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**The importance of popular images of target groups**

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**Abstract:** Since the early 1990s governments throughout the OECD area have been told and acknowledged that high levels of structural unemployment, which primarily has to do with supply side problems, haunt their economies. In most countries the policy response has been reforms that mark a shift from ‘passive’ to ‘active’ labour market policy. Even though one finds large cross-national variations in the implemented ‘active’ labour market policy they all seem to share two common characteristics; 1) the first group exposed to the new policies and the group exposed to the harshest policies was young people on social assistance and 2) as the target group gradually came to include ‘ordinary’ unemployed, most countries made exceptions for the oldest unemployed. The article argues that this striking policy convergence has to do with the public perception of the target groups. The article substantiates this argument 1) by giving a theoretical explanation for the different popular images of target groups and 2) by showing - using a national Australian sample - that these general popular images influence the way the public wants ‘active’ labour market policy to be conducted.

### **Acknowledgement**

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### **Introduction**

High levels of unemployment have been a large problem for most OECD countries since the mid 1970s. The OECD Job Study concluded in 1994 that *‘it is an inability of OECD economies and societies to adapt rapidly and innovatively to a world of rapid structural change that is the principle cause of high and persistent unemployment’* (OECD 1994a:vii). In other words the extraordinarily high level of unemployment experienced since the mid 1970s was caused by structural circumstances and not simply by lack of demand in times of recession. The explanations about the causes of this structural unemployment can roughly be divided into external and internal. The external explanations focus on fundamental changes in the production structure caused by economic globalisation and technology, which leads to mismatch problems on the labour markets. This line of thinking was for example very clear at the Lisbon Summit of the European Council in 2000, where it was concluded in the final memorandum that *‘the European Union is confronted with a quantum shift resulting from globalisation and the challenges*

*from a new knowledge-driven economy*' (The European Council 2000:1). The internal explanations focus on inflexible labour markets caused by corporatism and highly developed European welfare states (OECD 1994b: 51, 211, 265). This inflexibility turns into a huge problem when meeting the challenge of globalisation, and the old policy responses are no longer effective. The point is that due to mismatch problems on the European labour markets, traditional Keynesian demand side policy would only generate inflation. Firms would simply compete for the already employed workers who are suited to the post-industrial labour market, which leads to increasing wages and thereby inflation. And unemployed would remain unemployed due to insufficient qualifications and work incentives; at least this is how the argument goes.

Taken this problem definition as point of departure most OECD countries have implemented a number of labour market reforms aiming at reducing the level of structural unemployment. Using the language of policy makers themselves the changes can be characterised as a shift from 'passive' to 'active' labour market policy aimed at re-integration of the unemployed into the labour market. Within the OECD area the reforms were guided and monitored by the 'OECD job strategy', which was one of the organisations largest projects in the 1990s. Within the European Union a framework for guiding and monitoring the labour market reforms in the different countries was also established. However, it is widely recognised that the new 'active' labour market policies came in many different varieties (Lødemel & Trickey, 2000; OECD 1998). These substantial cross-national differences can be given many different explanations e.g. the colour of the government in power, the previous social and active labour market policy in place, the level of experienced unemployment, the strength of unions etc. Another typically explanation is that countries follows different labour market trajectories because they belong to different welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1996, 2000).

Nevertheless, these 'active' labour market reforms, which seem to be more and more diverse, the more one looks at them, share two common features. Firstly, in almost all countries the group first exposed to the new policy measures and the group exposed to the harshest measures was young people on social assistance, typically below 25 years old. Secondly, as the target group for the new active labour market policy gradually came to include 'ordinary' insured unemployed, most countries made exceptions for older unemployed, typically those aged above 50 years. In some countries the older were included in the target group but often on a much more voluntary basis.

In table 1 we have provided examples of such special treatment of respectively young and older unemployed in four selected Western countries. The countries are selected so each type of welfare regime is presented. At the same time we have looked for countries that have made a significantly shift from 'passive' to 'active' policies. From the social democratic welfare regimes we pick Denmark, as she in recent year has been the frontrunner for activation policies in the Nordic countries (e.g. Albrekt

Larsen, 2002). In the conservative regimes we do not find as well developed activation policies. However, following the so-called Hartz-commissions Germany has recently introduced some of the most comprehensive measures. From the liberal regimes we pick Britain, where a shift from 'passive' to 'active' policies were a major part of the third way rhetoric. We also include Australia because survey data from the Australian case will be used in the further analyses. Furthermore, a comprehensive OECD study, 'Innovations in labour market policies: The Australian way' (2001), has actually made the Australian case internationally known.

*Table 1: Special conditions for young and old unemployed found in Denmark, Britain, Australia and Germany.*

Examples of tighter conditions for young unemployed	Examples of looser conditions for older unemployed
<p>Denmark:<sup>1</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1990: Mandatory activation for 18-19 years old on social assistance.</li> <li>- 1998: unskilled under the age of 25 only paid half of normal unemployment benefit.</li> </ul>	<p>Denmark:<sup>1</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1992: A special early retirement scheme for older unemployed. From 55 years, later from 50 years.</li> <li>- 1994: Extended period of unemployment benefit for unemployed above 50 years.</li> <li>- 2000: Possible to free unemployed aged 58 and 59 from mandatory activation.</li> </ul>
<p>Britain:<sup>2</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1986: Introduced Income support gives lower benefits to 18-24 years old.</li> <li>-1988: Exclusion of almost all under the age of 18 from eligibility to unemployment support.</li> <li>- 1990: Removal of student from the unemployment risk pool.</li> <li>- 1996: Reduction in benefit level for claimants aged 18-24 (by 20 %).</li> <li>- 1998: New Deal program for young under 25 years.</li> <li>- 1999: New Deal Partner program made compulsory for under 25 years old</li> </ul>	<p>Britain:<sup>2</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1981: Higher Supplementary Benefit for unemployed over 60-year olds who choose to early retire.</li> <li>- 2002: 45 years old and above freed from mandatory New Deal for Partners.</li> </ul>
<p>Australia:<sup>3</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1995: Youth Training Allowance conditioned on participation in so-called 'approved activities'.</li> <li>- 1997: Mandatory participation for 18 – 24 years in 'work for the dole'.</li> <li>- 1998: Mutual Obligation activities for 18 to 34 years old (tougher obligation for 18-24 years old).</li> </ul>	<p>Australia:<sup>3</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1994: Age limit for 'relaxed reporting' and removal for requirement to search for fulltime work reduced from 55 years to 50 years.</li> <li>- 1994: A special 'Mature Age Allowance' not subject to 'activity test' for long-term unemployed above 60 years.</li> </ul>
<p>Germany:<sup>2</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2003: Tighter suitability criteria for young unemployed.</li> <li>- 2004/05: Unemployed under 25 years only entitled to benefits (ALG II) if offers of training, suitable employment or other integration measures accepted.</li> </ul>	<p>Germany:<sup>2</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1985: Older than 49 years entitled to longer benefit period (ALG – Arbeitslosengeld). The age limit later reduced to 43, 42 and later increased to 45 (1998) and 55 (2004).</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup>Source: Goul Andersen, Albrekt Larsen & Bendix Jensen, 2003.

<sup>2</sup>Source: Clasen & Clegg (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup>Source: OECD, 2001: 166-169.

From reading table 1 it is clear that across regimes or call it across countries with different labour market trajectories we find similarity in terms of the presence of harsher (or at least more conditioned) rules for young unemployed and softer rules for older unemployed. We assume that the same is true for most of the other Western countries. Even though nobody (to our knowledge) specifically have made cross-national comparisons of special treatment of the different groups of unemployed, the more general descriptions of the 'active turn' in other Western countries point in the same direction (see e.g. Clasen & Clegg, forthcoming, for the French case; Lødemel & Trickey, 2000. for the Dutch, Norwegian and American case).

The question is how we can explain this striking policy convergence, which seems to be part of a general overall pattern. It is far from obvious, from an economic point of view, why especially the young on social assistance should be exposed to the new policies. Firstly, young people below 25 years that claim social assistance are almost the least likely to get 'stuck' in the system; normally they claim benefit for a limited period before they enter education or employment. Secondly, in the short-run this group is not the most important in order to prevent the bottlenecks, which increase wages. Most of the group below 25 years, who are unemployed, simply do not (yet) have the required skills to prevent this source of inflation. Neither is it logical, from an economic point of view, why the older group should be treated so much 'softer'. On the one hand one could of course argue that the return from 'investing' in this group due to less remaining time on the labour market is smaller. But on the other hand such policies as tougher entitlement criteria, reduction in benefit duration, sanctions for not being active job seeker etc., do not cost that much. It is the 'softer' policies of training and education that cost a lot of money and in many countries the old were not excluded from these activities. Finally, one could argue that it would have been much more obvious that policy makers' primary focus had been on long-term unemployed. This is the group, which due to loss of human capital and maybe motivation, constitute the real structural problem. Therefore we suggest that the policy convergence should not only be explained by an economic logic but also by a political logic.

### **The new politics of the welfare state and popular images of target groups**

First of all we turn to the growing literature on the political dynamic of welfare state retrenchment. Pierson, being one of the pioneers (Pierson, 1994, 1996 and 2001), has argued that retrenchment is a political exercise in blame-avoidance. Retrenchment means taking something away from someone, and those suffering these (concentrated) losses are likely to react negatively. Furthermore, a body of survey studies consistently show that the welfare state is popular with the electorate in general (e.g. Bean & Papkis, 1993; Svallfors,

1997) i.e. not only the ‘losers’ but also the general public are likely to react negatively to retrenchment. Thus, according to this literature the tension between necessary reforms pursued by the policy elite and a reluctant constituency form a major conflict line in modern politics. The literature often use the label ‘the new politics’ of the welfare state in contrast to ‘the old politics’ of the 1960s and 1970s, where politicians fought about getting credit for the pursued welfare policy. From that perspective it is not surprising that most countries made labour market reforms where those exposed to the harshest measures had a negative popular image. Neither is it surprising that in the process of gradually expanding the target group the older was not exposed to the harshest elements of the new policies. For a number of reasons, discussed below, unemployed above 50 years have a much more popular public image. This argument combines the ‘new politics literature’ and the emphasis policy analyses put on the popular images of the target groups (e.g. Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

A promising way to theorise the popular images of different target groups is found in the literature on deservingness. Within this framework it becomes obvious that young people on social assistance have difficulties in meeting what seem to be a number of almost universal deservingness criteria. If we follow the review in Oorschot (2000) five so-called deservingness criteria are of importance.

- 1) Control (the less control over neediness, the higher degree of deservingness).
- 2) Need (the greater the level of need, the higher degree of deservingness).
- 3) Identity (the higher the degree of group belonging, the higher degree of deservingness).
- 4) Attitude (the more grateful, docile and compliant, the higher degree of deservingness).
- 5) Reciprocity (the higher previous or future payback, the higher degree of deservingness).

Both previous studies and Oorschot’s Dutch study shows that the issue of control is especially important. Thus, the key to explain the finding that the public in general express little concern about unemployed is that this group is perceived to be much more in control of their situation than e.g. disabled, sick, and pensioners. In De Swaan’s (1988) historical study of the modern welfare state, he labelled the criterion ‘disability’. In Cook’s (1979) study of Americans’ views on supporting the poor, she labels the criterion ‘locus of responsibility’. Finally, Will (1993) also found that the most important deservingness criterion was the degree to which the problems facing poor families were beyond the

immediate control of the individual family. Following this logic is understandable why a number of empirical studies have found a connection between level of unemployment and the public assessment of causes of poverty, i.e. poverty is being much more explained by 'lack of will power' or 'laziness' in times with low unemployment (Albrekt Larsen, forthcoming, & Quadagno 2003, Gallie & Paugam 2002, Eardley & Matheson, 1999). In our case one could further argue that the job or education possibilities of young unemployed are typically seen as being much better than those for the older unemployed. It gives the impression that the young are more in control of the situation than older unemployed. Naturally, the level of need also plays a part but here it is more difficult to see the difference between young and old unemployed. People aged above 50 typically have no children living home and sometimes their housing expenditures are low due to a debt-free house.

The identity criterion refers to the importance of feeling a shared identity with the groups who are to be supported. Using the label of proximity, De Swaan argues that the boundary of the area can be defined by kinship relations, by place of residence, or more generally, by the boundaries of a certain identity group, like 'our family', 'our town', 'our church' or 'our people'. Lack of shared identity with young social assistant claimants can be expected to be quite common. The active rhetoric of mutual obligation often comes with an undertone of teaching the unemployed the right work ethic. This fits perfectly with young social assistance claimants. It is more difficult to apply on older unemployed, which probably have learned the societal norms through a long life.

The attitude criterion refers to the way recipients respond to public support. De Swaan uses the term 'docility' to highlight that poor who hide their misery and ask for nothing are seen as more deserving than those who make impudent demands. Cook uses the terms 'gratefulness' and 'pleasantness'. Here the popular image of an ungrateful youth (maybe even with long hair), which have been spoiled since they were kids, again speaks against the deservingness of young social assistance claimants and in favour of the old unemployed. Finally, the attitude criteria can be linked to a more general criterion of reciprocity, e.g. such behaviour as 'the smile of thanks'. Oorschot argues that needy who at the moment are unable to reciprocate might fulfil this criterion if they have contributed to 'us' in the past, or are likely to do so in the future. Here the young social assistance claimants again scores very badly, as they clearly never have contributed. And it is obvious that unemployed aged above 50 years are likely to score much higher on this dimension. After all most of the unemployed above 50 years have contributed to the common 'us' in the past.

These deservingness criteria have primarily been used to explain variations in public support for welfare policy across different areas. Coughlin's pioneering cross-national study from 1980 found what he calls 'a universal dimension of support' because the ranking of the deserving groups followed the same line in all the countries included in his

study. The public was most in favour of support for old people, followed by support for sick and disabled, needy families with children and unemployed. The group given least support were people on social assistance. Petterson (1995), Oorschot (2000), Oorschot & Arts (2005), Oorschot (2005) and others have confirmed this ranking and often explained it with differences in the fulfilment of the deservingness criteria. These studies seem to support our argument but they do not provide empirical findings that allow us to distinguish between different groups of unemployed. Neither do they directly deal with the issue of new labour market policies. This lack of knowledge set the agenda for the empirical analyses below.

However, before turning to the empirical part it is worth noticing that the previous empirical studies seem to find a strong degree of consensus about these criteria. The deservingness studies have not focused much on that part but based on the Dutch study Oorschot concludes *‘that “social division” or “class” variables like income level and whether one is working or on benefit do not play a role in the conditionality of solidarity’* (Oorschot 2000:40). In our context it is an important finding as it suggests that the typical defenders of the rights of unemployed, the unions and the leftwing parties, actually have members and constituencies that would find harsher policies towards specific groups quite fair. And the other way around that the right wing parties typically in favour of harsher treatment of unemployed actually might have members and constituencies that would find ‘softer’ policies toward specific groups quite fair. It is explored below whether this kind of broad consensus, which would increase the likelihood of specific policies to specific groups, is present.

## **Data and method**

In order to substantiate the argument we will use survey data that distinguish between different groups of unemployed and more explicitly focus on the implementation of active labour policy. As no cross-national OECD country data set is available we have to rely on a more modest national survey from Australia. The items we use are found in the survey on *Coping With Economic and Social Change*, which was conducted by the Social Policy Research Centre in 1999. 4041 questionnaires were sent out to a random national sample of adults. 2403 questionnaires were returned, which (allowing for a small number that were returned indicating that the person had moved) gives an effective response rate around 62 per cent. In general this is a fair result for a national postal survey but in order to adjust for possible drop out bias a weight (comparing the survey with census data) was constructed. This weight is used in the analyses even though it only makes very little differences to the presented results. Further introduction to the data can be found in Saunders, Thomson & Evans (2000).

In the following we will only use the items that measure the requirements respectively young unemployed (below 25 years), old unemployed (above 50 years), and long-term unemployed (of any age) according to public should be asked to fulfil in order to receive unemployment benefits. As Australia has no ordinary insurance based unemployment system but only a state run means tested program, we do not have to distinguish between insured and non-insured. Naturally, this is also a limitation to the data. But on the positive side this ‘isolation’ of the age-effect actually makes a critical case for older unemployed, i.e. do even older non-insured unemployed have a much more positive popular image than young non-insured unemployed?

For each group the respondents were asked about the opinion towards nine different requirements. The first section to come makes a simple overall descriptive presentation of the results, which to some extent replicates Eardley, Saunders & Evans’s (2000) more general presentation of the results. The second section analyses the level of consensus behind these attitudes. We look at the different attitudes across political parties and across respondents with different chances of being exposed to the new policies. From the discussion above we expect the consensus across different groups to be quite high.

### ***Different requirements to different groups***

As a small prologue to the primary analyses, table 2 shows how the public respond to the question ‘what do you think about the overall amount of support the Government provides for the following groups of unemployed at the moment’. 58 per cent answered that ‘not enough’ was done for unemployed aged 50 or above. The share answering ‘not enough’ was 32 per cent for long-term unemployed (of any age) and 22 per cent for unemployed below 25 years. In terms of ‘doing too much’ the distinction between young and long-term unemployed was less clear. 26 percent found that ‘too much’ support was provided to the young unemployed, compared to 24 percent for the long-term unemployed. Nevertheless, the general pattern fits very nicely with our theoretical expectation.

*Table 2: Public views on government support for young unemployed, old unemployed, and long-term unemployed (percentages).*

	Too much support	About right support	Not enough support	Don’t know	Total
Young single unemployed (under 25)	26	39	22	14	100
Older unemployed (over 50)	2	26	58	15	100
Long-unemployed (of any age)	24	26	32	16	100

Unweighted n = 2331 to 2359

These figures could naturally be influenced by actual differences in the provided support rather than being reflections of the fulfilment of the suggested deservingness criteria. As the question asks about 'young single unemployed', our suggested age-effect is also somewhat blurred. Furthermore, as the previous empirical studies of deservingness, it does not tell much about active labour market policy. However, in the following it is shown that the same pattern is found when the public is asked in absolute terms, only asked about 'young unemployed', and when the dependent variable is requirements for getting unemployment benefits. Table 3 shows, which, if any, of nine listed activities unemployed should be required to undertake in order to receive the Australian means-tested unemployment benefits. The requirements are ranked after the difference between the requirements that respectively young and old unemployed might be obliged to fulfil; starting with the largest differences.

*Table 3: Requirement for receiving unemployment benefits. Per cent and average number requirement per group.*

Requirements	1: Young	2: Older	3: Long-term	Percentage point		
	unemployed (under 25)	unemployed (above 50)	unemployed (of any age)	differences 1-2	differences 1-3	differences 2-3
Take part in a 'work for the dole' scheme	83	38	72	+45	+11	-34
Move to another town or city to find work	49	9	41	+40	+8	-32
Look for work	93	54	81	+39	+12	-27
Complete a 'dole diary' detailing efforts to find work	80	41	71	+39	+9	-30
Change appearance (e.g. get a haircut)	71	34	58	+37	+13	-24
Improve reading and writing skills	84	51	75	+33	+9	-24
Accepted any paid job offered	65	33	65	+32	0	-32
Undergo a training or re-training program	82	62	81	+20	+1	-19
Undertake useful work in the community	78	63	77	+15	+1	-14
Average number of requirements	6.9	3.9	6.2			
Standard deviation	2.2	2.7	2.7			

n = 2373, missing = 30.

Note: Since respondents were simply asked to tick a box if they thought a particular requirement should apply, it is possible that some of those failing to tick a box were not positively disagreeing with the proposition but were just not responding. In order to allow for this, we follow Eardley, Saunders and Evans (2000:18) and only treat those cases where respondents also failed to complete other related questions on the same page of the as missing. These amounted to only 1.2 per cent of cases. Of those cases counted as valid, only 0.4 ticked no boxes.

The largest difference was found on the issue of required participation in a 'work for the dole' scheme. 'Work for the dole' is the Australian name for a compulsory activation scheme, which was introduced in 1997. 83 per cent of the population answered that young unemployed should be required to participate in these schemes in order to receive benefits. Only 38 per cent answered that unemployed above 50 years should meet the same requirement. It gives the percentage difference of +45 (83-38) seen in the fourth column. The second largest difference was found on the issue of moving to another town or city to find work. 49 per cent answered that young should be required to do so. The figure for old unemployed was only 9 per cent. Thirdly, there is a remarkable difference in public

attitudes to active job search. 93 percent answered 'looking for a job' should be required from the young. For the old the figure was just 54 per cent. Thus, 46 percent of the Australians actually indicate that job search should not be a requirement for old unemployed. Percentage differences above 30 were also found on such requirement as a) complete a 'dole diary' (which was a new measure introduced in 1996), b) change appearance (e.g. get a haircut), c) improve reading and writing skills, and d) accept any paid job offered. Smaller but still significant differences were found for training and re-training (percentage difference = +20) and community work (percentage difference = +15). Summarized as the average number of requirements, the figure is 3.9 for old unemployed and 6.9 for young unemployed (see table 3). Thus, so far it is safe to conclude that we see a remarkable difference when the public respectively is asked about the old and young unemployed.

However, In order to be sure that these two target groups really distinguish themselves, as our theoretical argument suggests, it is useful to use the category 'long-term unemployed (of any age)' as a reference category. The percentages differences shown in the last two columns of table 2 indicate that we find the expected pattern. In the second last column we find positive differences on 8 out of the 9 items. Thus, as expected the public is more inclined to put requirements on the young unemployed than on the long-term unemployed. The differences are fairly large and clearly statistical significant when it comes 'take part in a work for the dole scheme', 'move to another town or city', 'look for work', 'complete a dole diary', 'change appearance', and 'improve reading and writing skills'. When it comes to 'accept any paid job', 'undergo training', and 'community work' no significant difference was found between young unemployed and long-term unemployed. Summarized as the average number of requirements the figures are 6.2 for long-term unemployed and 6.9 for the young unemployed. As to the differences between long-term unemployed and old-unemployed the pattern is even clearer. On four out of the nine questions the percentage differences were above 30. On three questions, the percentage differences were above 20. And on the remaining two questions the percentage differences were above 10.

These overall findings give strong support to our theoretical argument. The political costs of introducing harsher labour market policy seem modest when it comes to unemployed below 25 years. Actually, it almost seems as a politics of credit claiming rather than a politics of blame avoidance. One eight out of the nine suggested requirements a clear majority indicated that young unemployed could be asked to fulfill them. A majority even indicated that young unemployed might be required to get a haircut in order to receive benefits. It is also clear that expanding harsh labour market policy to unemployed aged above 50 years could potentially have large political costs. On five out of the nine suggested requirement a clear majority did not think old unemployed could be asked to

fulfill them. Not even a rather 'soft' policy such as an obligation to take part in an activation scheme was supported by a majority.

### **The public consensus about treating unemployed citizens differently**

From a theoretical point of view one could argue that the political costs of harsher labour market policy cannot be directly calculated from the majority-minority arguments just presented. The majority might be in favor of a given policy but their incentives to mobilize political support are limited. To put it boldly, the majority does not make demonstrations that demand harsher labour market policy. In contrast the group affected by a given policy could potentially mobilize against it and thereby potentially generate large political costs. Nevertheless, this section argues that it is not the case when it comes to the different treatment of young and old unemployed. We argue that the self-interest argument does not apply because the public judgment of deservingness is rooted in a moral logic that is broadly shared. As already mentioned we also broaden the perspective somewhat by looking at attitudes of the electorate of the two major parties. One could suggest that left-wing voters could be mobilized against the harsher treatment of young unemployed and right wing voters could be mobilized against the soft policy towards the old unemployed. Nevertheless, again we suggest that it is not the case, as these attitudes are believed to be rooted in deservingness judgments that are shared across party lines. If we can be proved right in these suggestions it further supports the argument of modest political costs connected to introducing harsher policy towards young unemployed and large political costs connected to expanding harsher policy to the group of old unemployed.

We start out with the broad approach and look at the attitudes of the electorate of the two major parties. We distinguish between those who generally vote for the main left-wing party, the Labor party, and those who generally vote for the main right-wing party, the Liberal party, or the smaller right-wing party, the National party. Finally, we have a group of others, which include voters for the Australian Democrats, swing voters and others. In table 4 the requirements are listed after the percentage differences between leftwing voters and rightwing voters when asked about requirements of young unemployed. As expected the rightwing voters are more in favor of requirements than the leftwing voters. Only when it comes to 'looking for job' was the difference modest. However, it is striking that still a clear majority of leftwing voters in eight out of nine cases is in favor of the suggested requirements. Even a majority of leftwing voters think that unemployed below 25 years could be asked to get a haircut in order to receive benefits. Only on the requirement of moving to another city do we not find a majority in favor of one of the suggested requirements. Thus, even among the labor votes does harsher labor market politics towards young unemployed seem to be a winning strategy and opposing it

being a losing strategy. Among the rightwing voters there is no doubt that it is a winning strategy.

*Table 4: Requirements in order to receive benefits, respectively for young unemployed (below 25) and old unemployed (above 50+), answers distributed among main political groups*

	Requirements to young unemployed (under 25)			Requirements to old unemployed (50+)		
	Left-wing voters	Right-wing voters	Others	Left-wing voters	Right-wing voters	Others
Change appearance (e.g. get a haircut)	66	83	69	26	39	38
Take part in a 'work for the dole' scheme	75	91	83	29	47	42
Undertake useful work in the community	72	86	80	53	70	70
Improve reading and writing skills	79	89	85	44	52	57
Move to another town or city to find work	45	58	47	7	13	11
Complete a 'dole diary' detailing efforts to find work	76	85	79	36	47	43
Accepted any paid job offered	64	74	62	29	40	35
Undergo a training or re-training program	79	85	83	59	62	63
Look for work	92	94	94	49	56	59
N unweighted	777	810	638	777	810	638

When it comes to old unemployed we find the opposite situation. Among the left-wing voters imposing harsher requirement is clearly a losing-strategy. At least if it includes such measures as requiring old unemployed to 'change appearance', 'take part in work for the dole scheme', 'move to another town', 'complete a dole diary', and 'accept any jobs'. A majority is in favor of 'training' (59 percent) but even on such soft measures as 'doing community service' (53 per cent) and 'looking for work' (49 percent) is the leftwing voters split in halves. The rightwing voters are more ready to put requirements on unemployed

above 50 years. But again a clear majority in favor can only be found when it comes to such 'soft' requirements as 'undertake community service' (70 per cent) and 'undergo a training or re-training program' (62 per cent). On the requirements of 'take part in a work for the dole scheme' (47 per cent), 'improve reading and writing skills' (52 per cent), 'complete a dole diary' (47 per cent), and 'look for work' (56 per cent) the rightwing voters are more or less split in halves. Especially, it is remarkable that only 54 per cent of rightwing voters support the basic requirement of job search. Still one could argue that among liberal voters there could be an electoral basic for conducting a harsher labor market policy towards those above 50 years. But it is clear that the labor party would have very strong incentives to oppose such a policy and probably could impose large political costs on a liberal government conducting such a policy. Thus, the overall argument is that for both major parties it is winning strategy to support harsher policy towards young and a losing strategy to support harsher policy towards old unemployed.

Finally, we turn to the attitudes of the groups most directly affected by the labor market policies in question, i.e. those who could have a 'concentrated' interest in mobilizing for or against the policies in question. First of all that means unemployed below 25 years and unemployed between 50 and 65 years (65 years is the official Australian retirement age for men). However, even though the sample is rather large we only have respectively 9 and 12 respondents in each of these subgroups. This is not sufficient for a reliable analysis. Therefore we add the 29 employed respondents aged below 25 that answered that they 'worry all the time' or 'worry sometimes' about losing their job. This gives us 38 young respondents in - or in perceived risk of - unemployment. In the same way we add the 114 aged between 50 and 64 years, which worries about losing their job. It gives us a group of 124 old respondents in - or in perceived risk of - unemployment (one old unemployed had not answered the question of job security and one had not answered the requirement questions, therefore we do not end up with 126 respondents). The results are shown in table 5.

The most important overall result is the striking lack of difference between those in risk of being exposed to the requirements and the other groups. If we compared the attitudes of the 'young risk group' and the attitudes of the other age groups we find percentage differences below 10, except in one case. In terms of 'looking for job' (98 per cent), 'improve reading and writing skills' (86 per cent), 'undergo a training or re-training program' (84 per cent), and 'complete a dole diary' (82 per cent) the 'young risk group' actually seem a bit more in favor of establishing requirements for unemployment benefits. In terms of 'take part in a work for the dole program' (75 per cent), 'take part in community work' (71 per cent), 'change appearance' (68 per cent), and 'move to another town' (45 per cent) the 'young risk group' is slightly less in favor. Moving to another city and acceptance of any paid job offered (40 per cent) is the only two items where we do not find a majority of the 'young risk group' being in favor. And only in the latter case - the

acceptance of any paid job - do we find a large difference between the risk group (40 per cent) and the other age groups (66 per cent). Thus, as long as new active labor market policies do not force young to move to another city or take any paid job offered, the results indicate that not even those exposed to the policy will mobilize against it. And if they were to mobilize against e.g. the requirement of taking any paid job offered they would not have a good case; a majority in the electorate support that requirement. Resistance to a requirement of moving to another town would be a better case. Nevertheless, our overall interpretation is that the target group actually imposes the moral logic of the deservingness criteria on it selves.

*Table 5: Requirements in order to receive benefits, respectively for young unemployed (below 25) and old unemployed (50+), answers distributed among risk groups (unemployed or in risk of unemployment), others in the same age group, and other age groups.*

	Requirements to young unemployed (under 25)			Requirements to old unemployed (50+)		
	Risk group between 18-24	Others between 18-24	Other age groups	Risk group between 50-64	Others between 50-64	Other age groups
Change appearance (e.g. get a haircut)	68	74	71	35	33	34
Take part in a 'work for the dole' scheme	75	82	83	39	39	38
Undertake useful work in the community	71	80	79	60	64	63
Improve reading and writing skills	86	82	84	48	45	53
Move to another town or city to find work	45	51	49	11	7	10
Complete a 'dole diary' detailing efforts to find work	82	79	80	37	37	42
Accepted any paid job offered	40	62	66	41	34	32
Undergo a training or re-training program	84	87	82	64	54	64
Look for work	98	93	92	53	53	54
N unweighted	38	163	1981	124	373	1685

The same is the case when we look at the differences between the 'old risk group' (being unemployed or fearing losing current job) and the other age groups. On eight out of the nine requirements the percentage difference is below 6. The only noteworthy difference is the fact that a larger share of the 'old risk group' (41 per cent) than of the other age groups (32 per cent) actually thinks that old should take any paid job offered. In the 'old risk group' a majority support such requirements as 'undertake training or re-training' (65 per cent) and 'undertake community work' (60 per cent). On the requirement to 'look for work' (53 per cent) and 'improve reading and writing skills' (48 per cent) the target group

is – as the rest of the electorate – split in halves. And again in line with the other age groups a majority in the ‘old risk group’ oppose ‘acceptance of any job’ (41 per cent), ‘taking part in work for dole schemes’ (39 per cent), ‘completing a dole diary’ (37 per cent), ‘changing appearance’ (35 per cent), and ‘mowing to another city’ (11 per cent). Thus, if an active labor market policy where to impose such measures on the group of older unemployed we would expect the group to mobilize. And they would potentially have a very strong case because the other age groups share the same moral logic, which imply that unemployed above 50 years should not be subject to such measures.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

The overall aim has been to explain two common features in the OECD countries’ shift from ‘passive’ to ‘active’ labor market policy. In general the shift from ‘active’ to ‘passive’ comes in many different varieties but typically 1) those first exposed to the new policies and those exposed to the harshest measures were young people on social assistance (typically below 25 years) and 2) as the active labor market policy was extended to include ‘ordinary’ unemployed many countries made special rules for the old unemployed (typically aged above 50 years or 55 years). Theoretically, we explained this convergence by combining the ‘new politics theory’ of blame avoidance and the literature on deservingness. The point was that the group of young people on social assistance had very large difficulties in fulfilling five central deservingness criteria and therefore the political cost of introducing harsher labor market policy towards this groups were modest. In contrast older unemployed fulfilled a number of the deservingness criteria and therefore the political costs of exposing this group to a harsher labor market policy were quite high. In our opinion this political logic seems more obvious than any economic reason behind the striking policy convergence.

We were not able to support the argument by cross-national data but based on an Australian survey we were able to illustrate the suggested political logic. In the Australian data we saw a very large difference in the public attitudes towards unemployed aged below 25 years and unemployed aged above 50 years. In the former case a clear majority, even within the target group and even among those who typically vote for the leftwing party, was in favor of introducing rather tough requirements in order to receive benefits. Thus, in electoral terms introducing harsher policy towards this group was clearly a winning strategy and opposing it clearly a losing strategy. In the latter case a majority, even within other age groups and in many cases even among the rightwing voters, was against imposing harsher requirements on unemployed aged above 50 years. Thus, expanding harsher active labor market policy to this group was clearly a losing strategy and opposing it a winning strategy. And in the Australian case we do not even speak out

older unemployed, who have paid earmarked contribution through an insurance system, which is the case in most other OECD countries. As Australia do not have an insurance system, we speak about a group, which in other countries would be labeled social assistance claimants above 50 years. Thus, actually it is a 'conservative' case we have investigated. The previous empirical findings within the deservingness literature clearly suggest that had the older been insured, the difference in the public images of the target groups would probably have been even larger. Thus, the findings from Australia clearly suggest that a political logic might explain why the new active labour market policies treat subgroup of unemployed so differently.

Naturally, it is up for discussion too what extent we can generalize from the Australian case to the whole OECD area. One could ask whether the results only are valid under the given Australian business cycle conditions. As mentioned we do have empirical findings that show a relationship between level of unemployment and public explanations of poverty. However, firstly, at the time of interview the unemployed rate was 6.9 in Australia (OECD standardized, around 7.5 according to national definition), which is a middle positions compared to other the OECD countries. Thus, it is not extremely low which could have contributed to a tough judgment of unemployed. Neither is it extremely high, which could have contributed to a soft judgment of the unemployed. Secondly, further analyses of the data actually suggest that the judgment of the young unemployed and the old unemployed is not strongly affected by the business cycle. There turns out to be no relationship between the respondent's perceptions of the level of unemployment and the number of requirement put on young unemployed. The same is the case when it comes to requirement put on older unemployed, except a decline in the number of requirements when the respondents believed that unemployment rate was above 12 per cent. However, asked about the requirements of long-term unemployed (of any age) the expected relationship with perception of unemployment level could be found, i.e. the higher perceived unemployment rate the fewer requirements imposed on long-term unemployed (see Eardley, Saunders, and Evans, 2000:23 for exact figures). The same connection between perceptions of employment chances and general support for social assistance has been found in the Danish case (Albrekt Larsen, forthcoming:chapter VIII). Our interpretation of this exception to rule - when asked about young and old - is that the moral logic is so strong that it applies independently of the business cycle. Thus, even though there are (believed to be) no jobs, tough requirements should be put on the young and even though there are jobs to get, the unemployed above 50 years should not exposed to harsh policies. Thirdly, as the public attitudes towards old and young are measured at the same time one should not expect the differences between the groups to be affected by the business cycle, only the overall levels.

One could also ask whether the results are valid across welfare regimes (Esping-andersen, 1990). We do have reasons to believe that liberal welfare regimes

generate more reluctant attitudes towards unemployed and poor (Albrekt Larsen, forthcoming). However, firstly, the electorate in Australian is known to have more egalitarian attitudes than the electorate in USA, which typically serve as the country that comes closest to the ideal type liberal regime. In Feather's classic study from 1974, which replicated Feagin's American study (1972), he concluded that the Australians were less inclined than the Americans to explain poverty with individual causes. Secondly, even though the overall toughness towards poor and unemployed is larger in liberal regimes, we have reasons to believe that the differences in the judgment of young unemployed and old unemployed found in Australia are rooted in a number of deservingness criteria that have been proven to apply across at the Western countries. Therefore we dare to argue that in order to understand the way active labor market policy is implemented, not only in Australia but also in most of the other OECD countries, it is absolute crucial to take the popular images of the target groups into account.

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