contracts are less effective as routes out of poverty, according to an analysis of thirty countries between 2010 and 2017. Spain is one of the EU countries with the highest rate of in-work poverty (11.3% of households, compared with the EU average of 8.3%). This disproportionately impacts households with children and adolescents, contributing significantly to child poverty. These data have been associated, precisely, with the high incidence of low-quality employment and low wages (Lanau & Lozano, 2024).

Based on this evidence, any ALMP that aims to reduce the levels of child poverty in Catalonia should take into account objectives that go beyond the rapid and immediate employment of participants. It would be necessary to focus on medium and long-term objectives that include having quality jobs, job stability and income, as these are better indicators for effective poverty reduction. Thus, it should be ensured that public policies not only increase employment rates, but also promote decent and sustainable jobs that really contribute to improving the living conditions of families and reducing child poverty.

7.2. Not all demographic groups respond to ALMPs equally

One of the most visible patterns in the evidence reviewed is that the impacts of ALMPs vary by demographic group. For example, women appear to benefit more from programmes to improve human capital (Greenberg, Michalopoulos & Robins, 2003) and from programmes to improve labour market matching (OECD, 2023; Maibom, Rosholm & Svarer, 2017). . On the other hand, other groups, such as young people, systematically show fewer effects from the interventions. Several studies have found that ALMPs aimed at young people are, in general, less effective (Rovny, 2004; Greenberg, Michalopoulos & Robins, 2003; Card, Kluve & Weber, 2010; Calmfors, Forslund & Hemström, 2001). In the case of migrants, it has been found that the programmes that work are not always the same as for the general population; for example, hiring incentives are particularly important for this group (Butscheck & Walter, 2014).

This variation highlights that there is no single programme among ALMPs that is equally effective for everyone. In addition, the impact can vary substantially according to the demographic characteristics of the participants. This is a key lesson in designing ALMPs for parents, from a positive standpoint, as in the case of the professional training programmes mentioned in section 5.3.2, which were particularly effective for mothers in Germany, but also as a word of caution. For example, any programme design targeting young parents should consider issues associated with the effectiveness of these policies in this age group.

In summary, the ALMP design must be aware of differences in effectiveness by demographic and be adaptable so each subgroup gets the most benefits out of the programme. This is particularly important when dealing with vulnerable groups, such as young people or single mothers, where the impact of these policies may be more limited or require specific adjustments to achieve the desired results.

7.3. It is necessary to consider parents in the design and evaluation of policies

It is important to acknowledge that the cost of labour market activation is higher for people with dependent children than for people without children, as it includes the costs of childcare, which can be a significant obstacle to accessing employment. In this sense, it is worrying to note that most of the programmes presented in this review do not take this component into account, nor do the corresponding evaluations. Therefore, when designing ALMPs with the aim of

reducing child poverty, it is crucial to consider the specific needs of people with dependent children compared to the rest of the population when they enter the labour market.

In this context, the comparison between the tax credits established in the United States and the United Kingdom during the 1990s is a noteworthy one (section 5.3.1). The British example showed markedly more positive effects than the American one, thanks in large part to the generous subsidy for childcare costs associated with the programme. This led to improvements in the employment and income stability of the mothers, as well as an improvement in the quality of life of the children. Meanwhile, the American model, less generous in covering childcare costs, showed positive effects in terms of employment levels, but led mothers into low-quality jobs and poverty traps.

It is essential that the design of ALMPs take into account the differentiating components that can facilitate the parents' participation, such as childcare grants, the provision of daycare facilities or flexible hours, in order to improve the programme's effectiveness. In addition, evaluations are needed that measure the specific impact of the programmes on parents, and that are adaptable to the learnings derived from these assessments. This would make it possible to design policies that are better suited to the real needs of families, with a greater impact on the reduction of child poverty.

7.4. Effective ALMPs require a significant investment of resources

A common feature of the programmes reviewed in this summary report that have proven to be effective is that, in many cases, these are programmes that involve significant financial resources. For example, in the case of wage subsidies, some of the most effective programmes, such as those analysed in Slovenia or Germany (section 5.2), involve covering up to 50% of companies' labour costs for a period of 6 to 24 months. Similarly, Section 5.3.2 discusses how, among training programmes, those with longer durations and a greater variety of options achieve better results. Regarding the programmes oriented to the labour supply, it has already been mentioned that one of the keys to the success of the British programme compared to its American counterpart is precisely the difference in the levels of generosity. In this regard, it is important to note that subsequent reforms of the British tax credit that involved a reduction in coverage and benefit amounts have been linked to an increase in-work poverty in recent years (Hick & Lanau, 2018).

In general terms, these results indicate that if the goal of an ALMP is to reduce child poverty through the creation of quality jobs, it will be necessary to adopt a mindset that considers medium- and long-term investment. This involves recognising the short-term costs it may entail, as well as bearing in mind that it may be more beneficial to encourage quality employment in the medium term rather than encourage low-quality jobs in the short term. This investment perspective is essential to ensure that ALMPs not only increase employment rates but also lead to stable and well-paid jobs, which have a positive impact on reducing child poverty and improving the quality of life of families in the long term.

7.5. ALMPs must be understood as a complementary instrument to other public policies

Situations of poverty and social exclusion are multidimensional phenomena that require interventions from several areas to achieve the inclusion of people and families who find themselves in these situations (OECD, 2023). In this sense, ALMPs can be very effective when it comes to increasing employment, as we have seen throughout this summary report, but, in order to have real effects in reducing poverty, they must be accompanied by other measures adapted to people's needs. These complementary policies may include minimum income schemes, such as the Guaranteed Income in Catalonia (*Renda Garantida*) or the Minimum Vital Income in Spain (*Ingreso Mínimo Vital*), benefits for dependent children, housing aid or integrated social and health care.

In addition, as seen throughout the review, some of the most effective ALMPs, such as training programmes, prove to have medium and long-term effects. This implies that vulnerable groups need a safety net during the time it takes for the expected outcome to occur, which involves ensuring a minimum income to prevent people from abandoning the programmes and be able to meet their needs.

Some vulnerable groups also face a greater number of barriers, implying that they may need a broader and more comprehensive effort. Among these groups, single mothers are a particularly relevant group. In Catalonia, the poverty rate among single-parent female households (33%) is ten percentage points higher than that of all households with children and teenagers, according to the 2023 wave of the EU SILC (ECV by its acronym in Spanish). This group also has more difficulty than others in accessing the labour market, as they have fewer options for sharing childcare tasks. This may explain, for example, that the reviewed work incentive programmes are less effective for this group, since, in the

absence of accessible and sufficient childcare services, work activation measures fall short.

Another group of particular vulnerability is that of families born abroad or who do not have European nationality, since poverty, and especially severe poverty, is much more frequent among these groups. These families have more difficulty accessing the labour market due to barriers such as the lack of permits, a limited support network for balancing work and family life, and language barriers. In addition, severe poverty among foreign-born adults is much more common among those who have children (64%) than in those who do not (24%) (ECV 2023). Therefore, it is essential to understand the multidimensional context of the needs of these families to ensure that ALMPs work as part of a broader ecosystem of support and foster their exit from poverty.

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