

## / The “Solidaritatspremie” as a missed opportunity? Reasons and remedies for low participation in an Austrian working time reduction policy

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### Abstract

*This paper examines the Austrian Solidaritatspremie, a measure combining working time reduction (WTR) with an active labor market policy (ALMP). Despite its manifold benefits, participation in the Solidaritatspremie has been relatively low. We seek to shed light on the underlying reasons for this lack of participation and investigate possibilities for the policy’s improvement. Hypotheses are developed on the basis of a comprehensive literature review and five expert interviews are conducted. The data is structured and summarized using framework analysis, allowing for a systematic examination of the hypotheses. We find that participation in the Solidaritatspremie is thwarted by: (i) absence of direct financial benefits for employers, (ii) firm-specific characteristics, (iii) employees’ reluctance toward WTR, and (iv) lack of information and promotion. Therefore, we propose the following measures to increase participation: (i) financial benefits for employers, (ii) adjustments of the eligibility criteria, and (iii) information and promotion campaigns. Due to the dual character of the Solidaritatspremie, our findings contribute to a better understanding of WTR and ALMP implementation.*

**Keywords:** working time reduction, active labor market policy, employer participation, Solidaritatspremie, expert interviews

### Die Solidaritatspremie als verpasste Chance? Grunde fur und Manahmen gegen eine geringe Teilnahme an einer osterreichischen Arbeitszeitverkurzungsmanahme

### Zusammenfassung

*In diesem Beitrag wird die osterreichische Solidaritatspremie untersucht, die Arbeitszeitverkurzung (AZV) mit aktiver Arbeitsmarktpolitik (AAMP) kombiniert. Trotz ihrer vielfaltigen Vorteile sind die Teilnahmezahlen an der Solidaritatspremie relativ gering. Wir analysieren Grunde fur die mangelnde Teilnahme und skizzieren mogliche Reformvorschlage. Aufbauend auf einer umfassenden Literaturrecherche werden Hypothesen entwickelt und funf Expert:inneninterviews gefuhrt. Mithilfe der Framework-Analyse strukturieren wir die Daten und untersuchen die Hypothesen. Wir stellen fest, dass die Teilnahme an der Solidaritatspremie durch vier Faktoren eingeschrankt wird: (i) das Fehlen direkter finanzieller Vorteile fur die Arbeitgeber:innen, (ii) firmenspezifische Merkmale, (iii) die Vorbehalte der Arbeitnehmer:innen gegenuber AZV und (iv) mangelnde Information und Bewerbung. Wir schlagen daher folgende Manahmen vor: (i) finanzielle Anreize fur Arbeitgeber:innen, (ii) Anpassungen der Teilnahmekriterien und (iii) Informations- und Werbekampagnen. Aufgrund des dualen Charakters der Solidaritatspremie tragen unsere Ergebnisse zu einem besseren Verstandnis der Umsetzung von AAMP und AZV bei.*

**Schlagwort**er: Arbeitszeitreduktion, aktive Arbeitsmarktpolitik, Arbeitgeber:innenbeteiligung, Solidaritatspremie, Expert:inneninterviews

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*"[W]e shall endeavour to spread the bread thin on the butter—to make what work there is still to be done to be as widely shared as possible. Three-hour shifts or a fifteen-hour week may put off the problem for a great while. For three hours a day is quite enough to satisfy the old Adam in most of us!"*

*John Maynard Keynes (1930/2010: 369)*

## 1. Introduction

Unemployment represents one of the most salient socioeconomic issues within capitalist economies. Not least due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is now an increased political as well as scientific interest in the question of how policymakers might tackle the issue of unemployment. Responding to the labor market repercussions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries introduced state-supported working time reduction (WTR) programs, most often in the form of short-time work arrangements. In April 2020, about one quarter of the EU-27 workforce applied for a short-time work scheme or a similar model (Muller/Schulten 2020). However, WTR policies are not merely short-term measures to cope with rising unemployment during economic recessions.

Calling into question both the desirability and the feasibility of economic growth from a socioeconomic and environmental perspective, a myriad of scholars (Frayne 2016; Kallis et al. 2013; Knight et al. 2013; Pullinger 2014; Zwickl et al. 2016) put forward WTR policies as meaningful measures to combat structural unemployment in a no-growth economy. Here, WTR policies represent a possible solution to tackle the so-called productivity trap (Jackson/Victor 2011). The productivity trap describes the structural dependence of the socioeconomic system on continuous economic growth with respect to (un)employment. In a competitive market, firms are coerced to net-invest in order to survive, which leads to dynamics of technological innovation biased toward an increase in labor productivity (Richters/Siemoneit 2017). Essentially, an increase in labor productivity implies that the same economic output can be produced by fewer employed individuals. In other words, economic growth becomes necessary under such conditions in order to maintain a given level of working time in an economy (Richters/Siemoneit 2019).

The notion of reduced working hours is by no means novel within economic thinking and was proposed by Keynes as early as 1930 (1930/2010). Ideally, sophisticated WTR policies might entail several positive effects such as

improved individual life satisfaction by allowing for more leisure time, the facilitation of less commodity-intensive lifestyles, and a redistribution of work between the employed and unemployed, as well as between women and men (Frayne 2016). Moreover, the idea of reducing one's working hours seems to gain considerable traction among the public: in Austria, more than half of the working population would like to reduce their working time (Windisch/Ennsner-Jedenastik 2020). Thus, WTR policies are currently as relevant as ever. To draw relevant conclusions for the design of future policies within the field of labor market policies, it hence appears relevant to scrutinize existing WTR measures. This research project aims to analyze a particular Austrian policy combining WTR with an active labor market policy (ALMP), namely the *Solidaritatspremie* ("solidarity bonus"). It bears great potential benefits for employees and employers alike and might contribute to decoupling stable employment from economic growth. Nevertheless, employer participation has been relatively low. This observation informs the formulation of the following research question: *Why are employers' participation rates in the Solidaritatspremie relatively low and how can they be increased?* In other words, our analysis seeks to scrutinize employers' rationales for non-participation and to explore potential avenues for reforming the *Solidaritatspremie*.

This paper is structured as follows: Initially, a comprehensive literature review is conducted focusing on WTR, ALMPs, and, finally, the Austrian *Solidaritatspremie* model. Section 3 elaborates on the methods employed. First, hypotheses on employer participation are formulated based on insights from the literature review. Based on these hypotheses, we conduct expert interviews and analyze the data by applying framework analysis. In section 4, the results of our analysis are presented in detail. Thereafter, section 5 further discusses and contextualizes our results, highlighting the reasons for low participation in the *Solidaritatspremie* and outlining potential reforms. Moreover, implications for the design and implementation of WTR and ALMPs are discussed. Lastly, section 6 concludes this paper with some final remarks on the limitations of our analysis and potential avenues for further research.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Working time reduction policies

The sociopolitical struggle concerning the extent of working time is as old as industrial capitalism itself.

However, WTR is as relevant today as it was in the 19th century when workers protested against long working hours and poor working conditions. In contemporary discourses, WTR is oftentimes put forward as a possible solution to structural unemployment (Schwendinger 2015). Given the phenomenon of the productivity trap, WTR can contribute to remedying unemployment by enabling a more equitable distribution of jobs between the overworked and the unemployed (Jackson/Victor 2011). Moreover, a growing array of literature discusses shorter working hours and their social benefits (Kallis et al. 2013; Knight et al. 2013; Knijn et al. 2007; Pullinger 2014). WTR policies can facilitate a fair splitting of paid and unpaid work between men and women (Frayne 2016). Scholars such as Frayne (ibid.) argue that a more equal distribution of working time would allow more people to enjoy their free time, leading to a less work-centered life with employment no longer being the major source of income, social rights, and belonging. WTR could also help to prioritize human needs over the economy while giving people more time for self-development, cooperation, and informal production (ibid.). Moreover, WTR could enable a less commodity-intensive mode of consumption and help to develop more sustainable practices such as political engagement, learning new skills, cultural creation, stress compensation, and spending more time with friends and family (ibid.).

On the other hand, authors also contest some of the aforementioned positive effects of WTR policies. Examining an array of empirical studies, Schwendinger (2015) highlights that WTR literature remains inconclusive with respect to effects on employment. Investigating the shortened workweek from 39 to 35 hours in France, Estevão and Sá (2008) conclude that aggregate employment was unaffected but labor fluctuation increased, as firms would let go of employees due to increased labor costs. In terms of individual impacts, the examination of a Portuguese case shows that WTR can also lead to compensating for the lost hours by working overtime, causing even more mental and physical stress (Raposo/Ours 2008).

The way in which WTR policies are implemented depends on the particular policy goals and on the socioeconomic circumstances (Pullinger 2014). Hence, there exists a myriad of different WTR policies. To our knowledge, a systematic categorization of WTR policies is, however, currently missing in the WTR literature. Building on Pullinger's (2014) insights regarding working time policies, as well as general

policy design considerations (United Nations Industrial Development Organization/Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit 2017), one might broadly distinguish between two approaches to WTR policies: regulation-based approaches to WTR—which usually entail granting time rights to employees or limiting the allowed extent of working hours—on the one hand, and incentive-based approaches that (financially) incentivize the reduction of working time on the other. Beyond such classic policy approaches, WTR models can also be introduced by individual firms. A non-exhaustive list of examples of such firm-specific WTR models is presented by Gerold et al. (2017), who investigate the features of such models in terms of their practical benefits, risks, challenges, and opportunities for the employers and employees involved.

Figerl et al. (2021) give an overview of WTR policies in Austria that are supported by the Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich (AMS, Austrian Public Employment Service). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the financial crisis of 2007/2008, the most prominent model is short-time work (*Kurzarbeit*), which was and is still used to prevent soaring unemployment. Another similar model is partial retirement (*Altersteilzeit*), a form of short-time work allowing for a transition toward retirement. A further Austrian WTR instrument is the Solidaritätsprämie, the characteristics of which are explained in more detail in section 2.3. Moreover, there exist specific WTR models linked to various obligations such as educational leave and educational part-time work (*Bildungskarenz/-teilzeit*), parental leave and parental part-time work (*Elternkarenz/-teilzeit*)<sup>1</sup>, nursing leave and nursing part-time work (*Pflegekarenz/-teilzeit*), and family hospice leave and family hospice part-time work (*Familienhospizkarenz/-teilzeit*). These WTR instruments vary in the extent of working hour reductions, financial compensation for loss of income, length of funding, and requirements related to individual characteristics—e.g., the age of the participants, especially for partial retirement—and/or special circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Figerl et al. 2021).

WTR has, however, only rarely been studied within the Austrian context, as is also suggested by Schwendinger's (2015) literature review. Most notably, Baumgartner et al. (2001) use quantitative modeling to

1 Even though common policies in Austria, Figerl et al. (2021) do not mention parental leave and parental part-time work in their overview of Austrian WTR policies.

investigate the employment effects of WTR. After five years, a reduction of working hours per week from 39 to 35 increases employment by 3.6% (i.e., 113,000 persons) and decreases the number of unemployed individuals by 70,000 (ibid.: 3). Moreover, a recent survey shows that more than 50% of respondents would like to reduce their working time given the short-time work they experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, more than half of all Austrians have a positive attitude toward reducing their own working hours (Windisch/Ennser-Jedenastik 2020).

## 2.2 Active labor market policies

Labor market policies are political measures to tackle unemployment and related issues of poverty and social exclusion. ALMPs focus on "activation" and aim to re-incorporate unemployed individuals into the labor market, whereas passive labor market policies refer to measures centered around the provision of income support, e.g., via unemployment benefits (Malo 2018). The International Labour Organization (2016) notes that ALMPs not only aim to increase employment, but also seek to improve equity and enhance employment mobility as well as job quality. ALMPs can be classified according to five categories: (i) training programs, (ii) public works programs, (iii) employment subsidies, (iv) support for self-employment and micro-enterprise creation, and (v) labor market services to connect unemployed individuals with potential employers (ibid.). Moreover, ALMPs can be divided into matching, supply-side, and employer-oriented approaches (Bredgaard 2018). Conducting a meta-analysis of ALMPs, Kluge (2013) concludes that the efficacy of ALMPs mostly depends on the type of policy measure in question. Public work programs are found to be rather ineffective in reducing unemployment, whereas training programs seem to have moderate positive effects, especially in the medium term. Employment subsidies and labor market services have positive impacts on employment, with the latter measure being particularly effective in the short term.

Recently, there has been an increased interest in the issue of employer participation in the ALMP literature. This is due to the fact that employers are key actors with respect to successful implementation (Bredgaard 2018). However, the rationales for (non-)participation remain an under-researched subject matter in the literature (Bredgaard/Halkjer 2016; Orton et al. 2019). Employers may engage in ALMPs based on different motives, as a

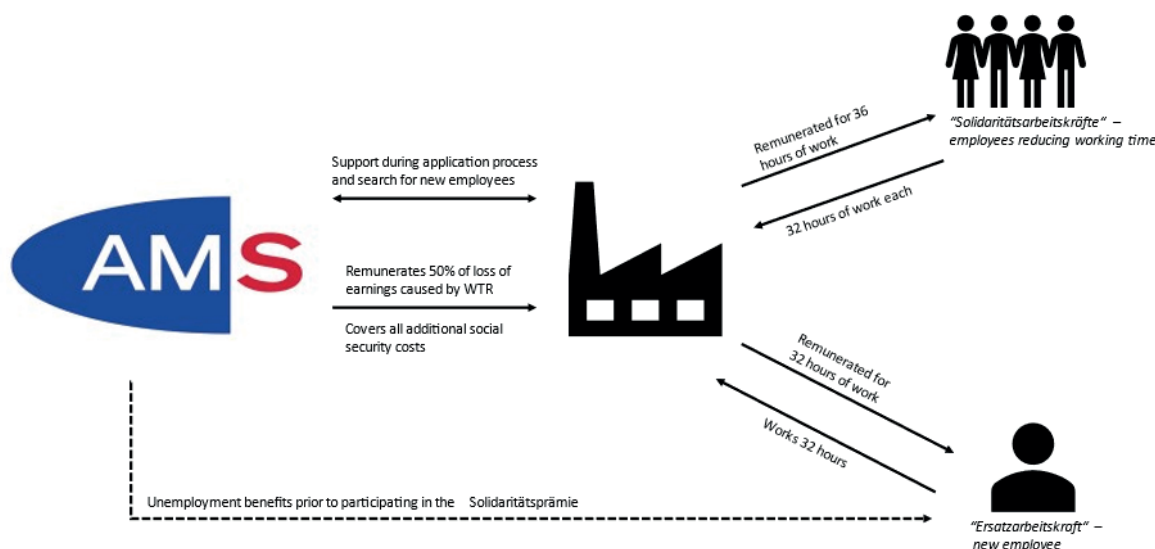
handful of studies of ALMPs in selected countries highlight. Van der Aa and van Berkel (2014) find three main rationales for participation in the Netherlands: finding new employees, decreasing wage-related costs, and improving the firm's public image in terms of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Moreover, an active role of employers within the process of policy implementation is put forward as an encouraging factor (ibid.). Investigating the case of participation in Denmark, Bredgaard (2018) finds that the majority of employers do not take part in ALMPs. Interestingly, more than one third of employers do not participate despite holding positive attitudes toward the policy in question. Moreover, employers are more likely to engage in subsidized than in unsubsidized programs (ibid.). In an empirical investigation of employer participation in a Danish wage subsidy scheme, Bredgaard and Halkjer (2016) conclude that various variables influence participation. Higher participation was found to correlate with a high share of unskilled labor, high coverage of collective agreements, deteriorating economic situation, domestic ownership structure, and firm engagement in the public sector (ibid.). Lastly, Orton et al. (2019) find that a general lack of information about and clarity of ALMPs discourages participation in the United Kingdom.

It should be noted that the reviewed ALMPs entail considerable differences in terms of their type as well as their design. Moreover, employer participation represents a multidimensional issue influenced by a variety of socioeconomic factors. The respective political economies, industrial relations, as well as the institutional framework in which ALMPs are embedded, vary greatly in the selected countries, thereby complicating any generalization of findings. A direct application of the reviewed rationales for (non-)participation to the case of the Austrian Solidaritatspremie thus seems hardly justifiable, especially due to the Solidaritatspremie's unique combination of WTR and ALMP. The reviewed literature on ALMP employer participation nonetheless offers valuable insights into the reasons for (non-)participation being considered within the scope of this analysis. The fact that there currently exists no ALMP literature investigating the issue of employer participation in Austria further highlights the specific research gap that this analysis seeks to address.

## 2.3 The Solidaritatspremie

The Solidaritatspremie was first introduced in 2000 by the AMS. The policy entails a reduction of the

Figure 1: Visualization of the practical application of the Solidaritätsprämie



Quelle: Own representation

normal working time<sup>2</sup> of willing employees and the recruitment of new employees to compensate for the loss in working hours (§ 13 AVRAG Solidaritätsprämienmodell; § 37a AMSG Beihilfen Zum Solidaritätsprämienmodell). Data provided by the AMS suggests that the uptake of the Solidaritätsprämie has, however, been confined to a relatively small number of firms and employees. In 2008, 152 employees reduced their working time as part of the Solidaritätsprämie, while 389 persons participated in 2019, resulting in a yearly average of 296. Overall, no more than 3,442 workers reduced their working hours in the scope of the Solidaritätsprämie between 2008 and 2019. These relatively low numbers of participants represent the starting point and focus of our research.

The company wishing to participate in the program will seek guidance and support from the AMS during the application process and in their search for suitable new employees. The employees interested in participating (the so-called *Solidaritätsarbeitskräfte*, "solidarity workers") can opt for a WTR of up to 50%. The employer then receives an allowance of 50% of the decrease in income of those reducing their working time, which is passed on to the respective workers. Moreover, the

social insurance contributions remain at the same level as prior to the working time reduction, as the AMS bears any additional costs (§ 37a AMSG Beihilfen Zum Solidaritätsprämienmodell). Figure 1 shows how the use of the Solidaritätsprämie both creates new jobs and redistributes existing working time. In this example, four workers reduce their working time from 40 to 32 hours per week while receiving wages for 36 hours of work. To compensate for the reduced hours, a new employee can be hired for a regular 32-hour position.

There are some eligibility criteria for participating in the Solidaritätsprämie. The newly hired workers (the so-called *Ersatzarbeitskräfte*, "replacement workers") have to be either formerly unemployed or non-corporate apprentices<sup>3</sup> (§ 13 AVRAG Solidaritätsprämienmodell; § 37a AMSG Beihilfen Zum Solidaritätsprämienmodell). Moreover, the duration of the program cannot exceed two years for the participating workers, unless the newly hired workers are above the age of 45 years at the time of recruitment, have a disability, or are long-time unemployed persons. In these cases, the maximum duration of the program is extended to three years. The legal design of the policy allows for implementation either via a collective

<sup>2</sup> *Normalarbeitszeit* (normal working time) in Austria is not allowed to exceed eight hours per day and 40 hours per week except for certain special cases in which longer working hours can be agreed on in a collective or internal agreement (§ 3 AZG Normalarbeitszeit).

<sup>3</sup> *Überbetriebliche Ausbildung* (non-corporate apprenticeship) in Austria refers to an apprenticeship for persons who could not be placed in a corporate apprenticeship by the AMS (§ 30 BAG).



agreement or via an internal agreement (*Betriebsvereinbarung*<sup>4</sup>; § 13 AVRAG Solidaritatspremienmodell).

With respect to our considerations of WTR policies, the Solidaritatspremie can be considered an incentive-based measure, as it allows employees to reduce their working time while receiving an effective increase in hourly wage. Moreover, the Solidaritatspremie resembles firm-specific implementations of WTR, as it is introduced in individual firms via a collective or internal agreement. Employing the aforementioned classification of ALMPs by the International Labour Organization (2016), the Solidaritatspremie can be considered a combination of (iii) employment subsidies incentivizing the employment of individuals and (v) labor market services aiming to connect job-seeking individuals with potential employers. However, the Solidaritatspremie goes beyond such simplified classifications, as it targets both jobseekers and employers and further makes use of matching to increase efficacy.

Based on the effects of the Solidaritatspremie in reducing employees' working time by redistributing existing working hours as well as creating new jobs, the program can be considered both an ALMP and WTR policy. In this sense, the Solidaritatspremie constitutes a unique policy—and therefore cannot be aptly described by referring only to existing approaches within the ALMP literature. This unique nature of the Solidaritatspremie makes it a particularly interesting policy to investigate.

The evaluation study by Dornmayr and Loffler (2013) reveals that the program has several positive impacts including the creation of new jobs, the reduction of physical and psychological overstrain of workers, as well as an improvement in life satisfaction and work-life balance. Moreover, the policy has proven successful in reintegrating the formerly unemployed beyond the funding duration and is an effective tool for knowledge transfer between older and younger employees (*ibid.*). While the previous research undertaken by Dornmayr and Loffler (*ibid.*) focused on a general evaluation of the program, our research specifically addresses the low uptake of the policy and potential reforms.

4 An Austrian *Betriebsvereinbarung* is a written agreement between a company's owner (*Betriebsinhaber*) and the works council (*Betriebsrat*; § 29 ArbVG Begriff).

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Hypotheses: the issue of employer participation

Given the relatively low extent of participation in the Solidaritatspremie, the overarching goal of this study is to examine possible reasons for the lack of employer participation. To this end, we formulate an array of hypotheses that might help to explain this issue. The formulation of the hypotheses is based on and informed by the evaluation study by Dornmayr and Loffler (2013), as well as a review of literature on employer participation in ALMPs (Bredgaard 2018; Bredgaard/Halkjar 2016; Ingold et al. 2015; Orton et al. 2019; van der Aa/van Berkel 2014). These hypotheses are grouped into four categories:

##### H1) Costs and benefits of participation for firms

- The administrative costs of the interaction with the AMS are too high.
- The administrative costs of the internal implementation are too high.
- The financial benefits of participation are too low.

##### H2) Interaction of the AMS with the firm

- Firms are not sufficiently informed about the policy.
- Firms are not adequately advised during the implementation.
- Employers and their interests were not considered to a satisfying extent during the design phase of the policy.

##### H3) Firm-specific characteristics

- Participating in the Solidaritatspremie is mostly only interesting for larger firms.
- Participating in the Solidaritatspremie is mostly only interesting for firms in certain sectors such as manufacturing and social services.

##### H4) Employees

- Employees are not willing to reduce their working time, potentially due to the reduction in income.
- Firms cannot find adequately skilled new employees to compensate for the reduced working time.
- Firms cannot find new employees who fulfil the requirements of the policy.

#### 3.2 Expert interviews

To test these hypotheses and gain insights into how participation in the Solidaritatspremie could be improved, five expert interviews are conducted. The choice of expert interviews as the main method is motivated

by four considerations. First, apart from the study by Dornmayr and Löffler (2013), no literature exists that evaluates the Solidaritätsprämie. Hence, the reasons for low participation in the Solidaritätsprämie from the employer perspective have not yet been studied in depth, thereby prompting our explorative analysis of the issue at hand. Secondly, there are practical limits to interviewing employers themselves, as the identification of—as well as the access to—employers who are familiar with the Solidaritätsprämie but decided to refrain from participation is a rather difficult task. Thirdly, experts can be seen “as ‘crystallization points’ for practical insider knowledge” (Menz et al. 2009: 2) and are therefore able to offer valuable insights that transcend the individual perspectives of employers. Moreover, expert interviews are well suited to deriving specialized information about a specific issue in a systematic manner (Bogner/Menz 2009). Lastly, the method of expert interviews fits well with the explorative approach of this study, as our conclusions might be able to serve as a meaningful starting point for future (quantitative) analyses of the Solidaritätsprämie or Austrian labor market policies more generally.

The interviewees are selected based on a purposeful sampling technique. The strength of purposeful sampling is the deliberate selection of information-rich cases best fit to analyze the issue under investigation (Patton 2015). Following Patton (ibid.), we employ a purposeful sampling strategy that specifically targets key knowledgeable and is best suited for gaining insights into highly specialized subject matters. To this end, we contacted five relevant Austrian institutions that referred us to their respective experts on the Solidaritätsprämie. These institutions are the Arbeiterkammer (AK, Chamber of Labor Austria), the Wirtschaftskammer Österreich (WKO, Chamber of Commerce Austria), the AMS, the Gewerkschaft GPA (Labour Union GPA), and the Österreichisches Institut für Berufsbildungsforschung (ÖIBF, Institute for Research on Qualifications and Training of the Austrian Economy). These institutions represent key stakeholders within Austrian labor market politics, comprising member organizations of the social partners, the Austrian Public Employment Service, as well as a nonprofit research organization. The experts’ differing backgrounds in applied research, politics, and labor market policy administration allow us to gain both comprehensive and differentiated insights into the Solidaritätsprämie and potential reasons for non-participation.

The expert interviews took place between November 24 and December 11, 2020, via videoconference and were conducted in German, as the interviewees’ native language represents the best option to enable free and unconstrained expression (Littig/Pöchlhammer 2014). The interviews were held by a single researcher and took between 30 and 90 minutes. Moreover, the interviews follow a guideline, the structure and content of which is based on the hypotheses and the literature review. To ensure flexibility in terms of structure and questions, we conduct semi-structured interviews (Scheibelhofer 2008), thereby also allowing for the emergence of new issues. Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed with the software Amberscript as well as manually, employing a simplified transcription system (Dresing/Pehl 2017).

### 3.3 Framework Analysis

The analysis of the expert interviews is based on qualitative content analysis (QCA; Mayring 2014; Schreier 2012). Essentially, “QCA is a method for describing the meaning of qualitative material in a systematic way” (Schreier 2012: 1). More specifically, we employ a particular form of QCA, namely framework analysis. The defining aspect of framework analysis is the systematization of the data within a matrix output structure (Gale et al. 2013). This method is apt for the subject matter of this research project, as it was developed for applied policy research (Ritchie/Spencer 2002).

For the analysis, we follow the seven-stage procedure outlined by Gale et al. (2013). Following the transcription and a familiarization with the material, a preliminary coding scheme is developed comprising distinct analytical categories to which the material is assigned. The categories are generated via a combination of concept- and data-driven procedures (Schreier 2012). Our categories are thus developed based on a literature review and the formulated hypotheses, and subsequently complemented by categories inductively derived from the material itself. The development of the coding scheme is conducted in German and performed with the software MAXQDA. Initially, each researcher codes an interview conducted by another colleague. Following that, the codes are compared and discussed to develop an analytical framework, i.e., the final coding scheme, which is then applied to the material. Using Microsoft Excel, a matrix is established in which all the relevant material is systematically charted based on the coding scheme. The matrix provides an

intuitive and structured overview of the summarized data, thereby allowing for easy comparison and interpretation of data across and within cases, i.e., individual interviews (Gale et al. 2013).

#### 4. Results

The following section presents the results gathered by applying the aforementioned methods. It is divided into three subsections: 4.1 highlights the results concerning the preformulated hypotheses, 4.2 mentions additional reasons for low participation, which are not covered by the hypotheses but emerged during the interviews, and 4.3 presents all results connected to possible reforms with the target of increasing participation in the Solidaritatspremie. This section exclusively focuses on introducing the findings, while section 5 uses these results to draw and discuss conclusions.

##### 4.1 Hypotheses results

This section comprises the results related to the hypotheses. Certain particularly remarkable findings are presented in the following. The table below displays the matrix structured by the hypotheses, including the identified reasoning proposed by the experts during the interviews.

The results show that the administrative costs of implementation (H1b) are deemed to be rather low and thus negligible, especially for big firms with separate human resources departments. Moreover, many firms participate repeatedly, whereby the costs of internal implementation decrease over time. On the other hand, some of the experts assert that the costs of internal implementation are considerable. According to one expert, "every form that has to be filled out is already an almost unacceptable burden." Moreover, the Solidaritatspremie requires organizational changes relating to work time models and the incorporation of new employees into the firm. This issue is particularly pronounced for smaller firms and may thwart their participation (cf. also H3a).

In respect to financial benefits (H1c), the results show that—while there are no immediate financial benefits (such as a direct subsidy)—participation can result in indirect financial benefits via a reduction in wage costs when a new employee is hired.

With regard to the role of information (H2a), the experts' arguments go in both directions. Essentially, information about the Solidaritatspremie is available on

the AMS website, during the so-called AMS Tour, and from local AMS consultants. According to one expert, the website informs readers how the policy works and which requirements firms need to fulfil, while details on the implementation and opportunities of the policy are not conveyed. The expert concludes that it is not widely promoted, but rather placed at the disposal of those who are interested. As indicated, the AMS does provide certain information on the Solidaritatspremie; however, the experts agree that more promotional activities by the AMS would be conducive to increased participation.

The interviewees highlight various reasons why an implementation of the policy is more likely in bigger firms with larger numbers of employees (H3a) such as ease of reallocating certain tasks to new employees, ease of finding enough employees willing to reduce their working time, and existence of human resources departments. Moreover, the experts point to continuous personnel fluctuation, as it increases the likelihood of finding new employees and of employing them beyond the funding period due to a higher likelihood of open positions in the firm. Further factors mentioned include a higher probability of having a works council (*Betriebsrat*), a less competitive environment, and higher job security ensuring employees can be engaged for the entire funding period.

With regard to the role of the sector (H3b), the experts provide mixed arguments. Some experts argue that firms in sectors that experience high fluctuation rather refrain from participating in the policy, as the Solidaritatspremie obliges firms to employ the new employee for at least the duration of the funding period. Additionally, firms with strict shift work—found mostly in the production sector—cannot easily implement the Solidaritatspremie. However, another expert argues that firms in the production sector usually display very well-organized labor interests and strong works councils, which makes participation more likely. Furthermore, the experts assert that firms operating in sectors with very high physical, emotional, or psychological strain are most likely to participate due to their workers' willingness to reduce their working time, and in turn their work-induced stressors. On the other hand, one interviewee highlights that the participating firms come from substantially different sectors, which indicates the policy's flexibility. Another expert mentions that it is not the sector but rather the work activities that influence the likelihood of participation, as very specialized activities inhibit taking part.



	H1 a: costs of interaction with the AMS	H1 b: costs of internal implementation	H1 c: financial benefits for firms	H2 a: information provided by the AMS	H2 b: advice provided by the AMS	H2 c: employer interests during design phase
ÖIBF	There exist administrative costs relating to paperwork and documentation. For example, firms must prove the extent of WTR and document to which employees it applies.	Firms might perceive the administrative costs to be high, especially for the initial implementation. Costs decrease over time of implementation.	There is a reduction in labor costs, as the working hours of older employees who have been employed for a long period by the firm and earn higher wages are replaced by new and possibly younger employees who receive relatively lower wages.	The AMS provides information via different channels; however, more promotional activities could help to increase participation.	Firms can turn to the regional AMS consultant for information and the consultant can help the firm to complete the administrative paperwork, find a potential new employee, and discuss the extent of WTR.	During the design and approval process within the AMS, both employee and employer interest groups were included.
GPA	There are costs; however, they are not particularly high and even lower for larger firms and those who already participate in alternative working time schemes.	There are costs for the internal implementation, as firms need to change their organization, adopt new working time models, and break in a new employee.	There is no immediate financial benefit.	The AMS provides information on certain aspects of the policy; however, information on other aspects is not available and there is no active promotion.		
AK	There are costs; however, they are not particularly high.	Only short-term effort for personnel departments (large firms) or managers (small firms).	A part of the lost income is compensated by the state, which allows the firm to offer more progressive working time models and hence attract employees.		The AMS offers a very good service and has dedicated and motivated consultants.	
AMS	There are no excessive administrative burdens or requirements, only a considerable extra administrative cost for companies when many employees participate.	Considerable costs since companies must look for people who want to reduce working time and hire someone who complies with the AMS requirements.	There is no financial benefit.	The information is sufficient and easily accessible to companies; however, there are no additional promotion campaigns.	The advice provided by the AMS is sufficient.	
WKO	High costs as cooperating with the AMS is perceived as an obstacle per se.	The internal implementation is too costly due to the reorganization of working time, the negotiation of the internal agreement, and the necessary approval of the employees.		It would be beneficial if there were more information available.	The AMS provides advice about funding options; however, the details of the implementation are the responsibility of the firm.	



	H3a: size of the firm	H3b: sector of the firm	H4a: willingness of employees to reduce working hours	H4b: qualifications of new employees	H4c: requirements toward new employees
ÖIBF	<p>The Solidaritatspremie can only be implemented by larger firms with more employees because it is easier to reallocate certain tasks to new employees. Therefore, the policy becomes irrelevant for many small firms.</p>	<p>The Solidaritatspremie is mostly interesting for firms in certain sectors such as industry, social work, or health. It is not particularly suitable for firms whose production is export-dependent and/or strongly influenced by the current economic situation, firms with high fluctuation, and firms with shift work.</p>	<p>The loss in income and associated reduced pension benefits are oftentimes an issue for implementation.</p>	<p>Qualification represents a crucial issue for firms' ability to participate.</p>	<p>Firms are required to guarantee employment of individuals for a given, usually longer-term period, which might be problematic if firms do not want to make such a commitment.</p>
GPA	<p>Implementation is easier for larger firms because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- it is easier to find enough employees willing to reduce their working time</li> <li>- personnel departments</li> <li>- continuous personnel fluctuation, which facilitates keeping the new employee beyond the funding period</li> <li>- they are more likely to have a works council.</li> </ul>	<p>The sector of the company does not play a pivotal role, as the Solidaritatspremie is constructed in a flexible manner and currently implemented by firms in very different sectors.</p>	<p>The employees' willingness is a major condition for participation. In general, there is a large demand for WTR.</p>	<p>Qualification is a major condition. However, in many cases it should not be a major obstacle to find a qualified person.</p>	<p>The requirements toward the new employees restrict the set of potential employees who can be hired. In most cases, it should be possible to find someone who fulfills the requirements.</p>
AK	<p>Large companies have an advantage due to well-organized labor. Small firms need to compete with monopolistic large firms.</p>	<p>Participation does not depend on the sector, but on the degree of employee specialization.</p>	<p>Ideology plays a crucial role. When employees do participate, they are satisfied with it. If you have a very low wage, it is nearly impossible to lose even more income.</p>	<p>The AMS usually does not convey high-skilled persons, as they find jobs in other ways.</p>	<p>The AMS should convey more people with high skills.</p>
AMS	<p>The policy is mainly attractive to large firms. Since the firms need a works council, the size of a company determines the possibilities to participate.</p>	<p>Companies that are more impacted by the economic situation and cannot guarantee stable work conditions can be expected to participate less since they cannot anticipate steady employment opportunities over the required time period of two years.</p>	<p>A sufficient amount of people would like to reduce their working time in general.</p>	<p>The requirements are not excessive as a person only needs to have been unemployed for one day.</p>	<p>The requirements are not excessive as a person only needs to have been unemployed for one day.</p>
WKO	<p>Smaller firms are excluded a priori.</p>	<p>The sector does not play an important role.</p>	<p>Employees consider their income and working time arrangements when taking their decision whether or not to participate.</p>	<p>Qualification does not play a crucial role in participation.</p>	<p>The requirements toward the new employees could be a problem.</p>



All interviewees highlight that income reduction is a crucial point regarding employees' willingness to reduce their working time (H4a), especially for low wage earners: that "is something people [with a low income] simply cannot afford to do." In general, a high willingness to reduce working hours is asserted. However, one expert argues that—on an ideological level—mostly older employees do not want to reduce their working hours due to their long-standing working habits. The expert asserts that raising awareness is a fundamental issue because the implementation of the Solidaritätsprämie hinges on employees' willingness to reduce their working time.

According to the experts, the policy's requirements of new employees (H4c) can decrease the pool of the available workforce, even though they are not deemed to be too excessive. Among the interviewees, there are differing conceptions of what the actual requirements are. This indicates a lack of information even among those who are most familiar with the Solidaritätsprämie (cf. also H2a).

#### 4.2 Additional findings

Additional findings that may help to answer the research question are presented in this section. They emerged during the interviews and were not initially covered by the hypotheses. Aspects of the Solidaritätsprämie as a policy with unique requirements and rules are addressed, as well as those of potentially participating firms, their employees, and other stakeholders.

In respect to the firms' characteristics, employee fluctuation is identified as both an obstacle and an enhancing factor for participation. One expert argues that high fluctuation is beneficial for participation for two reasons. First, such firms are continuously searching for new employees independent of the Solidaritätsprämie, which eases the search for new employees compensating for the reduced working time. Second, high fluctuation helps the firm to keep the new employee hired in the context of the policy after the funding period has expired, as the likelihood of an open position is high. This in turn makes participation more attractive for the employer. On the other hand, another expert considers high fluctuation to be disadvantageous for participation, as firms with more flexible work arrangements might refrain from commitment regarding the duration of employment. Moreover, firms that allow for a flexible organization of working time—such as part-time work or partial retire-

ment—are more inclined to participate than those not employing such working time models. Additionally, the Solidaritätsprämie has been attributed a positive role in structurally reorganizing work in the company: "The Solidaritätsprämie is a possibility for firms to minimize their costs pertaining to restructuring."

Concerning the employees, benefits from participation include increased knowledge transfer, creation, and distribution. Furthermore, the Solidaritätsprämie enhances employees' motivation, work-life balance, and can potentially improve health. These aspects can result in increased productivity benefitting the whole firm. However, one interviewee stresses that the working atmosphere could suffer if some workers were to benefit from the Solidaritätsprämie while others were excluded.

Another finding concerns the specific ideological interests of the stakeholders involved and the underlying notion that full-time work represents the norm: "A huge obstacle in WTR debates is the reaction on the capital side." Importantly, this norm inhibits not only employers' but also employees' willingness to participate. On another note, several experts highlight the need for other stakeholders—besides the AMS—to provide information on the Solidaritätsprämie. It is claimed that employees, labor unions, and works councils are poorly informed about the Solidaritätsprämie. One expert calls the lack of promotion "one of the main reasons why the Solidaritätsprämie is currently used that little."

#### 4.3 Reforms and obstacles

The experts mention four types of measures to raise participation. First, three experts propose an adjustment of the requirements. One interviewee substantiates this proposal by suggesting that employees should be able to transition from a short-time work arrangement into the Solidaritätsprämie, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, two experts list financial benefits such as tax abatements for employers as a possible reform. Another interviewee suggests that firms employing new workers beyond a certain period could receive an allowance. Third, two experts mention that the name of the policy ought to be changed, since it is misleading and not self-explanatory. Fourth, one interviewee suggests that more promotion is needed to inform firms and employees about the Solidaritätsprämie. Lastly, one expert notes that reforms are not meaningful because

participation is relatively low and would thus propose abolishing the policy altogether.

The experts mention possible obstacles concerning any reform of the Solidaritatspremie. One interviewee argues that other programs within the AMS are more relevant, which hinders more promotion of the Solidaritatspremie. Furthermore, the administrative costs of the AMS would rise if the eligibility criteria were to be adjusted. Two interviewees argue that employer interest groups and certain political stakeholders generally oppose WTR on a larger scale and thus inhibit any reforms that might make the Solidaritatspremie more attractive.

## 5. Discussion

Based on the results, the following section discusses reasons for low participation in the Solidaritatspremie and potential reforms. The first subsection 5.1 presents our conclusions concerning the hypotheses, the most relevant causes for the low uptake, and a list of potential reforms of the Solidaritatspremie. Going beyond this specific Austrian policy, in subsection 5.2., we draw implications for WTR and ALMP in general.

### 5.1 The Solidaritatspremie: reasons and remedies for low participation

This section discusses the findings we gained from the expert interviews with regard to the Solidaritatspremie. The first part presents the conclusions on the hypotheses that guided the investigation. Based on the hypotheses-related insights and the additional results from the interviews, the most salient reasons for low participation are determined in the second part of this section. Lastly, the third section points to potential policy measures that may increase participation in and, consequently, the relevance of the Solidaritatspremie.

#### 5.1.1 Acceptance and rejection of hypotheses

The first set of hypotheses focuses on the costs and benefits of participation for firms. The material gathered throughout the interviews rather points to a rejection of H1a, namely that the administrative costs of the interaction with the AMS are too high, as most experts agree that the related costs are negligible. The only expert who disagrees is from the WKO, arguing that any cooperation with the AMS represents an obstacle. Considering the expert's institutional background, this

disagreement seems consistent, as employers naturally strive to minimize costs. H1b, i.e., administrative costs of the internal implementation being too high, can neither be rejected nor accepted because the experts have differing opinions on the significance of the related costs. Once again, these different perceptions can partly be explained by the institutional background of the interviewees. While the expert from the WKO—representing the employer side—deems the costs to be very relevant, the AK expert—representing the interests of the workers—considers the costs to be less important. H1c stipulates that the financial benefits of participation for firms are insufficient; our results indicate a confirmation of this hypothesis, as the experts agree that there are no direct financial benefits for firms.

The second group of hypotheses concerns the interaction of the AMS with firms. Concerning the hypothesis that firms are not sufficiently informed about the policy (H2a), it is necessary to differentiate between the availability of information and promotion. On the one hand, there is information available for interested firms. However, the Solidaritatspremie is not promoted, and thus firms might not be informed about its existence and benefits. The interviews hint at a rejection of H2b, stating that firms are not adequately advised during the implementation, as the experts deem the support from the AMS to be sufficient to very good. The hypothesis assuming an unsatisfactory extent of consideration of employers and their interests during the design phase of the policy (H2c) seems unconvincing based on the statement of one expert. The social partners are part of the AMS administrative council and, therefore, had a say in the design of the Solidaritatspremie.

The hypotheses of the third group consider firm-specific characteristics. H3a states that participation in the Solidaritatspremie is mostly only interesting for larger firms. Our results point to a confirmation of this hypothesis, as it is easier for bigger firms to partake in the program. There is an array of explanations for this assertion, with some of them relating to the sector of the firm, the necessity of a works council, and continuous personnel fluctuation. There are mixed results with regard to the second hypothesis, assuming that participating in the policy is mostly only interesting for firms in certain sectors such as manufacturing and social services. The experts do not agree whether it is the sector that plays the main role or rather related factors such as firm size, work activities, or the existence of a works council.

The last set of hypotheses highlights the employees' role. H4a traces the low participation back to employees' lack of willingness to reduce their working time, potentially due to the reduction in income. The experts' statements point to a confirmation of this hypothesis as the implementation hinges on the employees' willingness. There are mixed results concerning the hypothesis that the uptake of the policy is low because firms cannot find adequately skilled new employees to compensate for the reduced working time (H4b). The experts point out that qualification is crucial; however, they disagree whether it significantly hinders participation. The last hypothesis asserts that firms might not be able to find new employees who fulfill the requirements of the policy (H4c). This can be neither rejected nor confirmed, as the experts have very different conceptions of what the actual requirements are.

#### 5.1.2 Reasons for low participation

Based on the results of the interviews and the derived conclusions with respect to the hypotheses, the following issues have been found to be most salient for explaining the low participation in the Solidaritätsprämie:

- Our investigation suggests that the lack of direct financial benefits for employers constitutes an obstacle to increased participation. This finding is in line with existing literature on ALMP employer participation (Bredgaard 2018). While it is true that employers do not receive any direct financial benefits, the additional findings show that firms can benefit indirectly from a plentiful range of opportunities related to the program. These include restructuring working time models, as well as improved health, motivation, life satisfaction, and work-life balance among employees, all of which can enhance general productivity in the workplace.

- The firms' specific characteristics play a crucial role with respect to their likelihood to participate. Our research indicates that employee fluctuation, flexible working time models, and the existence of a works council are relevant and positively related to the chances that a firm will implement the Solidaritätsprämie. However, all these factors are less prevalent in small or medium-sized firms. Moreover, due to the program's duration, a firm must be able to ensure steady employment, which is usually much more challenging for smaller firms. In Austria, a significant share of firms are either microenterprises with fewer than ten employees (81% of firms with 25% of total employees)

or small enterprises with up to 50 employees (11% of firms with 24% of total employees; Bundesministerium Digitalisierung und Wirtschaftsstandort 2020). Therefore, the Solidaritätsprämie impedes the participation of a significant share of firms and employees by design.

- The employees' willingness seems to represent a significant hindrance to increased uptake. Here, the most salient reasons are low wages and the corresponding unfeasibility of further income reductions. However, this hardly constitutes the only reason. Instead, the prevailing full-time work norm and the associated ideology are important factors that might inhibit the acceptance of a reduced working time regime.

- Even though the AMS provides information, labor unions, works councils, and particularly employees are apparently insufficiently informed, if at all. Thus, a general lack of information is identified as a major obstacle to employer participation, a finding consistent with the evidence provided by Orton et al. (2019). Moreover, our analysis suggests that the benefits pertaining to the Solidaritätsprämie are not adequately promoted. As employers and employees are oftentimes not aware of these benefits, this lack of information and promotion reinforces existing hindrances such as the perceived lack of (financial) benefits for employers and the reluctance of employees when it comes to WTR.

#### 5.1.3 Remedies for low participation: proposed policy measures

Building on the insights concerning the reasons for its low uptake, we propose the following measures to increase employer participation in the Solidaritätsprämie:

- Financial benefits for employers: A particularly practical measure to make the Solidaritätsprämie more attractive is the introduction of direct financial benefits for participating employers. These benefits could be scaled with respect to the size of firms to favor small ones. As discussed earlier, the implementation is much more difficult for firms with low numbers of employees; therefore, setting a financial incentive especially for such employers seems promising. From an economic perspective, the provision of financial benefits represents an effective means to influence employer behavior, i.e., incentivizing participation. This in turn might facilitate acceptance among other stakeholders such as employees and interest groups. The proposed introduction of financial benefits for employers should, however, be contextualized in terms of the asymmetrical political



power relations between employees and employers. Even though such a reform seems to be an economically sound suggestion, it is not politically viable by default. The exact design of such financial incentives for employers should thus be subject to political deliberation, in which the employees should not lose out to the employers. In other words, WTR policies should be implemented in a way that balances both employers' and employees' interests.

ii. Adjustment of the eligibility criteria: In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, WTR is currently ubiquitous in the Austrian labor market due to the prevalence of short-time work. Experiences from the Solidaritatspremie reveal that employees are mostly content with reduced working hours once they participate (Dornmayr/Loffler 2013). In a recent survey, more than 50% of Austrian employees expressed positive attitudes toward reducing their normal working time (Windisch/Ennser-Jedenastik 2020). In that regard, it seems meaningful to enable employees to transition from short-time work to a WTR model as part of the Solidaritatspremie. Accordingly, an adjustment of the eligibility criteria is proposed.

iii. Information and promotion: Since the lack of information is found to be one of the major causes of relatively low participation, we propose proactive promotion—e.g., in the form of an information campaign—of the Solidaritatspremie. This might entail a revision of the policy's branding including a name change, as proposed by the GPA (Gewerkschaft GPA n.d.). Besides the AMS, additional stakeholders such as labor unions, works councils, and employer interest groups should also provide information on the Solidaritatspremie and its manifold benefits. Information provision and promotion are fundamental to enhancing the popularity of the Solidaritatspremie and hence increase its uptake.

## 5.2 Implications for WTR and ALMP

Given that—to the best of our knowledge—there exists no literature on policies that combine WTR with an ALMP approach, our analysis of the Solidaritatspremie offers unique insights into the field of labor market policies. With respect to WTR, one of the most salient insights of this study is the potential lack of employees' willingness to reduce their working time. This insight stands in contradiction to current discourses on WTR, in which an implicit desire of employees to reduce their working time oftentimes seems to constitute an a priori assumption.

With respect to this contradiction, two issues are of particular relevance. Firstly, the reduction in income plays a crucial role in shaping employees' attitudes toward WTR, even in the case of the Solidaritatspremie where 50% of the income reduction is compensated for. Hence, the extent of income compensation represents a central issue for the design of WTR policies, a subject in need of further investigation. Secondly, norms and ideology play a pivotal role in shaping employees' (as well as employers') preferences concerning working time. We infer that the normalization of full-time work might represent a substantial hindrance to implementing WTR policies in general. In that regard, further research into the social construction of work-related norms within a work-centered society (Frayne 2016) is required. Lastly, the employer-centered approach of the Solidaritatspremie precludes a large share of the working population since participation is dependent on a sufficient size of the respective firm. In that regard, programs such as the Solidaritatspremie alone are not apt measures for a large-scale implementation of WTR. Instead, such policies should be complemented by further measures to achieve a broad change of working time regimes and underlying social norms. To this end, the introduction of improved time rights for employees (Pullinger 2014) or the introduction of negative financial incentives that increase the labor costs of full-time work represent potential policy measures that would facilitate the transition toward a less work-centered society.

With respect to ALMPs, our research indicates that real-life policies—such as the Solidaritatspremie—may go beyond the simple classifications developed in the literature. Moreover, employer participation in ALMPs constitutes a multidimensional issue entailing a multitude of relevant factors. Here, a detailed understanding of the specific socioeconomic context is required in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of what factors hinder and facilitate participation. In this regard, closer collaborations between policymakers, employees, employers, and researchers regarding the design and implementation of ALMPs—and indeed labor market policies in general—can prove to be a fruitful approach. Lastly, the efficacy of ALMPs might be increased when combined with a WTR approach, as "ordinary" ALMPs can only contribute little to tackling issues of structural unemployment (Kluve 2013). Hence, a combination of ALMPs and WTR might prove to be particularly effective in terms of facilitating the inclusion of unemployed individuals in the labor market.

## 6. Conclusion

The Solidaritätsprämie represents a unique and innovative WTR and ALMP with a multitude of societal, firm-, and employee-specific benefits. Given the unique character of the policy, it can contribute to tackling the productivity trap and thereby help to decouple stable employment from economic growth. Given the economic recession and the soaring unemployment figures in the COVID-19 pandemic, this issue is more pressing than ever. Consequently, the Solidaritätsprämie constitutes a relevant measure since it creates employment opportunities and redistributes work between the overworked and the unemployed.

Despite these benefits, the Solidaritätsprämie is rarely used. Our research sought to shed light on the reasons behind this phenomenon and propose suitable remedies. We conclude that participation in the Solidaritätsprämie is relatively low due to four main issues: (i) absence of direct financial benefits for employers, (ii) firm-specific characteristics, (iii) employees' reluctance toward WTR, and (iv) lack of information and promotion. Accordingly, we propose the following measures to increase participation in the Solidaritätsprämie: (i) financial benefits for employers, (ii) adjustment of the eligibility criteria, and (iii) information and promotion campaigns.

Our research fits into existing literature on WTR and ALMPs insofar as it discusses the reasons, hindrances, and challenges employers may face when working hours are reduced within the scope of the Solidaritätsprämie. Specifically, our analysis seeks to fill relevant research gaps pertaining to employer participation in WTR and ALMP in Austria. Our findings may offer an interesting starting point for future investigations studying the aspects relevant for effective participation in ALMP and WTR policies in general, and the Solidaritätsprämie in particular.

Our findings are based on expert interviews and a comprehensive literature review. Thus, our research is able to reflect on a variety of perspectives on the lacking uptake and popularity of the Solidaritätsprämie in the Austrian labor market. However, this choice of methods essentially limits the scope of our research and consequently, our findings. Since neither employers nor employees were interviewed, their perspectives and practical experiences are not directly reflected in our findings. Rather, their points of view are only indirectly inferred from the experts' insights, which might result in our analysis having biased results. Hence,

giving voice to employees and employers directly may contribute to a more balanced and differentiated analysis of participation in the Solidaritätsprämie.

Another limitation of our study is the general lack of information and practical experience regarding the implementation of the Solidaritätsprämie. This lack of knowledge is also somewhat reflected in the interviews, as the experts sometimes offered contradictory or even false information on the specificities of the policy. In that regard, it is curious that this limitation of our analysis also happens to be one of our main findings. Future research on the Solidaritätsprämie is highly recommended and expected to reduce some of the surrounding opacity.

WTR policies represent focal policy strategies to tackle a number of socioeconomic issues such as unemployment, unhealthy working conditions, and gendered division of labor. Given the steady rise in labor productivity, we would certainly be well advised to translate this trend into more leisure time rather than to facilitate the expansion of the economic system. This is by no means a new notion but was put forward by John Maynard Keynes as early as 1930. As Keynes reminds us: "The difficulty lies, not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones, which ramify, for those brought up as most of us have been, into every corner of our minds" (1936/2018: vii). Currently, the Solidaritätsprämie clearly represents a missed opportunity to tackle some of the most pressing issues of our time. Indeed, we should not let this opportunity go to waste.

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## Appendix

### Coding scheme

Main category	Subcategory	Sub-subcategory	Definition
Vorstellung Interviewpartner			Background information on interviewee
Kosten und Nutzen	Kosten/Aufwand fur Firma	Administrativer Aufwand interne Implementation (H1a)	Costs of the internal implementation due to administrative procedures, reorganization of shifts, etc.
		Administrativer Aufwand Interaktion AMS (H1b)	Costs of interacting with the AMS during implementation and participation phases
	Nutzen fur Firma	Produktivitat	Benefits for the firm with regard to increased productivity
		Betriebsklima	Benefits for the firm with regard to improved working atmosphere
		Umstrukturierung	Benefits for the firm with regard to reorganization of work
		Wissen	Benefits for the firm with regard to distribution and gain of knowledge
		Finanzieller Nutzen (H1c)	Financial benefits for the firm
	Nutzen fur Arbeitnehmer:innen	Gesundheit	Benefits for the employee with regard to health
		Work-Life-Balance	Benefits for the employee with regard to work-life balance
		Motivation & Zufriedenheit	Benefits for the employee with regard to motivation and happiness
Interaktion AMS Firma	Information AMS (H2a)		Information and promotion provided by the AMS
	Beratung (H2b)		Advice provided by the AMS
	Berucksichtigung Firmeninteressen (H2c)		Consideration of employer interests during the design phase of the policy
Firmenspezifische Charakteristika	Arbeitszeitmodelle		Influence of implemented working time models
	Betriebsrat		Influence of the existence of a works council
	Arbeitnehmer:innen Fluktuation		Influence of staff fluctuation
	Groe (H3a)		Influence of size
	Branche (H3b)		Influence of sector
Arbeitnehmerinnen	Solidaritatsarbeitskrafte	Bereitschaft Arbeitszeitreduktion (H4a)	Willingness of existing employees to reduce their working hours
		Anforderungen AMS	AMS requirements of employees willing to reduce working hours
	Ersatzarbeitskrafte	Alter	Influence of age of potential new employees
		Folgen Langzeitarbeitslosigkeit	Influence of the long-term unemployment of potential new employees
		Verfugbarkeit	Availability of potential new employees
		Qualifikation (H4b)	Qualifications of potential new employees
		Anforderungen AMS (H4c)	AMS requirements of potential new employees
Ideologie & Partikularinteressen			Influence of ideology and particular interest of employers and labor unions
Information	Informationsangebot		Provision of information by sources other than the AMS
	Informationsdefizit		Lack of information by sources other than the AMS





Reform SP	Verbesserungsvorschläge	Potential reforms
	Hindernisse	Obstacles to reforms
	Vorschlag GPA	Facts about and opinions on the proposal of the GPA
Allgemeine Information	Aspekte der Solidaritätsprämie (SP)	Facts about the SP
	Arbeitslosigkeit	General information on unemployment
	Arbeitszeitverkürzung allgemein	General information on working time reduction
	Budget	General information on the budget for the SP
	Corona	Relevance of the SP in light of the COVID situation
	Entstehung	General information on the development of the SP
	Nutzen für Gesellschaft	General information on the benefits of the SP for society as a whole
	Relevante Akteur:innen	General information on relevant actors

### Interview guideline

#### o. Einleitende Fragen:

Einleitendes Statement: Im Jahr 2000 trat die Solidaritätsprämie in Österreich in Kraft. Diese erlaubt es einem Unternehmen die Arbeitszeit mehrerer Beschäftigter zu reduzieren, um dafür eine vormals arbeitslose Person oder einen Lehrling einzustellen.

Was sind die wichtigsten Aspekte der SP (Solidaritätsprämie)?

→ Probing: Welche Institutionen spielen bezüglich der SP eine Rolle?

#### 1. Themenblock: Kosten und Nutzen der SP für Firmen

Wie schätzen Sie die Kosten und den Nutzen der SP für die Firmen ein?

Wie schätzen Sie die administrativen Anforderungen ein?

→ Probing: Wie schätzen Sie den administrativen Aufwand für die Firmen bei der Implementierung der SP ein?

→ Probing nach administrativem Aufwand bei der Interaktion mit dem AMS

→ Probing nach administrativem Aufwand bei der firmeninternen Umsetzung

Welchen Nutzen haben Firmen durch die Teilnahme an der SP?

→ Probing: Was ist der finanzielle Nutzen durch die Teilnahme an der SP?

Ihrer Meinung nach, welche Rolle spielen Kosten und Nutzen für die Entscheidung der Firmen, an der SP teilzunehmen?

→ Probing: Wie schätzen Sie das Verhältnis zwischen Kosten und Nutzen ein?

#### 2. Themenblock: Beziehung/Interaktion AMS-Firma

Erzählen Sie mir bitte etwas über das Informationsangebot zur SP!

→ Probing: Welche Rolle hat das AMS in diesem Zusammenhang?

→ Probing: Werden die Firmen ausreichend über Kosten und Nutzen einer Implementierung informiert?

Ihrer Meinung nach, welche Rolle spielt die Bereitstellung von Informationen für die Entscheidung der Firmen an der SP teilzunehmen?

Wenn eine Firma teilnehmen möchte, was sind die nötigen Schritte?

→ Probing: Erzählen Sie mir bitte etwas über das Beratungsangebot für Firmen bei der Umsetzung!

→ Probing: Wie verläuft der Kontakt der Firmen mit dem AMS bei der Teilnahme?

Ihrer Meinung nach, an welchen Schritten könnte eine Teilnahme scheitern?

Erzählen Sie mir etwas über die Rolle der Interessensvertretungen bei der Entstehung der SP.

→ Probing: Welchen Einfluss hatten Interessensvertretungen auf die Gestaltung der SP?



### 3. Themenblock: Firmenspezifische Charakteristika

Welche Firmen nehmen die SP eher in Anspruch?

- Probing: Welche Rolle spielt die Branche der Firma?
- Warum?
- Probing: Welche Rolle spielt die Groe der Firma?
- Warum?

### 4. Themenblock: Arbeitnehmer:innen und Ersatzarbeitskrafte

Welche Rolle spielen Arbeitnehmer:innen bei der Entscheidung der Firma die SP umzusetzen?

- Probing: Wie schatzen Sie die Bereitschaft der Belegschaft ein die Arbeitszeit zu reduzieren?
- Was sind potenzielle Hindernisse fur Arbeitnehmer:innen ihre Arbeitszeit zu reduzieren?
- Welche Rolle spielt der Lohnentfall bei dieser Entscheidung?

Auf welche Herausforderungen stoen Firmen bei der Suche nach Ersatzarbeitskraften?

- Probing: Welche Rolle spielt die Qualifikation der potenziellen Ersatzarbeitskrafte?
  - Probing: Wie schatzen Sie die administrativen Voraussetzungen fur die Einstellung der Ersatzarbeitskrafte ein?
  - Dauer der Arbeitslosigkeit & Erhalt von Arbeitslosengeld
- Ihrer Meinung nach, welche Rolle spielen diese Herausforderungen fur die Entscheidung der Firmen an der SP teilzunehmen?

### 5. Themenblock: Verbesserungsvorschlage

Was ist Ihre Meinung zur SP?

Wie schatzen Sie die Inanspruchnahme der SP ein?

Was konnte man Ihrer Meinung nach an der SP verbessern?

→ Probing: Kennen Sie den Vorschlag der Gewerkschaft der Privatangestellten Druck, Journalismus, Papier (GPA-djp)?

Was halten Sie von diesem?

Was steht einer potenziellen Reform der SP im Weg?

Mochten Sie abschlieend noch etwas hinzufugen?

