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## Third order fiducial predictions for Drell–Yan at the LHC

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The Drell–Yan process at hadron colliders is a fundamental benchmark for the study of strong interactions and the extraction of electro-weak parameters. The outstanding precision of the LHC demands very accurate theoretical predictions with a full account of fiducial experimental cuts. In this letter we present a state-of-the-art calculation of the fiducial cross section and of differential distributions for this process at third order in the strict fixed-order expansion in the strong coupling, as well as including the all-order resummation of logarithmic corrections. Together with these results, we present a detailed study of the subtraction technique used to carry out the calculation for different sets of experimental cuts, as well as of the sensitivity of the fiducial cross section to infrared physics. We find that residual theory uncertainties are reduced to the percent level and that the robustness of the predictions can be improved by a suitable adjustment of fiducial cuts.

*Introduction.*— The fine understanding of Quantum Chromodynamics (QCD) demanded by the physics programme of the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) has led to the impressive development of new computational techniques to achieve precise predictions for hadronic scattering reactions. Among these, the production of a lepton pair (the Drell–Yan process) [1] arguably constitutes the most important standard candle at hadron colliders. The precise data collected at the LHC enables a broad spectrum of high-profile applications to different areas of particle physics, such as the extraction of Standard Model (SM) parameters [2–6], parton densities of the proton [7], and the exploration of beyond the Standard Model scenarios [8, 9]. Today, the theoretical description of this important reaction reaches the highest level of accuracy. Fixed-order perturbative predictions in QCD, obtained as an expansion in the strong coupling  $\alpha_s$ , are known up to third order beyond the Born approximation, i.e. next-to-next-to-next-to-leading order (N<sup>3</sup>LO), for the Drell–Yan cross section and rapidity distribution calculated inclusively over the phase space of QCD radiation [10–13]. Moreover, next-to-next-to-leading order (NNLO) corrections for the production of a Drell–Yan pair in association with one QCD jet have been computed in Refs. [14–23]. Similarly, electro-weak (EW) corrections are known up to next-to-leading order (NLO) [24–33] and mixed QCD–EW at NNLO [34–45]. The description of kinematical distributions sensitive to the emission of near-infrared QCD radiation features large logarithms of the transverse momentum of the Drell–Yan pair, and demands in addition the resum-

mation of radiative corrections at all orders in the strong coupling [46–52]. Today such calculations have been performed up to next-to-next-to-next-to-leading logarithmic (N<sup>3</sup>LL) accuracy [53–57], also including the analytic constant terms up to  $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s^3)$  in Refs. [58–60], enabled by the perturbative ingredients from Refs. [61–77]. Additional sources of logarithmic corrections have been considered [78–84], and found to have a moderate numerical impact. The modelling of effects beyond collinear factorisation, relevant for low-mass Drell–Yan production, has also been studied (see e.g. Refs. [85–90]). Finally, the high experimental accuracy for this process makes it an ideal laboratory for the development of state-of-the-art event generators [91–96].

Despite this outstanding progress, the accurate description of experimental data is challenged by the presence of fiducial selection cuts in the measurements, whose inclusion in theoretical calculations can potentially compromise the stability of the perturbative expansion [97–100]. An initial estimate of the N<sup>3</sup>LO Drell–Yan cross section with an account of experimental cuts was presented in Refs. [58, 101] using the  $q_T$ -subtraction formalism [102], albeit without a complete assessment of the theoretical and methodological uncertainties. The conclusions of the above study are discussed in detail in the supplementary material to this letter [103].

In this letter, we present state-of-the-art predictions both for the fiducial Drell–Yan cross section and for differential distributions of the final-state leptons. We exploit this calculation to carry out, for the first time, a

thorough study of the robustness of these theory predictions in the presence of different sets of fiducial cuts. We also present a detailed analysis of the reliability of the computational method adopted, and show that reaching a robust control over the involved systematic uncertainties requires an excellent stability of the numerical calculation in deep infrared kinematic regimes.

*Methodology.*— The starting point of our calculation for the production cross section  $d\sigma_{\text{DY}}$  of a Drell–Yan lepton pair, differential in its phase space and in the pair’s transverse momentum  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$ , is the formula:

$$d\sigma_{\text{DY}}^{\text{N}^3\text{LO}+\text{N}^3\text{LL}} \equiv d\sigma_{\text{DY}}^{\text{N}^3\text{LL}} + d\sigma_{\text{DY}+\text{jet}}^{\text{NNLO}} - [d\sigma_{\text{DY}}^{\text{N}^3\text{LL}}]_{\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s^3)} \quad (1)$$

where  $d\sigma_{\text{DY}}^{\text{N}^3\text{LL}}$  represents the  $\text{N}^3\text{LL}$  resummed  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$  distribution obtained in Ref. [59] with the computer code `RadISH` [52, 104, 105], including the analytic constant terms up to  $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s^3)$ ; the quantity  $[d\sigma_{\text{DY}}^{\text{N}^3\text{LL}}]_{\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s^3)}$  is its expansion up to third order in  $\alpha_s$ , and  $d\sigma_{\text{DY}+\text{jet}}^{\text{NNLO}}$  is the differential  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$  distribution at NNLO, obtained with the `NNLOJET` code [15, 19, 20]. Eq. (1) is finite in the limit  $p_T^{\ell\ell} \rightarrow 0$ : by integrating it inclusively over  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$  one can obtain predictions differential in the leptonic phase space at  $\text{N}^3\text{LO}+\text{N}^3\text{LL}$  perturbative accuracy, allowing for the inclusion of fiducial cuts. An important challenge in the evaluation of the integral of Eq. (1) over  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$  is given by the fact that both  $d\sigma_{\text{DY}+\text{jet}}^{\text{NNLO}}$  and  $[d\sigma_{\text{DY}}^{\text{N}^3\text{LL}}]_{\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s^3)}$  diverge logarithmically in the limit  $p_T^{\ell\ell} \rightarrow 0$ , and only their difference is finite. Guaranteeing the cancellation of such divergences requires high numerical precision in the NNLO distribution  $d\sigma_{\text{DY}+\text{jet}}^{\text{NNLO}}$  down to very small values of  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$ . Setting  $d\sigma_{\text{DY}+\text{jet}}^{\text{NNLO}} - [d\sigma_{\text{DY}}^{\text{N}^3\text{LL}}]_{\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s^3)} = 0$  for  $p_T^{\ell\ell} \leq p_T^{\text{cut}}$  introduces a slicing error of order  $\mathcal{O}((p_T^{\text{cut}}/m_{\ell\ell})^n)$ , which is further enhanced by logarithms of  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$  and requires  $p_T^{\text{cut}}/m_{\ell\ell}$  to be very small to ensure a good control over this systematic uncertainty. If one integrates inclusively over the leptonic phase space one has  $n = 2$ , while the presence of fiducial cuts in general leads to the appearance of linear terms with  $n = 1$  [100, 106–108]. Such linear corrections can be resummed at all orders in Eq. (1) [56] by applying a simple recoil prescription [109] to  $d\sigma_{\text{DY}}^{\text{N}^3\text{LL}}$ , and their inclusion would in principle allow for a larger  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$  in the calculation. These effects are accounted for in Eq. (1), as discussed in Ref. [59]. As a consequence, our  $\text{N}^3\text{LO}+\text{N}^3\text{LL}$  fiducial predictions obtained by integrating Eq. (1) are only affected by a slicing error of order  $\mathcal{O}((p_T^{\text{cut}}/m_{\ell\ell})^2)$ .

The perturbative expansion of the  $\text{N}^3\text{LO}+\text{N}^3\text{LL}$  fiducial cross section to third order in  $\alpha_s$  leads to the  $\text{N}^3\text{LO}$  prediction as obtained according to the  $q_T$ -subtraction formalism [102]. In this case, the outlined procedure to include linear power corrections below  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$  in the  $\text{N}^3\text{LO}$  computation is analogous to that of Refs. [101, 110]. Since the fiducial cross section can be computed up to

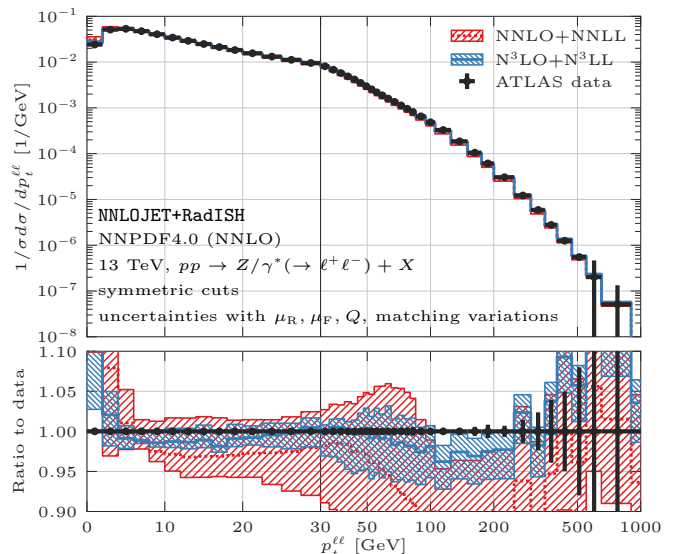


FIG. 1. Fiducial  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$  distribution at  $\text{N}^3\text{LO}+\text{N}^3\text{LL}$  (blue, solid) and  $\text{NNLO}+\text{NNLL}$  (red, dotted) compared to ATLAS data from Ref. [113]. The binning is linear up to 30 GeV and logarithmic above.

$\text{NNLO}$  using the `NNLOJET` code, which implements a subtraction technique [111, 112] that does not require the introduction of a slicing parameter, in the fixed-order results quoted in this letter we apply the above procedure only to the computation of the  $\text{N}^3\text{LO}$  correction, while retaining the  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$ -independent result up to NNLO. This effectively suppresses the slicing error in our fiducial  $\text{N}^3\text{LO}$  cross section to  $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s^3 (p_T^{\text{cut}}/m_{\ell\ell})^2)$ .

The problematics related to the presence of linear power corrections can be avoided by modifying the definition of the fiducial cuts in such a way that the scaling of the power corrections be quadratic across most of the leptonic phase space. In the following we present a calculation of Eq. (1) and of the fiducial cross section both for the standard (*symmetric*) cuts adopted by LHC experiments [113, 114] as well as for the modified (*product*) cuts proposed in Ref. [100]. This state-of-the-art calculation allows us to assess precisely the effect of different types of fiducial cuts on the theoretical prediction for the cross section, as well as on the performance of the computational approach adopted here.

*Results.*— We consider proton–proton collisions at a centre-of-mass energy  $\sqrt{s} = 13$  TeV. We adopt the `NNPDF4.0` parton densities [115] at NNLO with  $\alpha_s(M_Z) = 0.118$ , whose scale evolution is performed with `LHAPDF` [116] and `Hoppet` [117], correctly accounting for heavy quark thresholds. We adopt the  $G_\mu$  scheme with the following EW parameters taken from the PDG [118]:  $M_Z = 91.1876$  GeV,  $M_W = 80.379$  GeV,  $\Gamma_Z = 2.4952$  GeV,  $\Gamma_W = 2.085$  GeV, and  $G_F = 1.1663787 \times 10^{-5}$  GeV $^{-2}$ . We consider two fiducial volumes, in both of which the leptonic invariant mass win-

Order	$\sigma$ [pb] Symmetric cuts		$\sigma$ [pb] Product cuts	
	N <sup>k</sup> LO	N <sup>k</sup> LO+N <sup>k</sup> LL	N <sup>k</sup> LO	N <sup>k</sup> LO+N <sup>k</sup> LL
0	721.16 <sup>+12.2%</sup> <sub>-13.2%</sub>	—	721.16 <sup>+12.2%</sup> <sub>-13.2%</sub>	—
1	742.80(1) <sup>+2.7%</sup> <sub>-3.9%</sub>	748.58(3) <sup>+3.1%</sup> <sub>-10.2%</sub>	832.22(1) <sup>+2.7%</sup> <sub>-4.5%</sub>	831.91(2) <sup>+2.7%</sup> <sub>-10.4%</sub>
2	741.59(8) <sup>+0.42%</sup> <sub>-0.71%</sub>	740.75(5) <sup>+1.15%</sup> <sub>-2.66%</sub>	831.32(3) <sup>+0.59%</sup> <sub>-0.96%</sub>	830.98(4) <sup>+0.74%</sup> <sub>-2.73%</sub>
3	722.9(1.1) <sup>+0.68%</sup> <sub>-1.09%</sub> ± 0.9	726.2(1.1) <sup>+1.07%</sup> <sub>-0.77%</sub>	816.8(1.1) <sup>+0.45%</sup> <sub>-0.73%</sub> ± 0.8	816.6(1.1) <sup>+0.87%</sup> <sub>-0.69%</sub>

TABLE I. Fiducial cross sections for the symmetric (2a) and product (2b) cuts both at fixed perturbative order and including all-order resummation.

dow is  $66 \text{ GeV} < m_{\ell\ell} < 116 \text{ GeV}$  and the lepton rapidities are confined to  $|\eta^{\ell^\pm}| < 2.5$ . The transverse momentum of the two leptons is constrained as

$$\text{Symmetric cuts [113]:} \quad |\vec{p}_T^{\ell^\pm}| > 27 \text{ GeV}, \quad (2a)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Product cuts [100]:} \quad & \sqrt{|\vec{p}_T^{\ell^+}| |\vec{p}_T^{\ell^-}|} > 27 \text{ GeV}, \\ & \min\{|\vec{p}_T^{\ell^\pm}|\} > 20 \text{ GeV}. \end{aligned} \quad (2b)$$

The central factorisation and renormalisation scales are chosen to be  $\mu_R = \mu_F = \sqrt{m_{\ell\ell}^2 + p_T^{\ell\ell 2}}$  and the central resummation scale is set to  $Q = m_{\ell\ell}/2$ . In the results presented below, the theoretical uncertainty is estimated by varying the  $\mu_R$  and  $\mu_F$  scales by a factor of two about their central value, while keeping  $1/2 \leq \mu_R/\mu_F \leq 2$ . In addition, for the resummed results, for central  $\mu_R = \mu_F$  scales we vary  $Q$  by a factor of two around its central value. Moreover, a matching-scheme uncertainty is estimated by including the full scale variation of the additive matching scheme of Ref. [59] (27 variations that comprise the one of the central matching scale  $v_0$  introduced in Eq. (5.2) of that article). The final uncertainty is obtained as the envelope of all the above variations, corresponding to 7 and 36 curves for the fixed-order and resummed computations, respectively. In the fiducial cross sections quoted below at N<sup>3</sup>LO and N<sup>3</sup>LO+N<sup>3</sup>LL, we do not consider the uncertainty related to the missing N<sup>3</sup>LO parton distributions, which are currently unavailable.

In Fig. 1, we start by showing the transverse-momentum distribution of the Drell–Yan lepton pair in the fiducial volume (2a), obtained with Eq. (1), compared to experimental data [113]. In the figure we label the distributions by the perturbative accuracy of their inclusive integral over  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$ . Our state-of-the-art N<sup>3</sup>LO+N<sup>3</sup>LL prediction provides an excellent description of the data across the spectrum, with the exception of the first bin at small  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$  which is susceptible to non-perturbative corrections not included in our calculation. We point out that the term  $d\sigma_{\text{DY+jet}}^{\text{NNLO}} - [d\sigma_{\text{DY}}^{\text{N}^3\text{LL}}]_{\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s^3)}$  in Eq. (1) gives a non-negligible contribution even for  $p_T^{\ell\ell} \leq 15 \text{ GeV}$ . The residual theoretical uncertainty in the intermediate  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$  region is at the few-percent level, and it increases to about 5% for  $p_T^{\ell\ell} \gtrsim 50 \text{ GeV}$ . A more accurate description of the

large- $p_T^{\ell\ell}$  region requires the inclusion of EW corrections, which we neglect in our calculation.

We now consider the fiducial cross section with symmetric cuts (2a). In order to gain control over the slicing systematic error, we choose  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$  as low as 0.81 GeV. In the first column of Tab. I, denoted as N<sup>k</sup>LO, we show the fixed-order results to  $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s^k)$ . The second column of Tab. I displays the result obtained including resummation effects. In the fixed-order case, the theoretical uncertainty at N<sup>3</sup>LO, estimated as discussed above, is supplemented with an estimate of the slicing uncertainty obtained by varying  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$  in the range [0.45, 1.48] GeV and taking the average difference from the result with  $p_T^{\text{cut}} = 0.81 \text{ GeV}$ . In the resummed case, we quote the total theoretical uncertainty including also the matching scheme variation. In both cases the statistical uncertainty is reported in parentheses.

We observe that the new N<sup>3</sup>LO corrections decrease the fiducial cross section by about 2.5%, and the final prediction at N<sup>3</sup>LO has larger theoretical errors than the NNLO counterpart, whose uncertainty band does not capture the N<sup>3</sup>LO central value. This indicates a poor convergence of the fixed-order perturbative series for this process, which is consistent with what has been observed in the inclusive case in Refs. [10–12]. In the resummed case, the theoretical uncertainty is more reliable and within errors the convergence of the perturbative series is improved. The presence of linear power corrections is also responsible for the moderate difference between the fixed-order and the resummed prediction for the symmetric cuts (2a), which in turn indicates a sensitivity of the cross section to the infrared region of small  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$ . This ultimately worsens further the perturbative convergence of the fixed-order series thereby challenging the perspectives to reach percent-accurate theoretical predictions within symmetric cuts.

A possible solution to this problem [100] is to slightly modify the definition of the fiducial cuts as in Eq. (2b) in order to reduce such a sensitivity to infrared physics. We present for the first time theoretical predictions up to N<sup>3</sup>LO and N<sup>3</sup>LO+N<sup>3</sup>LL for this set of cuts, reported in the third and fourth column of Tab. I. The relative difference between the fixed-order and resummed calculations for the fiducial cross section never exceeds the

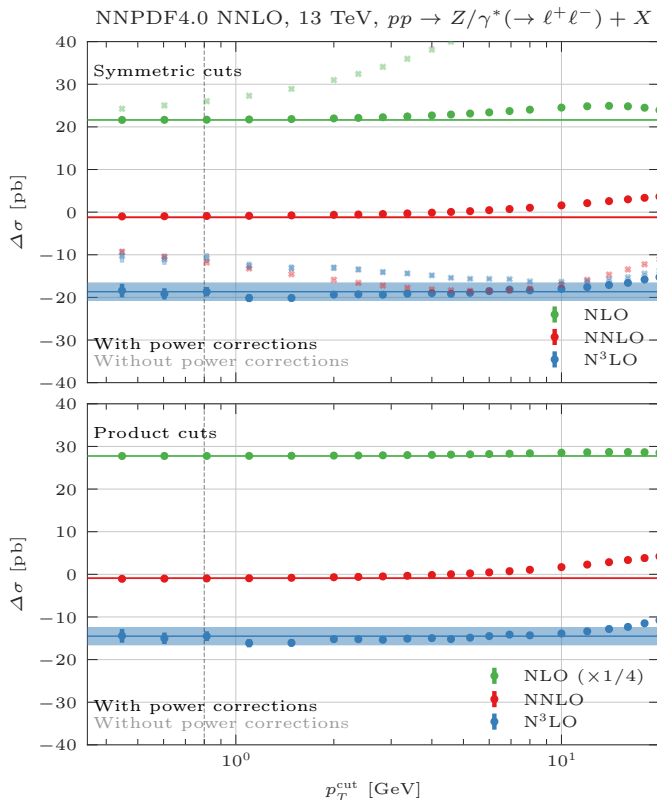


FIG. 2. Dependence of the extracted  $N^k$ LO fiducial cross sections shown in Tab. I on the  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$  infrared parameter, both for the symmetric (2a) and product (2b) cuts. In the latter case, the NLO correction has been rescaled by a factor  $1/4$ . The dashed vertical line indicates our default value  $p_T^{\text{cut}} = 0.81$  GeV. The blue band is obtained by combining linearly the statistical and slicing errors.

0.04%, which indicates that the predictions with product cuts can be computed accurately with fixed-order perturbation theory. Nevertheless, we still observe a more reliable estimate of the theoretical uncertainties when resummation is included.

In order to study the stability of our predictions against variations of the infrared parameter  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$ , in Fig. 2 we show the dependence of the  $N^k$ LO correction (i.e. the  $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s^k)$  term in the expansion of the fiducial cross section) on  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$  down to  $p_T^{\text{cut}} \simeq 0.4$  GeV. In the case of symmetric cuts (2a), we observe that the inclusion of the linear power corrections is essential to reach a plateau at small  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$ , achieving the necessary independence of the result on the slicing parameter. We thus obtain an excellent control over the estimate of the slicing error quoted in Tab. I. Fig. 2 also clearly shows that the omission of such linear corrections leads to an incorrect result for the fiducial cross section computed with the  $q_T$ -subtraction method, unless  $d\sigma_{\text{DY+jet}}^{\text{NNLO}}$  can be computed precisely down to  $p_T^{\text{cut}} \ll 1$  GeV. Conversely, in the case of the product cuts (2b), we observe a much milder dependence of the  $N^k$ LO correction on  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$ , and the further inclusion

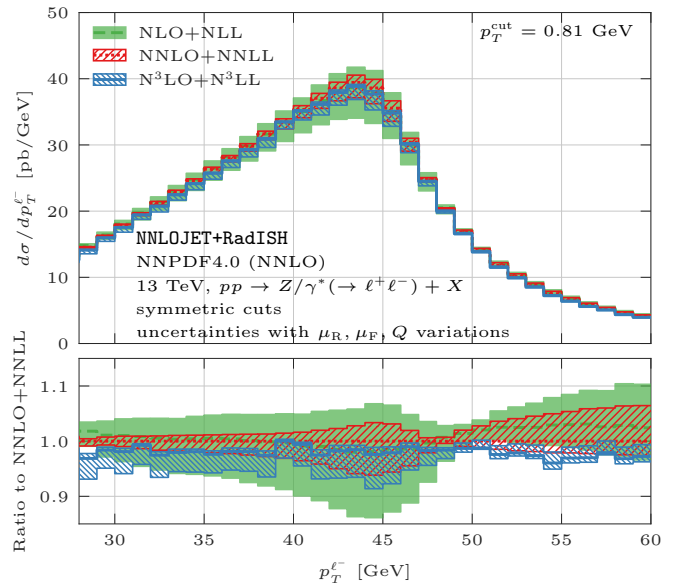


FIG. 3. Lepton transverse momentum distribution up to  $N^3$ LO+ $N^3$ LL order in the fiducial phase space (2a). The labels indicate the order in the fiducial cross section.

of power corrections does not lead to any visible difference, consistent with the fact that such corrections are quadratic in most of the phase space [100]. As an additional sanity check, we have repeated the test of Fig. 2 for each individual flavour channel contributing to the  $N^3$ LO Drell–Yan cross section. The results are collected in the supplementary material [103], together with a discussion on alternative approaches to  $q_T$  subtraction employing a fitting procedure, and a comparison to the literature.

Finally, the computation presented in this letter allows us to obtain, for the first time,  $N^3$ LO+ $N^3$ LL predictions for the kinematical distributions of the final-state leptons. A particularly relevant distribution is the leptonic transverse momentum, which plays a central role in the precise extraction of the  $W$ -boson mass at the LHC [2, 6]. Fig. 3 shows the differential distribution of the negatively charged lepton at three different orders, for our default value  $p_T^{\text{cut}} = 0.81$  GeV. Unlike for the fiducial cross section, the inclusion of  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$  resummation in this observable is crucial to cure local (integrable) divergences in the spectrum due to the presence of a Sudakov shoulder [119] at  $p_T^{\ell-} \sim m_{\ell\ell}/2$ . The figure shows an excellent convergence of the perturbative prediction, with residual uncertainties at  $N^3$ LO+ $N^3$ LL of the order of a few percent to the right of the shoulder, which grow at most up to the  $\mathcal{O}(5\%)$  level for  $p_T^{\ell-} \lesssim m_{\ell\ell}/2$ .

*Conclusions.*— In this letter, we have presented state-of-the-art predictions for the fiducial cross section and differential distributions in the Drell–Yan process at the LHC, through both  $N^3$ LO and  $N^3$ LO+ $N^3$ LL in QCD. These new predictions are obtained through the combination of an accurate NNLO calculation for the produc-

tion of a Drell–Yan pair in association with one jet, and the N<sup>3</sup>LL resummation of logarithmic corrections arising at small  $p_T^{\ell\ell}$ . The high quality of these results allowed us to carry out a thorough study of the performance of the computational method adopted, reaching an excellent control over all systematic uncertainties involved. We presented predictions for two different definitions of the fiducial volumes, relying either on symmetric cuts (2a) on the transverse momentum of the leptons, or on a recently proposed product cuts (2b) which is shown to improve the stability of the perturbative series. Our results display residual theoretical uncertainties at the  $\mathcal{O}(1\%)$  level in the fiducial cross section, and at the few-percent level in differential distributions. These predictions will play an important role in the comparison of experimental data with an accurate theoretical description of the Drell–Yan process at the LHC.

*Acknowledgments.*— We are grateful to Luca Buoncore, Massimiliano Grazzini, and Gavin Salam for discussions and constructive comments on the manuscript, and to Aude Gehrmann–De Ridder, Tom Morgan, and Duncan Walker for their contributions to the  $V$ +jet process in the NNLOJET code. This work has received funding from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under grant 396021762-TRR 257, from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) under contracts PZ00P2\_201878, 200020\_188464 and 200020\_204200, from the UK Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) through grant ST/T001011/1, from the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MIUR) through grant PRIN 20172LNEEZ, and from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme grant agreement 101019620 (ERC Advanced Grant TOPUP).

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## Supplementary material

In this appendix we provide additional details on the consistency checks of the calculation presented in the letter, as well as on comparisons to other variants of the  $q_T$ -subtraction method adopted in the literature.

### Dependence on $p_T^{\text{cut}}$ for the individual flavour channels

Here we provide a breakdown of the results shown in Fig. 2 into the different flavour channels contributing to the N<sup>3</sup>LO cross section with the fiducial cuts of Eq. (2a). The results are displayed in Fig. 4, where we observe a clear independence of the extracted N<sup>k</sup>LO corrections on  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$  for each individual channel. An analogous independence of  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$  is observed with the fiducial cuts of Eq. (2b), not shown here. This constitutes a strong consistency check of our calculation.

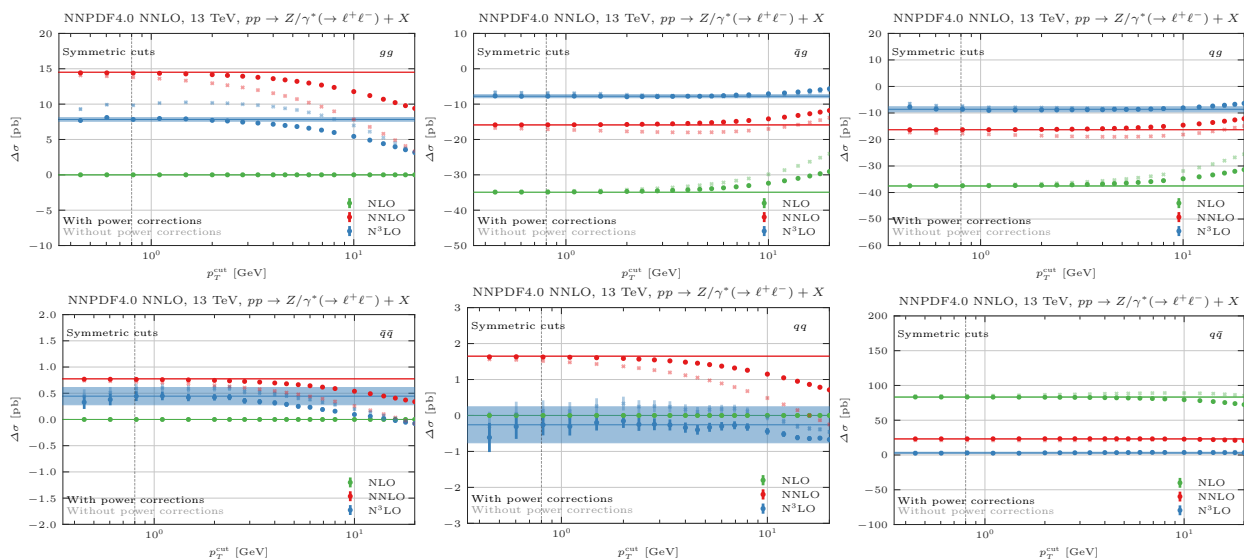


FIG. 4. Dependence on  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$  of the extracted N<sup>k</sup>LO fiducial cross sections for the individual flavour channels. The blue band is obtained by combining linearly the statistical and slicing errors.

### Comparison to the literature

We repeat our N<sup>3</sup>LO calculation using the  $d\sigma_{\text{DY+jet}}^{\text{NNLO}}$  predictions and setup of Ref. [55] to compare with Refs. [58, 101]. These references employ the same data to extract the N<sup>3</sup>LO fiducial cross section with symmetric cuts for the central scale choice  $\mu_R = \mu_F = \sqrt{m_{\ell\ell}^2 + p_T^{\ell\ell^2}}$ . Following Refs. [58, 101], we perform the calculation using  $p_T^{\text{cut}} = 4$  GeV with and without linear power corrections. Fig. 5 shows that the omission of linear power corrections as done in Ref. [58] leads to a result for the N<sup>3</sup>LO correction that is off by  $\mathcal{O}(30\%)$ . These linear power corrections are instead accounted for in Ref. [101], although the slicing cut at  $p_T^{\text{cut}} = 4$  GeV is employed already at  $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s)$ . This introduces a systematic slicing error of  $\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s (p_T^{\text{cut}}/m_{\ell\ell})^2)$ , corresponding to a shift of about 2 pb, not quoted in the uncertainty of Ref. [101].

Nevertheless, focusing on the N<sup>3</sup>LO correction alone, we find that the data of Ref. [55] is not of sufficient quality to observe a stable plateau around  $p_T^{\text{cut}} = 4$  GeV, as can be seen in Fig. 5. When applying the procedure described in the letter for the estimate of the residual uncertainty, we find a statistical error of 1.3 pb and a slicing error of 1.5 pb (computed using the range  $p_T^{\text{cut}} \in [3, 5]$  GeV). When combined, the total uncertainty is three times larger than the 0.7 pb that Ref. [101] quotes.

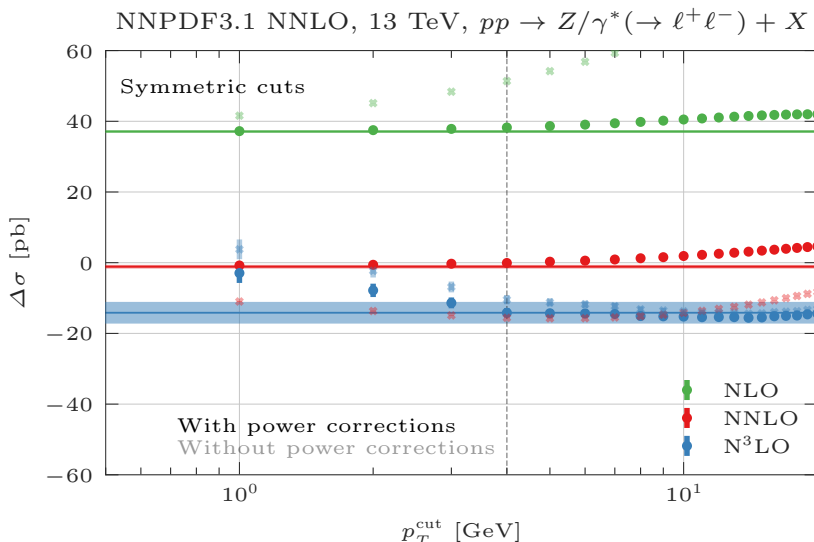


FIG. 5. Dependence on  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$  of the extracted  $N^k$ LO fiducial cross sections using the data from Ref. [55]. The blue band is obtained by combining linearly the statistical and slicing errors. The dashed line indicates  $p_T^{\text{cut}} = 4$  GeV, as used in [58, 101].

### Fit-based implementation of $q_T$ subtraction

As an alternative to choosing a specific  $p_T^{\text{cut}}$ , a fitting procedure can be employed either by extrapolating Fig. 2 of the main letter down to  $p_T^{\text{cut}} \rightarrow 0$  or by analytically integrating a fit function.

In the first method, we directly fit the  $N^3$ LO curve in Fig. 2 in the range  $p_T^{\text{cut}} \in [p_{T,\text{min}}^{\text{cut}}, p_T^{\text{off}}]$  using a parametrisation that follows the known analytic structure of power corrections

$$\Delta\sigma^{\text{N}^3\text{LO}}(p_T^{\text{cut}}) \sim \Delta\sigma_0^{\text{N}^3\text{LO}} + \frac{\alpha_s^3}{(2\pi)^3} \frac{p_T^{\text{cut}2}}{m_{\ell\ell}^2} \sum_{n=0}^5 a_n^{(3)} \ln^n \frac{m_{\ell\ell}}{p_T^{\text{cut}}}, \quad (3)$$

and extract  $\Delta\sigma_0^{\text{N}^3\text{LO}}$ . The lower edge of the fitting range  $p_{T,\text{min}}^{\text{cut}}$  is set to 0.45 GeV. In the second method, we consider a fit up to relatively large  $p_T^{\ell\ell} \leq p_T^{\text{off}}$  values of the residual quadratic power corrections  $d[\Delta\sigma_{\text{DY}}^{\text{non-sing}}]_{\alpha_s^3}$ , which denotes the  $\alpha_s^3$  coefficient of the difference  $d\sigma_{\text{DY+jet}}^{\text{NNLO}} - [d\sigma_{\text{DY}}^{\text{N}^3\text{LL}}]_{\mathcal{O}(\alpha_s^3)}$ . The fiducial cross section is then obtained by performing a slicing calculation with  $p_T^{\text{cut}} = p_T^{\text{off}}$  and adding the analytic integral of the above fit over  $p_T^{\ell\ell} \in [0, p_T^{\text{off}}]$ . In this case, the functional form is

$$d[\Delta\sigma_{\text{DY}}^{\text{non-sing}}]_{\alpha_s^3} \sim \frac{\alpha_s^3}{(2\pi)^3} \frac{p_T^{\ell\ell}}{m_{\ell\ell}} \sum_{n=0}^5 b_n^{(3)} \ln^n \frac{m_{\ell\ell}}{p_T^{\ell\ell}}, \quad (4)$$

with the coefficients  $b_n^{(3)}$  being extracted from the fit.

We perform Markov chain Monte Carlo fits based on generative probabilistic models for the data that facilitate a straightforward marginalisation over nuisance parameters and the propagation of uncertainties and their correlations. The latter are relevant for the extrapolation at the cumulant level, as the integral of  $d\sigma_{\text{DY+jet}}^{\text{NNLO}}$  features large off-diagonal entries in the covariance matrix. In both fitting methods we find that too small values of  $p_T^{\text{off}}$  do not allow for the inclusion of sufficiently many data points to constrain the fit parameters, yielding uncertainties as large as  $\mathcal{O}(100\%)$  for the  $N^3$ LO correction. On the other hand, choosing larger values of  $p_T^{\text{off}} \gtrsim 50$  GeV leads to a more stable determination of the  $N^3$ LO correction, which in both cases is in agreement with the result quoted in Tab. I of the letter within uncertainties. The nominal uncertainty is slightly smaller than the slicing uncertainty obtained with the procedure described in the letter. However, increasing the value of  $p_T^{\text{off}}$  induces a higher sensitivity to yet subleading-power terms in Eqs. (3)–(4), which constitute an additional source of systematic uncertainty that must be reliably assessed. A naive extension of the fitting functional forms to account for an additional tower of next-to-subleading terms increases the number of fitting parameters, ultimately leading to uncertainties which are significantly larger than those quoted in Tab. I. For this reason, we choose to adopt the slicing procedure described in the main letter, which allows for a reliable assessment of all the sources of uncertainty involved.