

European Green Perspectives on Basic Income

Volume II
August 2021

European Green Perspectives on **Basic Income**

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Foreword

Here it is: the second volume of our collection of articles showing different facets and perspectives on basic income (BI)¹. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, the debate around basic income has gained traction over the past year. Across Europe and worldwide, alternative concepts for simple and effective ways to alleviate economic hardship were sought and economic aid programmes were approved; some of which were reminiscent of a partial basic income. For the first time, many people realised that we can all suddenly find ourselves in an economically challenging situation through no fault of our own. In such circumstances, an unconditional basic income may help us to not lose courage, but to instead focus our energies on our own further development and on finding a way out of this crisis.

The Covid-19 pandemic further highlighted and aggravated social injustice and economic inequalities as much as it raised questions on the social responsibility of individuals and solidarity at all levels of society. Politicians in various countries have implemented measures similar to a basic income; many (Green) parties – and their election manifestos – now speak of a basic income; however, in some cases, this is exclusively to the benefit of specific target groups, such as children.

Where does this publication fit into the debate?

Since 2017, the Green European Foundation (GEF) has been observing and helping to shape the discussion advancing universal basic income in Europe and if possible also worldwide. In transnational projects, brochures have been produced, pilot projects evaluated, financing options

debated, videos created for social media, debates and online discussions initiated, an expert advisory board established, networks created and expanded, and an online course developed². The aim of these activities and of this publication is to support initiatives, such as the European Citizens Initiative on basic income³, to initiate debates within and outside Green circles to learn from each other, and to allow an exchange on alternative social policies.

Following the suggestion of the “European Green network of basic income supporters”, we have updated and expanded the Green European Foundation’s publication [European Green Perspectives on Basic Income](#) from 2019 to create this present publication. Similar to the first edition, this second volume aims to provide insights into the discussions around BI in various European countries, – both within the Green movement as well as in the broader public – and contextualises those in historic and cultural prerequisites. In this second volume, we now present articles on countries not previously covered, updates on known projects, as well as contributions linking BI with other pressing issues, such as sustainability, climate protection and climate justice. The more we know about the pilot projects and debates in different countries, the more European and international the discussion becomes, and establishing greater networks and links becomes possible. We can learn from each other if we take the topic of BI further and link it to overcoming the climate crisis, the demand for social justice, and the development of new working time models to respond to digitalisation. This would also open new possibilities for (partially) financing BI, such as through a CO2 tax or – more generally – through a tax on natural resources.

The present compendium begins with eight essays on BI-related topics from three fields: economic, social, and ecological. Liz Fouksman and Baukje Dobberstein focus on financial and tax-related questions. They explain why net versus gross costs of BI are often misunderstood and whether a tax-free allowance could be paid out in advance instead of set off against the tax load after a year’s end. Antje Schrupp and Ute Fischer turn towards social issues and describe the ties between BI and the care crisis on the one hand and those between BI and feminism on the other one. Another four articles by Guy Standing, Vincent Liegey, Mathis Bönte, and Ulrich Schachtschneider respectively then touch upon climate justice and demonstrate how the imposition of various forms of taxes may not only help to reduce carbon emission and the depletion of other resources, but may furthermore allow financing (a partial) BI. These eight essays are followed by reports from sixteen countries depicting current activities regarding basic income in their respective Green Parties or political landscapes more broadly, as well as the discourse at the national level.

We would like to thank our authors for their contributions and our editor, Hannes Mehrer, without whom this publication would not have been possible and to whom we are deeply grateful for the engagement and invested time.

Where do we go from here?

To engage as many people as possible, it is our aim to make this publication available in multiple languages. We want to pick up the ideas and proposals formulated in its contributions in various (online) events and involve our authors at various levels and through public discussions. Furthermore, the Green European Foundation will continue its work on the subject of BI to build networks around the topic and to carry this discussion even further. There is still a lot of work and effort needed to get a true universal basic income off the ground in Europe and worldwide.

Finally, the idea of basic income may be referred to by universal, unconditional, something different or just simply as basic income. What is important are the following four criteria: BI allows (1) political and cultural participation; it is (2) provided as an unalienable right; (3) without means-testing; and (4) without behaviour-testing, so it can be ethical, social and ecological.

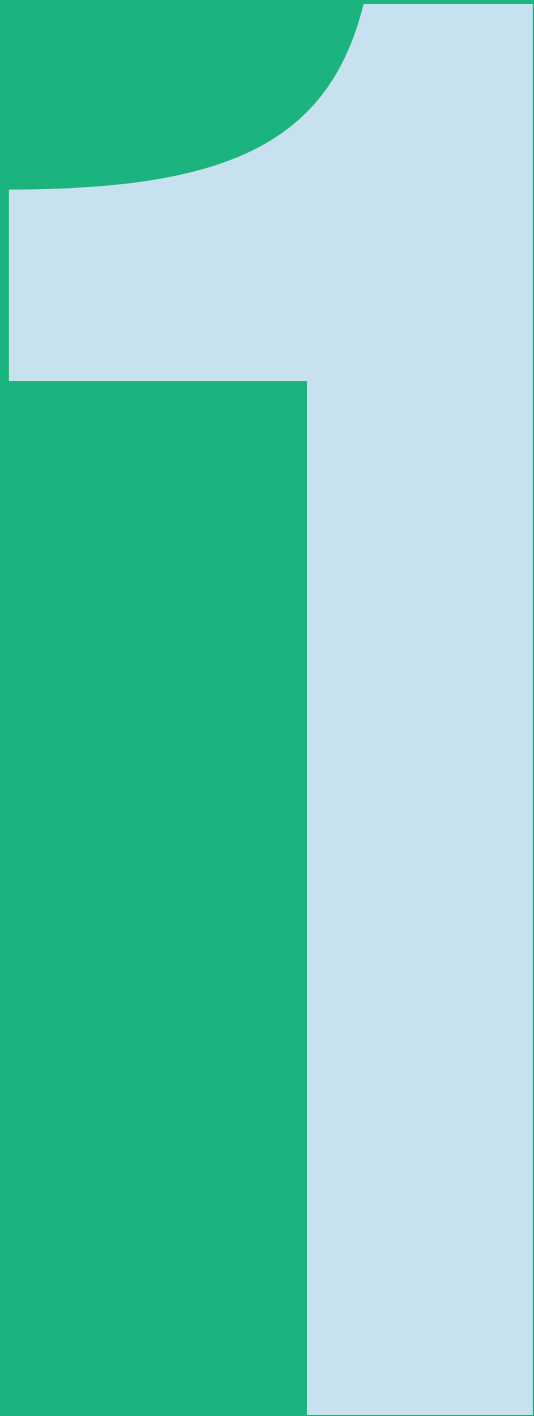
Susanne Rieger

Green European Foundation (GEF) Co-president & Coordinator of the UBI working group of GEF

1 Throughout this publication, different models of a basic income, unconditional or with certain conditions, are discussed. We are therefore speaking about basic income here in the general introduction to this compendium, while the authors specify their different visions and models more in detail in the individual contributions.

2 The free online course on basic income is available in English and Spanish on the Green European Foundation’s online learning platform Green Academy [here](#).

3 <https://eci-ubi.eu/>



**UNIVERSAL
BASIC
INCOME
EMBEDDED
IN A BROADER
CONTEXT**

I. The Economic Dimension

Basic income is affordable. We just need to stop confusing the gross and net cost of UBI.

E. Fouksman

On the surface, universal basic income seems like a simple idea. Indeed, its core appeal is its elegance. Just give everyone a liveable income on a regular basis, no strings, conditions, paperwork or bureaucrats attached. Yet, the most common confusions, questions and critiques that emerge around UBI show that the elegant simplicity of the idea in fact hides subtleties that play on peoples' mathematical and economic intuitions and fallacies. And a lot of these confusions lie around the cost of basic income.

Gross-Net Cost Fallacy

The first of these is what I call the gross-net cost fallacy. At first glance, the cost of a UBI might seem easy to calculate. Most people assume that all one needs to do is multiply the size of the UBI by the population of a country, and voila, the cost: usually a staggeringly large number, used to justify the argument that UBI is unaffordable. Yet, this calculation – and the claim of unaffordability – is incorrect. It only shows the *gross cost*: a number that does not actually tell us anything useful about economic policy and affordability. Instead, we need to be talking about *net cost*.

For a quick example of the difference between the net and gross cost, and why it is net cost that matters, imagine that you're getting a violin lesson. You only have a €20 bill in your pocket, so you give that to your teacher to pay for the lesson. The teacher gives you €5 back as change. What does the lesson cost?

The answer is obvious: €15. The €20 that you first paid (equivalent to the gross cost) is irrelevant – what matters is the amount of money you gave up after the entire transaction was completed. This is the net cost.

Though this might sound like a painfully obvious point, when discussing the cost of basic income, a staggering number of journalists, advocates, social policy makers and even economists do the mathematical equivalent of claiming this violin lesson costs €20.¹ This happens so frequently that this confusion should be considered an economic fallacy of the sort that interests behavioural economists, like sunk cost fallacy² or hyperbolic discounting.³

The number that matters in cost discussions of UBI is the net cost: the amount of money gained by one group of people and lost by another after all taxes and transfers. It transparently measures the redistributive effect of UBI. Just like in the example above, the net and gross cost can be very different. Imagine you receive a €12,000 annual UBI but pay €13,000 in new taxes to fund the policy. You might feel upset that you received such a large new tax bill, but, in fact, that bill is not the actual cost of the new policy to you. What matters is the net cost – the difference between the money transferred to you and the money taxed away – which, in this example, is €1,000. (See Figure 1)

1 Some examples of high-profile economists and economic journalists that have committed the net-gross cost fallacy include: <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2015/05/23/basically-unaffordable>; <https://www.ft.com/content/100137b4-0cdf-11e8-bacb-2958fde95e5e>; <https://www2.project-syndicate.org/commentary/why-universal-basic-income-is-a-bad-idea-by-daron-acemoglu-2019-06>

2 In classical economics and rational choice theory, only future or prospective costs should influence rational decision making, as past costs are already incurred and cannot be undone. However, many people are influenced by past costs (be that of money, time or energy) in decision making – a common example is continuing to invest in a failing business because of the investments that have already been made.

3 Hyperbolic discounting experiments show that many people make economic choices that are inconsistent over time. For example, most people prefer a smaller reward now than a larger reward in one month, but if choosing between a smaller reward in 12 months, or a larger reward in 13 months, they would choose the larger reward in 13 months.

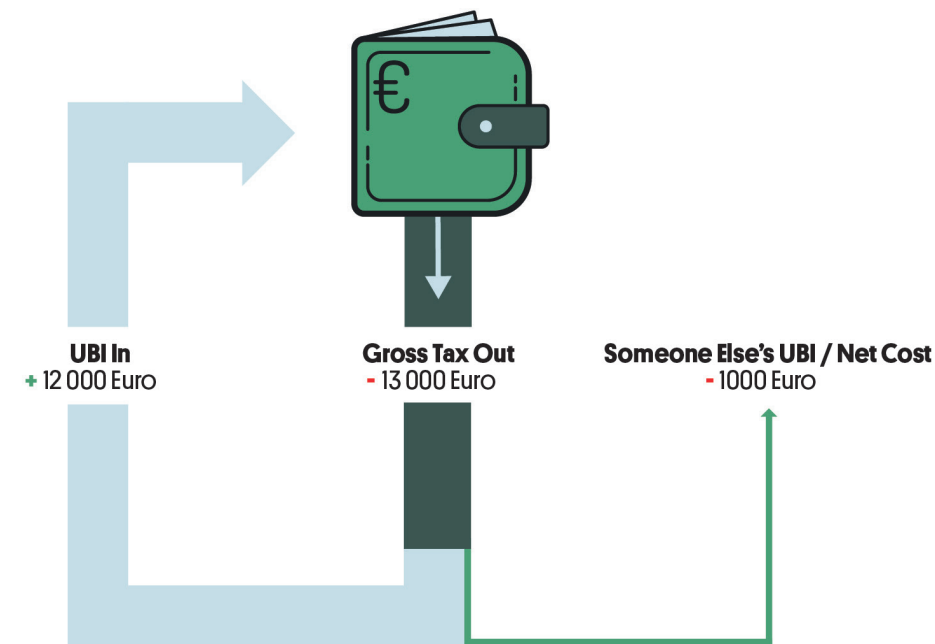


Figure 1 | Gross cost versus net cost: Your country implements a €12,000 UBI and, to help fund it, you have €13,000 in new taxes to pay (the **gross cost** to you). You might think this very expensive – but, in fact, €12,000 of these taxes come right back to you in the form of your €12,000 UBI. The **net cost** to you is then only €1,000.

Understanding the true cost of UBI is predicated on understanding that some people who get a UBI would also fund it. That's true of any universal public goods and services. While state education might be free for all *at the point of service*, some people would be paying quite a lot in taxes to send their kids to state schools – not only covering the cost of their own children, but also paying for the cost of educating the children of those that have less wealth. The same is true of UBI. It is universal in distribution, but it does not *universally* increase disposable income.⁴ *This is because some of the same people who receive a UBI are also the ones funding it.*⁵

The Billionaires' Dilemma

This resolves a connected fallacy around UBI: what I call, 'the billionaires' dilemma'. This is the objection that UBI would benefit rich people who don't need it. This is not, in fact, the case: while rich people would indeed receive their UBI, they would return it via their taxes⁶, which would also fund it for others as well.

In other words, a portion of the population will, via their taxes, return their basic income; and, after all taxes and transfers, their disposable income won't change. Another portion will not only return their basic income, but also pay additional taxes that will fund the basic income of others – these are the net contributors.

⁴ The exception to this is if a national or regional UBI is funded by another country or external institution – for instance, if countries in the global North paid for a UBI in countries in the global South; for example, as reparations for slavery or colonialism.

⁵ Many others have made this point, in particular see: <https://works.bepress.com/widerquist/75/>; <https://medium.com/basic-income/if-we-can-afford-our-current-welfare-system-we-can-afford-basic-income-9ae9b5f186af>; <https://www.scottisantens.com/negative-income-tax-nit-and-unconditional-basic-income-ubi-what-makes-them-the-same-and-what-makes-them-different>

⁶ The easiest way to think about this is via progressive income taxes where the rich pay a higher tax rate on their income. However, the point would hold for any funding scheme for UBI, as long as it's not regressive (i.e., as long as richer people pay more). This includes a carbon tax, a corporate tax, a robot tax, and a wealth tax – all of these would take more money from people who are better off.

After all taxes and transfers, only a segment of people will end up with their income increasing, but those who are paying into the system do have their tax bill offset by the UBI itself. The net cost of UBI measures how much each individual gains or loses when the policy is implemented. And, to calculate this cost, we *must* specify funding.

Consider another simple example: three friends decide to set up a UBI of €10 each amongst themselves. To pay for this UBI, the friends decide to implement progressive 'taxation', where the richest person among them contributes €25 to the collective UBI-pot, the second-richest contributes €5, and the poorest doesn't have to pay any 'taxes' at all. Once offset by receiving their €10 UBI, this means that the net cost of the policy to the richest

person is €15 (€25 - €10), and they are a net contributor. The second person paid in €5 but received €10, so even though they paid into the pot, they are €5 richer due to the policy and are a net beneficiary. And the poorest person didn't pay any 'tax', and is therefore the only one that is a full €10 richer. (See Figure 2)

The net cost of the above UBI example: the amount of money that one group of people actually loses and another gains is the sum of the *net* contributions, which, in this case, is simply the €15 lost by the richest person and gained by the two poorest. This €15 net cost is a fraction of the €30 gross cost of this UBI (and the €25 paid upfront by the richest person). But it's the amount that matters as this is how much money is actually lost from someone's disposable income.

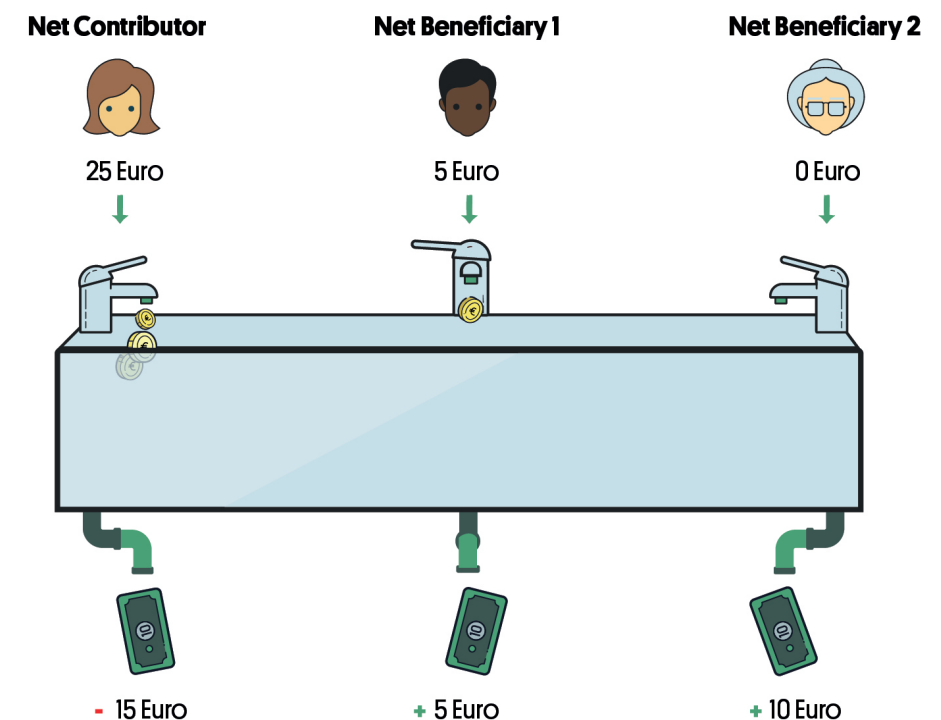


Figure 2 | The billionaire's dilemma: Three friends set up a scheme to fund a basic income for themselves of €10 per person. Although everybody – including the richest of the three (i.e., the 'billionaire') – receives the basic income, the different levels of contribution to the scheme means the richest friend (left) is a net contributor and the others are net beneficiaries (centre and right).

“In other words, a portion of the population will, via their taxes, return their basic income; and, after all taxes and transfers, their disposable income won’t change.”

Universal-vs-Means-Tested Cost Fallacy

These three friends could have gone a different route to achieve the same result. Instead of a €10 UBI for all, they could implement a means-tested transfer policy or negative income tax with an identical cost and redistributory outcome. They could set up a cash transfer where the richest person pays €15 in taxes, and the second richest receives €5 of that payment, and the poorest receives €10. Both the cost and the final outcome are the same: everyone ends up losing or gaining the same amount of money.

This leads us to the third common economic fallacy around the cost of UBI: the intuition that means-tested transfers are cheaper than UBI. This need not be the case. As can be seen in the example above, for every UBI proposal, there is an equivalent means-tested transfer policy or negative income tax that both has the same net cost and the same redistributive effect.

This means that any claims that a negative income tax is inherently *cheaper* than a universal basic income are incorrect – this is equivalent to claiming that $2+2$ is less than $2+123-121$ because the numbers are smaller and there are fewer of them. Studies that claim that universal basic income costs more than negative income tax or another means-tested transfer system are either making the gross-net error, or are comparing two different policies, where the negative income tax is affecting a different set of transfers than the UBI.

As is clear from these three fallacies, we can’t talk about the cost of UBI without talking about funding and taxation. And when talking about implementing new taxes that would pay for UBI, many policy makers and economists like to discuss marginal tax rates. However, research has shown that most people – including quite a few politicians – do not understand the difference between marginal and effective tax rates. This confusion of marginal and effective tax rates is the final cost fallacy.

Marginal-vs-Effective Tax Rate Fallacy

The marginal tax rate is the tax rate paid on one euro of additional income. It’s *not* your overall (or average or effective) tax rate. Imagine you’re a top earner, making €1,000,000 per year, and in your country, the top tax bracket is 50%. How much tax are you paying on the €1,000,000?

The answer is *not* half a million. It’s a weighted average of the tax rates of all the tax brackets used by your country and it is a number that is much lower. High top tax brackets obscure the fact that people can pay far less than this rate in average tax. While this might seem like a self-evident point, a 2013 YouGov poll showed that 48% of respondents did not understand the difference between marginal and average or effective tax rates.⁷ Often this confusion is deepened by conservative politicians, who refer to top marginal tax rates as if they are average tax rates – and it’s hard not to see this as a political tactic against any attempt to increase the top tax bracket.⁸

This confusion is only made worse by discussions of UBI funding that refer to marginal tax rates since marginal tax rates do *not* measure or reflect lump sum transfers. If you receive a UBI, your marginal tax rate can go up and your post-tax income can *also* go up at the same time. This is because you could get a UBI which more than offsets the additional marginal tax.

For example: suppose you earn €500 and live in a society with no taxes. You have €500 of disposable income. Now, suppose you still earn €500, but your country decides to implement a €1,000 UBI and progressive taxation – in this case, a 50% marginal tax rate on earnings up to €450 and 99% marginal tax rate on any earnings over €450. You might feel very upset at your incredibly high tax rate, especially when you learn that you’re in the 99% tax bracket. But, in fact, you’re left better off in the second example. You pay 50% tax on the first €450 (which comes to €225 in taxes) and 99% tax on the last €50 (which is €49.50 in taxes). This means your total (gross) tax bill is €274.50 (and your average tax rate is thus 54.9% – far lower than your top marginal tax rate!), which leaves you with €225.50. But you also receive your €1,000 UBI, so you have a total of €1,225.50 in the bank after all transfers and taxes. Though you went from having no taxes to a top marginal tax rate of 99%, you’re left richer overall. (See figure 3)

⁷ See: <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2013/01/08/understanding-how-marginal-taxes-work-its-all-part>

⁸ For instance, see: <https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/10/ocasio-cortez-70percent-idea-is-just-the-start-of-the-democratic-tax-debate.html>

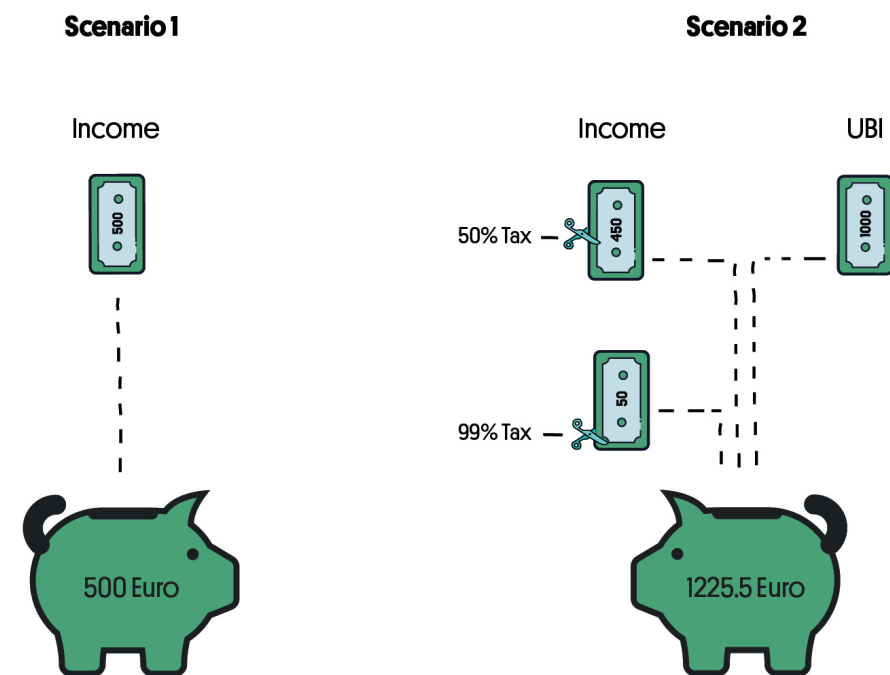


Figure 3 | Marginal-vs-Effective Tax Rates: **Left:** In a country with no taxes and no basic income, your earnings of €500 are the same as your disposable income. **Right:** In a country with a basic income of €1,000, a marginal tax rate of 50% of earnings below €450 and a marginal tax rate of 99% on all earnings above €450, your pre-tax and pre-transfer earnings are still €500, but your disposable (net) income after all taxes and transfers is €1,225.50 – far more than in the scenario with no taxes!

The bottom line is that while marginal tax rates are useful for technical deliberations of issues such as work incentives, they lead to greater confusion when it comes to discussing UBI funding via taxation. A much more lucid and intuitive approach would be to discuss the *net average tax rate*, which is the overall proportion of income people are giving up through the taxes and transfers system.⁹

The net-gross fallacy, the billionaire's dilemma, the universal-versus-means-tested cost fallacy, and the marginal-versus-effective tax-rate fallacy are all iterations of the same overarching confusion around the cost of UBI.

They all rest on the same economic misconceptions and misleading intuitions. Basic income advocates can rectify some of this confusion by focusing on net rather than gross cost by underscoring that the rich would be net contributors, not beneficiaries of UBI; by being transparent about the fact that, in terms of distributional and cost, negative income tax and UBI are the same policy; and by discussing net average tax. All of these changes might push at people's mathematical intuitions, but they make clear that UBI is indeed an affordable policy – just, at times, a surprisingly confusing one.

⁹ The net average tax rate can thus be calculated as: $1 - (\text{net income} / \text{gross income})$. Net income is the same as post-tax and post-transfer income or final disposable income. Some organisations already have this focus – for instance, the OECD's annual Taxing Wages report includes 'net personal average tax rates' (NPATR), which takes into account gross taxes and social security contributions paid offset by any cash benefits received. See: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/taxation/taxing-wages-2021_83a87978-en

'Child benefit for all': the introduction of a partial basic income

Baukje Dobberstein

The only unconditional cash benefit paid by the German state to its citizens is child benefit. A simple one-time application at the beginning of the child's life – and, from then on, a fixed sum – is transferred regularly every month. Currently, it is at least €219. It is paid to those who bear the child's living expenses – usually the parents.

Child benefit is unconditional. The need is assumed, regardless of the parents' income. How the money is spent is not monitored, and, despite fears to the contrary, it is used for its intended purposes, as a Bertelsmann study from 2018¹⁰ shows. There is no expectation of anything in return. Child benefit in Germany is a partial basic income for children.

The purpose of child benefit is to exempt the costs of the child's subsistence level living expenses from income tax. For parents with high incomes, a retrospective child allowance can be claimed instead; this is checked by the tax authorities by means of a 'most favourable option' tax assessment.

The subsistence level income for adults is also constitutionally exempted from income tax via the basic tax-free allowance. Why should an 'adult benefit' not be paid out in advance – similar to the payment of child benefit, rather than the child allowance? With a partial basic income for all, paid out in advance and monthly, the subsistence level income would be indirectly exempted from income tax. Via this change in the way it works, it would roughly correspond to today's tax savings through the basic tax-free allowance. The basic tax-free allowance would be either replaced in this way or subsequently granted via a 'most favourable option' tax assessment.

A positive message from the state

The message conveyed by an unconditional partial basic income is quite different from that of the tax-free allowance. Psychologically, to receive something is completely different from not paying for something.

Normatively, too, it makes a difference whether something is paid in advance, i.e., 'ex ante', or is deducted from tax obligations 'ex post', because one's own income is no longer given priority.

Nowadays, it is particularly more important than it has been for a long time for the state to send out a positive message to its citizens. An unconditional partial basic income can be one such positive message. In times when so much is demanded of us in terms of solidarity, discipline and restrictions, the message 'you belong and are wanted' can make an important contribution to social cohesion.

And, at the same time, it's fun to give something. If everyone in a society receives something and everyone gives something, this fosters cohesion and a sense of community. A basic income makes all citizens into receivers and givers. It overcomes the division between those who pay and those who receive. Everyone belongs.

Hidden poverty is reduced

By removing the tax-free allowance at the same time, the whole thing can be made more or less revenue-neutral. Nonetheless, a few holes in the system are plugged and hidden poverty is reduced.

A basic income offers those who today do not have sufficient income of their own and also do not receive sufficient state social benefits – i.e., those who live in hidden poverty, below the subsistence level – a chance of having more than before. This is expenditure that the state would have to bear anyway if these people claimed what they are entitled to. Currently, the state saves money because it prevents those in need from claiming benefits to which they are actually entitled by erecting bureaucratic hurdles. This injustice will be significantly reduced by a partial basic income.

In order to change the subsistence level, other reforms are needed, such as those being discussed by the Ger-

¹⁰ https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/Projekte/Familie_und_Bildung/Studie_WB_Kommt_das_Geld_bei_den_Kindern_an_2018.pdf

man Greens under the slogan of ‘guaranteed security’¹¹. Even for people who live exclusively on social benefits, there would be change. Although a partial basic income – like child benefit – would count as a transfer payment, it is unconditional. This means that it does not have to be applied for again and cannot be reduced.

A partial basic income would probably not have a significant impact on employment as actual disposable income levels would remain unchanged. Everyone would receive the partial basic income from the state, but employees would receive slightly less net pay from their employers due to income being taxed from the first euro onwards.

Converting the tax-free allowance into a partial basic income

The conversion of the basic personal income tax allowance into a partial basic income – paid out monthly – can be designed as an almost cost-neutral reform. This can provide further experience with unconditional payments and make an important contribution to a more positive perception of the state.

It could also be implemented initially as a pilot project for all residents in one region.

In principle, the conversion of the tax-free allowance into a partial basic income could be implemented in all other European countries that have a comparable basic allowance. In Austria, for example, a payment of €250 per month to each citizen would make the subsistence minimum tax-free. If all incomes from the first euro onwards were taxed at the current rates and the resulting sum was deducted from the minimum level social security budget, it could be paid for, with 90% of the citizens benefiting financially, and only the top decile would face a slightly higher tax burden.

“Currently, the state saves money because it prevents those in need from claiming benefits to which they are actually entitled by erecting bureaucratic hurdles.”

11 <https://www.gruene-bundestag.de/themen/soziales/hartz-iv-ueberwinden-garantiesicherung-einfuehren>



I. The Social Dimension

Care, Covid-19, Basic Income

Antje Schrupp

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how ill-equipped the current social systems in European countries are to deal with crises. When people's income depends mainly on their formal employment, it is impossible to take many effective social measures to deal with a crisis. This is because, in addition to trying to contain the crisis in question – and this applies just as much to a virus as it does to the climate crisis or any other challenge – measures must always be designed in such a way that – if at all possible – they do not disrupt the flow of earned income.

In the case of Covid-19, for example, it was necessary to limit physical contacts as much as possible in order to break infection chains and keep the risk of transmission as low as possible. Significant hotspots for infection and virus spread are, of course, on-site workplaces, especially offices and production facilities. It would therefore have made sense for as many people as possible to stay away from these – both employees and the self-employed – and to continue only with those activities indispensable for the supply of vital goods, the maintenance of infrastructure, and essential services. There are many fields of work generating products and services that a society can occasionally do without for a few weeks or months if it is a matter of averting numerous deaths and serious illnesses. Is it really a problem if certain consumer goods cannot be bought for a while, if leisure events do not take place, or tourist trips have to be cancelled?

But the question was not, 'How can we manage without these areas of the economy for a while?' But it was rather, 'How are the people who earn their money there supposed to live?' Although there was some social support for business owners and the self-employed, many people found themselves fearing for their livelihoods, and this had serious consequences not only for those directly affected but for society as a whole. Many people avoided taking the necessary infection control measures for fear of losing their income or jeopardising their jobs, or were forced to do so by their managers or employers. The support that was available involved a lot of bureaucracy; there was – predictably – considerable

attempted fraud; and, often, the money did not get to where it was needed.

How much easier all this would have been with an unconditional basic income! Everyone would then be sure that at least their minimum subsistence level would be guaranteed, regardless of whether their earned income was affected by the pandemic. Public acceptance of the necessary measures would have been greater, and the pandemic could have been more quickly contained and with less loss of life. Most companies and small businesses would also have benefited.

The basic idea of an unconditional basic income is the separation of income and work and the Covid-19 pandemic was an example that made the social advantages of this principle clear: everybody gets what they need to live, unconditionally, i.e., regardless of what they are willing or able to do. And, on the other hand, work, or being active, no longer exclusively serves the purpose of earning money or securing one's own livelihood. The point is not to completely break that link, but it should no longer be an exclusive one. This makes it possible to react more flexibly to challenges and needs, both at the individual level and that of society as a whole.

In our culture, however, work and income are so closely linked symbolically that many consider this proposal to be utopian. This overlooks the fact that work without income and income without work have always been something normal; perfectly commonplace. As children, we all received all the necessities of life without giving anything in return. No human being would have been able to grow up without an 'unconditional basic income' of this kind. On the other hand, many people – more women than men – work unpaid for others, especially (but not only) within the family. They bring up children, cook, wash, clean, take care of the sick and the elderly. Of the total of 4.1 million people in need of care in Germany, 80% are cared for at home in their families, according to the Federal Statistical Office (as of 2019)¹². A study by the Hans Böckler Foundation found that employed women do 3.29 and men 2.08 hours of unpaid housework per day¹³.

¹² https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Gesundheit/Pflege/_inhalt.html

¹³ <https://www.boeckler.de/de/boeckler-impuls-unbezahlte-arbeit-frauen-leisten-mehr-3675.htm>

This economic aspect was also made visible by the Covid-19 pandemic. Particularly important and directly 'system-relevant' professions in the care sector or in retail turned out to be those that do not have the corresponding social prestige and are also poorly paid. Everyone noticed this, and the embarrassment of impotent applause was also clear to see. It remains to be seen how this experience of being used almost like cannon fodder because of the failed management of the pandemic will affect the nursing landscape in the long run. Thousands of nursing staff have already decided to leave the profession, a trend that started before Covid-19 but accelerated as a result.

However, the failure to recognise the importance of care work was also evident where it is carried out without pay: in the family. Parents were largely left to their own devices with the task of providing not only care but also schooling for their children and they mastered this task with a Herculean exertion that was astonishing and without their professional work performance being significantly diminished as a result. But the criticism of this unreasonable imposition was impossible to ignore, and the anger was great.

The background to this disaster is the fact that unpaid work is still barely included in national economic considerations. Childcare and nursing and elderly care at home are simply not considered 'work' at all. Only what is paid for is defined as 'work'.

There are, of course, historical reasons for this incongruity, which are linked to a patriarchal culture and its gendered division of labour. The political scientist Carol Pateman described this distinction in 1988 as a 'gender contract': an unspoken agreement that implicitly underlies the functioning of society in the same way as Rousseau's social contract. According to Pateman's thesis (which has since been taken up and developed by numerous feminist social scientists), the invisible work assigned to women in the private sphere underlies the visible sphere of the market and politics and makes them possible in the first place. This is legitimised and justified by social theories that distinguish between private and public spheres, between family and politics, whereby the principles of the rule of law, of social justice and the economy are only valid for the public sphere, whereas the 'private sphere' is presumed to function according to completely different criteria. Within the private sphere, in the family, in this view, people act collectively, selflessly, altruistically, care for each other unconditionally and without expecting anything in return; while, in the public sphere, interests clash, competition and rivalry prevail, and everyone makes sure that they don't lose out.

Today, however, this gender contract has been revoked from two sides. Firstly: women have emancipated themselves and gained access to the formerly exclusively male

public sphere. Today, they are active as full equals in politics and in the market. Secondly: the capitalist market has long since spread into the private sphere as well. Money can be made in the so-called care sector; social welfare can be a business model. The neat separation of the two spheres and thus the separate principles that apply in each case has never really worked well, but today, it has become completely clear that it has had its day. The two spheres are mixing. 'Women's work' and 'men's work', paid and unpaid work, giving and trading – everywhere, there are grey areas.

For a while, many people thought that the problem could be solved by completely dissolving the private, family sphere (formerly assigned to women), and enabling everyone to act in the same way that only men had been able to in the past. After all, large areas of what used to be done unpaid by housewives have now moved into the sphere of the money-based economy: we eat in restaurants, take blouses to be ironed, hire cleaners and geriatric care, we build more and more day-care centres, elderly homes and other professional care facilities. However, it turns out that 'the market' and the old economic models are often not very useful when it comes to care. The care of the sick or the education of children simply cannot be organised like a car factory. Economic indicators designed to increase efficiency do not work in areas where quality is also manifested precisely in the fact that those involved are not constantly watching the clock.

What is needed instead is a paradigm shift. 'Care' must not be seen merely as an additional factor within the traditional economy; rather, it has to be placed at the centre of economic policy considerations, where it can challenge the traditional economic theories. In the care sector, for example, it is evident that the law of supply and demand does not apply everywhere, otherwise nursery school teachers, nurses and geriatric care workers – who are desperately needed everywhere – would have been earning much more long ago already. But the market only provides what people (can) pay for and what is therefore profitable. To put it bluntly: from an economic perspective, caring for old people is not worthwhile. While caring for children can be seen as an 'investment in the future' (and is indeed often described as such nowadays), caring for the elderly is not: in economic terms, caring for the elderly is 'throwing money away'.

The motivation behind care cannot be based on economic principles, but only on humanistic ones. But because 'care' does not really 'pay off', the gaps in the provision of care are currently getting bigger and bigger. Sometimes reports about people in need receiving poor care, or stories of unclean school toilets, make it into the newspapers, but the scandals remain few and far between. Yet, they challenge us to rethink from the first principles. One objection often raised against an

“A basic income would free people from the necessity of having to earn money for their living through formal employment before they can even think about other activities.”



unconditional basic income is the fear that no one would work anymore. In relation to care, however, this is already a reality – many things that are urgently needed are in fact not done because they are not profitable. The market simply does not ensure that what is necessary is done. So, here, we need other motivations.

The quality of care work is also difficult to capture in economic parameters. The caring relative and the professional geriatric nurse often provide identical services, which should be analysed and evaluated in a similar way – whether money is exchanged or not is of secondary importance for the issue of the quality of their work. The political mechanisms engendered by the old, sphere-divided order are also often out of place in the care sector. It is difficult to go on strike in a hospital, for example, because it is people, not machines, that then remain unattended.

For all these reasons, the Care Revolution¹⁴ network, founded in 2014, is testing forms of political organisation in Germany that bring together different actors – nurses and patients, people in need of assistance and care workers, economists and political activists – because, in the debates around the care crisis, it is not enough to make a few small adjustments here and there. For example, it is no use just pumping more money into the professional care system if care corporations just siphon it off again in the form of higher profits. It is also of little use paying care workers more if their real problem is that they are overworked due to time and efficiency pressures. Improving the framework conditions for home care is also of no use if at the same time many companies expect more and more working hours and flexibility from their employees. Nevertheless, more money, better pay and better framework conditions for relatives providing care are of course needed. But these cannot be isolated measures, but only building blocks of a genuine paradigm shift.

This is where an unconditional basic income comes into play. It is a way to release the social energy that is urgently needed for innovations in the care sector. There are no patent solutions, after all. The alternative is not for care to take place either in the purely professional sector – i.e., in state or private-sector institutions with well-paid and unionised professional staff – or self-organised at home and in the family. Rather, it will be essential to combine both together effectively, and in addition to find numerous intermediate forms. Neighbourhood networks, local exchange trading systems, associations, communal forms of living, cooperatives and independent projects of all kinds can step in and fulfil needs that neither the traditional family nor formal employment organised on economic principles can meet. For this, we need social space and committed people who want to try something out.

A basic income would free people from the necessity of having to earn money for their living through formal employment before they can even think about other activities. Unconditional basic income therefore has the potential to create precisely the freedom and social space we need to develop new ideas and gain experience. For example, regarding how we can organise those services that are socially necessary but not profitable and therefore not provided by the market. A basic income is an opportunity to work on solutions to the care crisis, but – and this is important – it is not, in itself, the solution. Because, even with a basic income, all other things being equal, there would probably not be enough people coming forward to solve the care crisis. And that is a good thing.

This is because some feminist economists fear that a basic income might increase the expectation that women will provide care for those family members in need. In view of the ‘two spheres of gender’ ideology – which is still far from being overcome – this danger is indeed present, especially since women would then no longer necessarily have to earn their own money. And indeed, there are many – especially male – supporters of a basic income who actually underestimate the extent of the need in the care sector. But a basic income of this kind would not be emancipatory. Basic income must absolutely not be seen as a solution to the crisis of social reproduction.

Rather, it is about creating the conditions for freedom. People who want to care for others should have the opportunity to do so; at the same time, no one should be forced to care for others if they do not want to. An unconditional basic income would give individuals the opportunity to choose unpaid care work instead of paid employment – but it is only emancipatory if good quality, professional care work is available at the same time, so that no one is faced with the choice of either doing care work themselves or leaving relatives uncared for.

Basic income is not a solution to the care crisis. But it could be a building block for an attempt to realise a society in which a good life is possible for all. A society in which everyone can be sure that their existential needs will be reliably taken care of under all circumstances – both in material terms and in the sense of human care and attention. A society that can react flexibly and appropriately to crises because it is in a position to do what is needed in each individual instance, instead of preserving jobs under any circumstances and at any cost – even at the cost of human lives.

Rolling back or liberation? The social potential of UBI from a feminist perspective

Ute Fischer

Many women are enthusiastic about the idea of an unconditional basic income. They see themselves and their own life expectations reflected in it, in a vision of gender justice: equality in freedom instead of equality in coercive formal employment. It pays tribute to the diversity of women’s lives as they have developed over recent decades and secures existence independent of the earning partner. It enables care for dependents, as well as activities in support of the community. Partaking can take many forms once such basic security is assured, following one’s own preferences. These are the arguments put forward by its advocates.

However, the proposal also comes in for harsh criticism, especially from feminists. Some fear a relapse into outdated gender roles. In their view, a basic income would function as a stay-at-home bonus with which women vacate hard-won terrains in politics and business. It would put at risk an emancipation based on independent income and hard-earned progress in the job. Moreover, discriminatory structures cannot be overcome with money. Basic income, they say, distracts from important struggles over access to decision-making power and work and over the distribution of income and wealth.

Whether UBI is seen as a step forward or a step backwards is therefore a question of the goal and the understanding of emancipation.

What is gender equality about?

Gender inequalities are well known and remarkably persistent in spite of considerable political efforts. Thus, in

its gender equality strategy for the years 2020-2025,¹⁵ the EU Commission soberly observes that although some progress has been made in terms of gender equality since 2005, it has been at a snail’s pace. The yardsticks used here are the proportion of gender shares in gainful employment, income, pensions, leadership positions in business and politics and, finally, in child-rearing and caring responsibilities. The Commission of Experts for the Second Equality Report of the Federal Government in Germany makes a similar point to that made by the EU Commission:¹⁶ women still bear the main responsibility for bringing up children and caring for family members; the consequences being curbed professional careers, reduced earnings, gaps in their professional biographies up to leaving their professions, and precarious provision for old age. Indicators relevant to gender equality policy are therefore gross hourly earnings (Gender Pay Gap), total earned income over the life course (Gender Lifetime Earnings Gap), independent old-age security benefits (Gender Pension Gap), weekly working hours (Gender Time Gap) and daily time spent on unpaid care work (Gender Care Gap).

Various conclusions can now be drawn from this state of affairs. The gender equality strategies mentioned here focus on time, money and influence. The common goals are ‘equal opportunities to thrive and be economically independent’¹⁷ (EU Commission). There are two main strategies leading to this goal: either the life course patterns of men and women are brought into closer alignment, with gainful employment and care activities being distributed equally between the sexes; or alternatively, money, time and influence – as well as opportunities for development – are ensured by other means.

¹⁴ <https://care-revolution.org/>

¹⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 Brussels 5.3.2020. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152>

¹⁶ See Sachverständigenkommission zum Zweiten Gleichstellungsbericht der Bundesregierung, Gutachten für den Zweiten Gleichstellungsbericht der Bundesregierung. Erwerbs- und Sorgearbeit gemeinsam neu gestalten, in: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Hrsg.), Zweiter Gleichstellungsbericht der Bundesregierung, BT-Drs. 18/12840 v. 21.06.2017

¹⁷ Communication from the Commission, see footnote 1.

“Thus, UBI is something more than money: it is a foundation for self-determined life paths. It creates scope for decision-making and places trust in the individual.”

UBI affords income and recognition, security and meaning

An unconditional basic income – understood as a sum of money that is paid out to every inhabitant of a given country¹⁸ at the start of each month – is based precisely on these criteria: the free development of one’s personal life plans, economic independence, and time sovereignty. It guarantees:

Securing one’s livelihood: An unconditional basic income represents the basic right of a life of dignity and free from existential hardship. It is an effective protection against poverty. Every individual should be able to participate in the life of society. It must therefore be high enough to live on without additional gainful employment. It thus removes the coercion to work. It is not a reward of performance and not a substitute for a lack of earned income. Conversely, an unconditional basic income is a prerequisite for the ability to provide services and activities of all kinds. This can be gainful employment, but also leisure, care for others and/or for oneself.

Individuality: UBI is paid out on an individual basis and thus fulfils an early demand for gender equality policy, namely financial independence between spouses or other members of a couple as a basis for emancipation. Payment to individuals is in line with modern, cross-gender, pluralised lifestyle concepts. A basic income opens up the option of courageously venturing into self-determined life paths, trying out new things and leaving gender stereotypes behind.

Unconditionality: The biggest difference to the current welfare systems in all European countries is the fact that no one has to prove they deserve to receive payments from the state. No one has to demonstrate that they are willing to work or that they contribute to society in some other way or are in financial need. Making these criteria irrelevant can eliminate much of the state’s bureaucratic monitoring machinery. And more importantly, unconditional payment acknowledges the citizens as being in themselves the foundation of the political community, simply by virtue of their existence.

Thus, UBI is something more than money: it is a foundation for self-determined life paths. It creates scope for decision-making and places trust in the individual.

The absence of any fear for the future and of mistrust unleashes energy and creativity at the level of the individual.

At the societal level, a UBI is also not only a new basic social security system in a financial sense, but also a new idea of society. It creates a new order of social recognition in that – as social legislation – it simultaneously represents the self-image of a society and its system of values. What do we give recognition to? To a life centred around gainful employment and a professional career? Do we measure a successful life by whether someone can earn their own money? Or do we appreciate an authentic way of life geared towards the full realisation of one’s own abilities, interests and needs? UBI frees the performance ethic from its work-based corset and affords recognition and status to all activities that contribute to the sustainable evolution of society.

In this sense, such activities also create meaning.¹⁹ For meaning in life always arises when our actions have significance beyond ourselves, i.e., for the community, for family and friends, for particular groups and for society as a whole. And this demonstrates particularly well how UBI matches the conditions that a society needs for its development. For every society has to solve three problems: it has to reproduce itself in generational terms by caring for the young (this is mostly done by the family); it has to reproduce itself socially, i.e., to ensure and strengthen social cohesion (i.e., through civic engagement); and it has to reproduce itself materially through the production and supply of goods and services (this is mostly achieved via the labour market).

In the best-case scenario, socio-political regulations create a framework in which these necessary activities can be carried out and the challenges overcome. An unconditional basic income meets these structural requirements in that it is not dependent on performance in a job but also enables caring and community related activities. From this systematic perspective, a basic income is an appropriately fitting and thus sustainable and resilient social system.

But is it also fair from an equality perspective?

¹⁸ Who exactly is entitled to receive these payments – whether only nationals or also immigrants and asylum seekers, and under what conditions – must be worked out in a detailed model and will not be discussed further here.

¹⁹ For more detail, see Ute Fischer, *Anerkennung, Integration und Geschlecht. Zur Sinnstiftung des modernen Subjekts*, Bielefeld 2009

Flaws and pitfalls of UBI from a gender perspective

In principle, as Ronald Blaschke sees it,²⁰ even critics of the UBI see the benefits it brings in terms of women's personal freedoms. The more favourable conditions for self-determination on the labour market, for dealing with the state bureaucracy, in family or partnership dependency structures, and the protection it provides in precarious life situations, are undisputed. What follows is a selection of reservations and counter-arguments, mostly from a progressive feminist perspective.²¹

Distribution of time and money

In order to shape their lives according to their own ideas, people need money and time. A basic income furnishes both, because it provides the individual with income and also allows them to spend their time as they wish, because it is granted unconditionally without requiring anything in return. This results in a gain of freedom, albeit at a financially low level.

A closer look at who should benefit from social policy in the narrower sense of securing livelihoods reveals several groups of women: single parents, the unemployed, all those whose income remains below the poverty line despite gainful employment and who have to receive additional unemployment benefits, and pensioners. Despite its low level, a basic income would help them in two ways, because it could serve both to secure their livelihood financially and to offer a way out of bureaucratic surveillance and stigmatisation. Instead, in addition to the basic income, these women would also enjoy some recognition.

Dismantling structures of discrimination

Critics of the basic income idea argue that it is not an instrument that would achieve greater equality in the distribution of socially necessary work between men and women. They believe that it would leave the structures of discrimination in the sphere of employment untouched, and that men would still have more opportunities for work-related income and recognition and more power

and influence than women. Hence, nothing would change with regard to the gender gaps identified in the Gender Equality Report. On the contrary, the danger would be that with the payment of a basic income, the arguments for, and political attention paid to, the elimination of discriminatory structures in the organisation of gainful employment and care work would also disappear from view. In this sense, a basic income would represent a kind of reward for keeping quiet, as Gisela Notz, among others, fears.²²

But why should women decide not to take up formal employment and men decide not to take up a greater share of care work? In addition to the necessity to meet one's own basic needs, the other main factor in an individual's decision is the vitally important experience of meaning. Gainful employment is an especially important source of meaning. For one thing, its social necessity is not in doubt. On the other hand, it is precisely the strong anchoring of the performance ethic as a collective myth of probation in the culture of Western modernity that causes professional activities to be valued.

Formal employment will retain this positive feature even after the introduction of a basic income. What is new, however, is that it serves to prepare the ground for the development of new collective values by raising the status of family and public welfare activities. Such values can counteract a distribution of necessary tasks, including unpaid ones, that is based on gender stereotypes.

The concrete measures proposed by gender equality commissions to facilitate the taking up of care work as well as of formal employment will benefit all genders in the long run. Ultimately, the decision to engage in activities for the benefit of the family or the community has its roots in an antithetical position to the employment system and its profit-oriented economic basis which cannot be reconciled. Couples cannot escape this irreconcilability. Political regulations that provide balancing support – with respect to childcare, flexible life-work-time systems, etc. – are also necessary under a basic income regime. But they are not an alternative to it. Only a basic income would enable the necessary negotiation within couple constellations or family-based communities and transform equality under coercion into formal employment into equality in freedom.

Freedom or coercion?

This freedom is suspect to some – for well-intentioned reasons. Nancy Fraser's counter-proposal, which many UBI critics draw on, envisages mandatory equality of distribution. Under the slogan of 'participatory parity', the US philosopher and feminist advocates a concept in which the participation of all in all socially necessary areas (gainful employment, the family and the political community) is seen as a prerequisite for the realisation of the vision of gender equality.²³ She wants to achieve this through prescriptive regulation to bring about a change in men by making them become more like the women they are today.²⁴

Fraser is thereby proposing an equality under coercion that is no less intrusive or rigid than the current coercive system. Whether the prospect of undermining the structures of discrimination is an end which justifies such means is questionable, as are the prospects of success. But Fraser herself now concedes that this strategy involves a dangerous appropriation of women for economic purposes. While Fraser does not question the basic idea of an equal distribution of the duties and responsibilities between the genders, she recognises the flip side of the prevailing gender equality strategy of focusing on formal employment. 'Neoliberalism,' she argues, is 'harnessing the dream of women's emancipation to the chariot of capital accumulation.'²⁵ So, Fraser, too, is arguing for an 'overcoming of the masculinist values' of status hierarchy, for economic justice, and for a focus on 'participatory democracy'.²⁶ Such a strategy, it can be inferred, would only be put on a solid – namely material – footing, by means of a basic income.

This also strengthens the negotiating position of women, vis-à-vis both their partners and their employers. Where there is no coercion, negotiations can be conducted with greater self-confidence. This also enables men to escape the treadmill of work at any cost; working conditions and hours become the subject of real negotiations between equals. Families where fathers are fully present – a socially as well as individually advantageous situation – could become the norm. It is not necessary to speculate at this point about the consequences for the birth rate, but the conditions for starting a family would certainly improve. At any rate, people would no longer have to refrain from doing so because the future was uncertain (whether financially or in other ways), or because they were afraid of becoming dependent on the male breadwinner, or of not being able to re-enter the labour market.

Conclusion: Which social system benefits women?

In summary, it can be stated that in view of the diversity of women's lives, it is not clear which social system serves women best. Nevertheless, the inequality indicators used by the German Expert Commission reveal clear discrimination against women. The Gender Pay Gap, the Gender Lifetime Earnings Gap and the Gender Pension Gap are all due to the lower labour market participation of women compared to men, which is also manifested in the Gender Time Gap. The Gender Care Gap is a mirror image of this: women perform more care work than men.

Under the current social system, these conditions lead to a systematic disregard of women and their behavioural choices: they miss out on income and recognition. From the point of view of social theory, this is a design flaw which can be explained not least by the systematic consideration of the threefold reproduction requirements (generational, social, material). A socially sustainable social system that enables and supports the survival and further development of society must take into account all three necessary and meaningful areas of activity. Only then will it also take adequate account of gender relations as a structural foundation.

An unconditional basic income matches these societal requirements precisely and thus also recognises and values activities outside of paid work. It therefore represents a gender-equitable model of an alternative social system.

It is impossible to predict how a basic income will affect the behaviour of women and men in the different social spheres or whether the gender division of labour will change. However, the conditions for negotiating a division of tasks appropriate to one's own needs and desires will improve whatever happens, because women, like men, will be freed from the coercion to engage in gainful employment, and the collective interpretive models of those areas of life that are to be valued will be open to change as a result.

20 See Ronald Blaschke, Grundeinkommen und Care-Arbeit, in: Widersprüche 134 (2014), p. 119

21 For a comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of basic income from a feminist perspective, see also the differentiated discussion by Susann Worschech, Soziale Sicherheit neu denken. Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen und bedarfsorientierte Grundsicherung aus feministischer Sicht, vol.4 of the Schriften des Gunda-Werner-Instituts/ Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Berlin 2008

22 See Gisela Notz, Grundeinkommen gegen Ungleichheit und Armut? – Anmerkungen aus feministischer Sicht, in: Widerspruch 49 (2005), p. 115 ff.

23 See Nancy Fraser, Soziale Gerechtigkeit im Zeitalter der Identitätspolitik. Umverteilung, Anerkennung und Beteiligung, in: dies./Axel Honneth, Umverteilung oder Anerkennung? – Eine politisch-philosophische Kontroverse, Frankfurt a.M. 2003

24 See, by the same author, Die Gleichheit der Geschlechter und das Wohlfahrtssystem. Ein postindustrielles Gedankenexperiment, in: Axel Honneth (Hrsg.), Pathologien des Sozialen. Die Aufgaben der Sozialphilosophie, Frankfurt a.M. 1994, p. 370

25 See Nancy Fraser, Neoliberalismus und Feminismus: eine gefährliche Liaison, in: Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 12/2013, p.30

26 Ibid., p. 31

I. The Ecological Dimension

‘De-Growth’ and the Blue-Green case for basic income

Guy Standing

We are living in an era of global rentier capitalism, when more and more income and wealth is being gathered by the owners of property – financial, physical and so-called ‘intellectual’.²⁷ In the process, there has been a systematic plunder of the commons: that which is outside the legitimate sphere of private property rights.

The biggest losers in all this have been nature and the commoners of the world. But among the implications has been the fact that as most of the gains from any rate of GDP growth go to the rentiers, a higher rate of growth is needed to raise the material living standards of workers, most notably those in the precariat. The claimed ‘trickle-down’ of benefits from growth has been reduced to a ‘drip down’, or even no gain at all. But the recipe of faster growth is doomed, since that means more resource depletion, more global warming, more threat of extinction of species and habitats, and more pandemics like Covid-19.

We will come back to that. First, it is important to remember that the justification for a basic income is fundamentally ethical: it is a matter of common justice; it enhances basic security, which is a human need and public good; and it enhances three types of freedom – libertarian (freedom to choose and say ‘no’), liberal (freedom to be moral), and republican (freedom from domination).²⁸ It is with respect to justice where the overlap with the environment occurs.

The justice case goes back to what must surely be the starting point for the case for basic income in the Charter of the Forest, sealed on November 6, 1217, in Westminster. This asserted that every free man had a right to subsistence in the commons. The commons are what belong to everybody equally. And they encompass not only the natural commons – land, water, the sea, the air – but also the social commons, cultural commons, civil commons and knowledge commons. The trouble

is that over the centuries in every society, elites and commercial interests have managed to plunder the commons for their benefit, depriving commoners of their heritage. The demand for a basic income is the demand for compensation for that deprivation.²⁹

This rationale fits neatly with the need to dismantle rentier capitalism and the ecologically destructive nature of trying to maximise GDP growth. Consider greenhouse gas emissions. These pollute the air, and do harm to humans and nature in general. They are also an incursion into the commons. The only fair way to deal with this is through regulation and putting a high price on those doing or being responsible for the pollution. The best way to do that is through the imposition of high carbon taxes. By themselves, those taxes will not stop the pollution altogether. But there will be a disincentive to doing such activities, coupled with a cost incentive to switch to less-polluting alternatives.

However, by themselves, even though the rich are more likely to incur the tax because they consume more, they would also be regressive, because the carbon tax would come to a higher share of the income of low-income earners than for the wealthy. This would produce a political resistance to such a tax, and deter politicians from introducing and raising it. The only way to gain widespread support for eco-taxes would be to guarantee that the proceeds would be recycled to the citizenry, and the only equitable way to do that would be via equal basic dividends, comprising part of the basic income.

Revenue from a carbon tax should go into what could be called a national *Commons Capital Fund* (CCF), set with three complementary objectives of: first, combatting the erosion of the commons and the destruction of nature; second, redirecting public investment into more sustainable sectors; and third, providing the funding of a basic income system. The source of primary revenue for the CCF would be a set of levies, or taxes, on all activities that encroach on the commons and the life of commoners.

²⁷ G. Standing, *The Corruption of Capitalism: Why Rentiers Thrive and Work Does Not Pay* (London, Biteback, 2021).

²⁸ For a review of these ethical justifications, see G. Standing, *Basic Income: And how we can make it happen* (London, Pelican, 2017).

²⁹ The proposals in the following paragraphs are expanded elsewhere. G. Standing, *Plunder of the Commons: A Manifesto for Sharing Public Wealth* (London, Pelican, 2019), chapter 8.



For a start, in most countries, land has been acquired by elites over the centuries and passed on to their offspring. Much of the land has been ‘enclosed’ by dubious means. It was taken from the commons. And, in creating a concentration of land ownership, the market value of all land has been pushed up artificially. So, a *Land Value Levy* should be introduced. In a country like the UK, even a very low Land Value Levy of 1-2% would raise a substantial amount for the Commons Fund. But there should also be an additional *Land Inheritance Levy*, since those who inherit land have done nothing to ‘deserve’ it.

There should also be a *Planning Permission Levy* (PPL). In Britain, and maybe in other countries, when an area is declared to be one where property can be built, the market value of all the land in that area rises dramatically. It is land that, in effect, is taken from the commons, or from being nearly commons, into being the preserve of corporations or rich individuals to make considerable profits, simply because of a political decision and not because of their work. It is a windfall gain. The commoners should be compensated for the loss.

So, putting a PPL of something like 10% of the increased value of the land would be justifiable. That might be sufficient to deter property corporations pushing local and national politicians to convert open land into new property development sites, especially as there are vast areas with planning permission that are not actually developed. Indeed, one way of inducing a more efficient housing market with less loss of open land would be a *Non-Occupancy Levy*, charged on landlords and property developers if they leave properties empty or deliberately incomplete for six months or more. This would help to reduce the unnecessary spread of house building, which is an under-appreciated source of pollution and global warming.

Then there should be a *Minerals and Mining Levy*. What is mined under the ground or in the seabed is part of the common pool resources, and they belong in nature to everybody, not to any private commercial interest. If mining is licensed, it is appropriate that those taking the risk and doing the mining earn a decent profit. But, on top of that, a Levy should be charged as representing a compensation for the loss to the general commoners.

Similarly, water, historically, was part of the commons; it belonged to nobody. If commercialised and privatised, those producing the clean water deserve to have their production costs covered and a fair profit. But a *Water Use Levy* should be a way of compensating the commoners for the loss of their common pool resource. It would also be a way of encouraging people to be more

conscientious in conserving water. And where water is privatised, as in Britain, a *Water Pollution Levy* should be steep if water companies fail to introduce maintenance measures and if they pollute rivers, lakes and the sea with sewage.³⁰

Next: the air. We know airplanes cause a great deal of pollution. And we know the rich fly much more than the poor, while the poor tend to live in areas adversely hit by air pollution and while the wealthy live with more protection. So, a *Frequent Flyer Levy* should be introduced, paid as a percentage of every flight ticket price. Again, channelling that revenue into the Commons Fund could ensure it went into funding equal basic common dividends – or basic income under another name.

One special levy should be a *Cruise Liner Levy*. Cruise liners have become monstrosities, doing terrible ecological damage. They tend to stay in ports with their diesel engines permanently going. The air is so polluted that the incidence of throat cancer and other illnesses is much higher in the vicinity around ports where they dock. While they should be regulated much more strictly, they should be required to pay a levy, the revenue from which would go into the Commons Fund, from which dividends would be a form of compensatory payment.

Another source of levies with environmental connections is the sea. At present, in many countries the government gives ‘quotas’ of permitted catches of commercial fish, mainly to large-scale industrial fisheries that, with this freely given property, make substantial profits and deplete the oceans of fish populations. There should be a *Seafood Levy*, as well as much tighter regulations. If the fisheries react by raising prices, that might have the conservationist effect of reducing consumption of what are becoming threatened species. At the moment, industrial fisheries receive huge government subsidies, which is an international disgrace.

Another source of ecological decay is the spread of unsightly advertising boards across the countryside. Most of us do not want them and regard them as an intrusion into the landscape. Putting a *Billboard Levy* on them, determined by size of advert would be a means of compensating commoners for the loss of the landscape.

There are other Levies that would have environmental improvement objectives while generating funds to help build the Commons Capital Fund. But besides the directly environmentally beneficial levies, there should be levies on other forms of rent currently taken by a minority, such as on intellectual property, digital data and financial transactions gained by monopolistic

practices. There is no space here to go into the details. But in essence the strategy would amount to a shift in the taxation system from taxing income on the production of goods and services to taxing the commercial incursion into the commons and rentier practices.

The next question concerns the investment behaviour of the Fund. This should abide by guidelines and an independent governance of the Fund outside direct government control, probably along the lines of the Norwegian Pension Fund Global, obliged to invest only in ecologically accepted sectors, with minimal exposure to fossil fuels.

The size of the basic income dividends would be determined in part by the annual rate of return on the total investment of the Fund. However, the size of the dividends would also depend on respecting the Inter-Generational Equity Principle, or what is known as the Hartwick Rule, named after the economist who formalised it. This states that the value of the commons should be preserved over the generations; in which case, the Fund should not give out all its revenue to today’s commoners, but should try to preserve the ‘capital value’ for future generations.

Here there is a challenge. To respect the Hartwick Rule, only the net return of the investment should be distributed if the levies come from *exhaustible resources*. However, as explained elsewhere, levies that come from *renewable resources* or from forms of pollution could be recycled as basic income dividends, close to their entirety, after a portion of the revenue is allocated to renew any renewable asset on which the levy was made. So, for example, if there were a 10% *Forest Timber Levy* on all forest trees felled for timber (forests being a natural commons and renewable), then some 80% of the revenue might be recycled as part of the basic income dividend, while 20% would be spent on regenerating the forest.

This general approach – of levies on the use and abuse of the commons, pooled in a Commons Fund and recycled as Common Dividends, or basic income – has three features that are likely to be politically popular. First, they would suggest that the basic income payments were a form of property right, not a form of charity or ‘redistribution’. Second, the system would allow for changing levels depending on the performance of the economy. Third, it would be ecologically beneficial, discouraging activities harming the environment, and facilitating a strategy of ‘de-growth’, because a high rate of GDP growth would not be needed to raise the

material living standards of the precariat and other low-income earners.

Basic Income and Care

Besides the use of levies for combating ecological damage and for providing basic income security, there is another link between basic income and the environment. If we had such security, we would be more encouraged to devote more time to the many activities that come under the term *care*.

This embraces care of ourselves, care for those we love and cherish, care for our communities and care for nature. Most of us go through life feeling we were unable to devote enough time and effort to most of those activities. But, of course, they are the essence of life. In our national income statistics, most are completely ignored. This must be changed. All forms of work must be legitimised. And if we are to combat the threat of extinction and the threat of pandemics, we need to use more time and effort on all those activities.

When critics of a basic income claim that it would result in laziness and reduced work, what they really mean is reduced labour. Although there is no evidence that a basic income does reduce work or labour, there is plenty of evidence that it leads to more care work and more voluntary community work. And, if it led to more leisure as well, is that not precisely what we should want?

There is one final point worth making. The Extinction Rebellion movement is the most exciting collective action on the environment. It must continue to make apologists and the establishments feel very uncomfortable. The Basic Income movement is in the vanguard of efforts to dismantle rentier capitalism and enhance social justice, freedom and social and economic security. Together, they will prove the core of a new progressive politics, a politics of paradise.

³⁰ In England, all the privatised water companies have been fined for pouring billions of tonnes of untreated sewage into rivers, but the fines have been minimal compared to the very high profits gained by the companies.

How carbon pricing can become socially fair and a starting point for basic income

Mathis Bönte

In order to stop global warming, CO₂-emissions have to be reduced to net-zero as soon as possible. Economies worldwide currently heavily depend on fossil fuels and it is unrealistic to believe their usage could be immediately prohibited in any single country, let alone in all countries worldwide. However, the introduction of carbon pricing would put an explicit environmental price tag on goods and services contributing to the climate crisis. In this way, people polluting the environment most would be encouraged to reduce their footprint and would more likely choose more eco-friendly options instead. Carbon pricing can be implemented in two major forms: (1) a carbon tax, as already introduced in a few European countries, such as Sweden and Switzerland; or (2) emission certificates, for which the EU Emissions Trading System (EU-ETS) was introduced in 2005. There is much debate as to whether the national carbon taxes are high enough to affect consumer decisions and there exists even more criticism of the EU-ETS as being far from an effective tool to reduce CO₂ emissions. But both forms of CO₂-pricing – at least in principle – help to reduce CO₂ emissions as, from a consumer perspective, the prices for products with the largest CO₂ footprint rise most strongly in both cases.

People with a low-income cause far less emissions than the wealthy ones because they fly less, live in smaller flats, and use public transport more often. However, those with low incomes are also not close to a net-zero footprint and would thus be heavily affected by the introduction of any sort of CO₂ pricing. CO₂ pricing might thus lead to social and political challenges. People with low incomes will struggle to make ends meet as soon as carbon prices are introduced, and overall expenditures increase. Such a development might be utilized by interest groups trying to delay the transition to a climate neutral society, such as major corporations from the energy sector or the automotive industry, who might – in this case – easily find allies in political forces promoting social justice and thus fight against increased living costs that hit the poor hardest. These competing interests then often lead to the introduction of a carbon price too low to have a tangible effect on consumer

behaviour and can thus not lead to the required socio-ecological transition.

A simple solution is to distribute all revenues from CO₂ pricing evenly across all members of society. In this way, every citizen receives the same amount of money on a regular basis. Such a climate dividend would have a redistribution-like effect, in that everybody with a below average carbon footprint will benefit from this system. As people with low incomes *in most cases* have a lower-than-average CO₂ footprint, they would benefit from the system *in most cases*. This is true the other way round as well: as people with high incomes *in most cases* have a higher-than-average CO₂ footprint, they would be net contributors to this system *in most cases*. This means that *some* people with low incomes might not benefit from the system because they happen to have an above-average CO₂ footprint; for example, as they have to commute a lot by car. At the same time, this also means that *some* people with high incomes might indeed benefit from the system because they happen to have a below-average CO₂ footprint because they get around without using a car or planes. But *on-average* people with low incomes benefit and people with high incomes contribute to the system³¹. Because the climate dividend increases with carbon prices, it might motivate those already fighting for the climate and those fighting for social justice to join forces.

The proposed climate dividend shares many characteristics with a universal basic income. The arguably most important feature is unconditionality: everyone receives the climate dividend by virtue of being alive and a member of the given political group of people providing the climate dividend, i.e., a nation-state. No means-testing is applied: beneficiaries do not have to be poor, they do not need to work, nor do they have to consume in order to be eligible. And no behaviour-testing is applied, either: beneficiaries can spend the money for whatever purpose they want; although, it would soon vanish if they caused high emissions with their purchases.

31 For details, please see figure 2-1 in Stede, J., Bach, S., Ismer, R., Meßerschmidt, K., Neuhoﬀ, K., 2020. Optionen zur Auszahlung einer Pro-Kopf-Klimaprämie für einen sozialverträglichen CO₂-Preis. Retrieved on 17th May 2021 from https://www.diw.de/de/diw_01c.800308.de/projekte/optionen_zur_auszahlung_einer_pro-kopf-klimapraemie_fuer_einen_sozialvertraeglichen_co2-preis.html

One underrated aspect of the climate dividend is the way in which beneficiaries receive it. In order to make these benefits as salient and tangible as possible, it is hardly advisable to let the climate dividend result in a decrease in fees to be paid for an unrelated cause, such as health insurance – as is the case in Switzerland. Representative surveys have shown that only a quarter of people in Switzerland know about the refund (Schwegler et al. 2015³²). Instead, the climate dividend should be transferred directly to people's accounts or otherwise be directly accessible for people without a bank account (for details on implementation steps, see Stede et al. 2020³³). Importantly, the required infra-structure to pay out the climate dividend could well pave the road for regulatory tools and mechanisms allowing to pay out a basic income.

In the debate on a climate dividend, there is one major advantage in comparison to a full basic income with the goal to provide comprehensive social security: the question of who pays for it is relatively easy to answer, thanks to the increased awareness regarding climate issues through movements such as Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion in Europe or the Sunrise Movement in the US. First, the industry – including large corporations – have to pay the carbon price and thus finance the climate dividend. Although corporations then pass on the costs to consumers, it still holds that people with low incomes are better off *in most cases* and people with high incomes are net contributors to the system *in most cases*. But the more emissions someone causes, the more they have to pay. This can obviously be justified by referring to the global damages resulting from emissions. It is that simple: people have to pay for the environmental damage they cause.

Up until now, no carbon price worldwide adequately reflects the associated damage caused by emissions. A few wealthy people are responsible for most emissions and the resulting damage but they – just as everybody else contributing to the climate crisis – do not pay for it. Maybe the introduction of carbon pricing in combination with the pay out of a climate dividend on an individual basis may help to make people believe in a system in which those causing harm to nature will also be held responsible. If more of such basic trust would be created, this might help the discussion about basic income in general.

Finally, a climate dividend can be realised in a way that makes carbon pricing socially fair and politically viable. For decisive action against climate change to be supported by a large part of society, it is important that people do not feel left behind. But be assured that a socially fair and accepted climate dividend alone is far from enough to solve the ecological crisis. In order to achieve carbon-neutrality and sustainability of those economies with the largest footprint, they inevitably need to reduce their consumption of natural resources. And this means that there is no way round a thorough and serious discussion on degrowth. Politically, this seems even more challenging than designing and implementing socially just carbon pricing because people tend to prefer avoiding losses to acquiring gains (and so do entire states). A basic income may be able to convey a sense of trust and safety; a crucial aspect for overcoming the loss-aversion that is associated with a debate on degrowth. A climate dividend might be a first step towards such a debate.

32 Schwegler, R., Spescha, G., Schäppi, B., Iten, R., 2015. Klimaschutz und Grüne Wirtschaft – was meint die Bevölkerung? Ergebnisse einer repräsentativen Bevölkerungsbefragung. INFRAS. Retrieved on 17th May 2021 from https://www.bafu.admin.ch/dam/bafu/de/dokumente/klima/externe-studien-berichte/klimaschutz_und_gruenewirtschaftwasmeintdiebevoelkerung.pdf

33 Stede, J., Bach, S., Ismer, R., Meßerschmidt, K., Neuhoﬀ, K., 2020. Optionen zur Auszahlung einer Pro-Kopf-Klimaprämie für einen sozialverträglichen CO₂-Preis. Retrieved on 17th May 2021: Please see footnote 31.

The Unconditional Autonomy Allowance: a tool for democratic and convivial degrowth

Vincent Liegey

In France, 2002, the provocative slogan ‘*Décroissance*’ – meaning ‘degrowth’ – was launched. Later translated into other languages, degrowth became a set of thoughts and a mindset related to questioning not only the physical limits to growth but also the cultural limits³⁴. Degrowth became a movement and a platform for fruitful open debates, activism, and experimentations. Since its beginning, Unconditional Basic Income (UBI) has been debated within degrowth networks³⁵. However, the question of UBI in the degrowth movement has not been discussed in the simple ‘in favour of’ or ‘against’ fashion. Such binary approaches often lead to sterile and narrow-minded debates. Instead, the question has rather been whether UBI would be meaningful and useful from a degrowth perspective. Like any other tool, the key question is under which conditions and within what kind of framework would UBI make sense? UBI was soon adopted by a large part of the degrowth networks, with criticism and caution, and associated with other economic and social tools and framework, such as *gratuités* (free access for basic goods)³⁶, Universal Basic Services (UBS)³⁷, local/complementary currency, and reciprocity or maximum income. Thus, in France emerged the idea of Unconditional Autonomy Allowance (UAA) as a central democratic and transition tool for a degrowth project³⁸. This proposal reflects the key principles on which degrowth has been constructed:

radical criticisms to development and capitalism³⁹ or how to re-embed the economy⁴⁰, eco-feminism, frugal abundance, conviviality and autonomy⁴¹, and open re-localisation⁴².

Democracy requires serenity and trust

The degrowth movement opened the debate on basic income, first as a tool for re-politicization and for autonomy. “Without minimum resources, the new citizen cannot completely assume the republican principles of freedom, equality and fraternity,” said Thomas Payne in 1792 at the French National Assembly. Thus, the primary aim of basic income relates to the individual empowerment to freely decide whether to participate in the imposed productivist and consumerist society. In addition, UBI would recreate a feeling of serenity and trust in a society dominated by economic fears; in particular, the fear of unemployment.

In parallel, driven by the same principle about autonomy and democracy, other economic tools enable the recreation of solidarity and trust in society, such as local and complementary non-speculative currencies and non-monetary local exchange systems. Such local systems aim to create and sustain social interactions, acts of solidarity, and mutual assistance. These interactions

“In short, from a degrowth perspective, UBI should be implemented as a tool to reinforce democracy by reconnecting people by creating solidarities and by questioning basic needs and how to fulfil them in a sustainable way.”

34 Vincent Liegey and Anitra Nelson, *Exploring Degrowth: A Critical Guide*, Pluto Press, September 2020.

35 Hugo Carton, *Le revenu d'existence, Pour des sociétés libres et égalitaires*, Institut Momentum, October 2013 (find here the translation into English: <http://www.projet-decroissance.net/?p=1640>).

36 Paul Ariés, *Gratuité versus capitalisme*, Editions Larousse, September 2018.

37 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/why-universal-basic-services-is-no-alternative-to-basic-income/>

38 Vincent Liegey et al., *Un projet de Décroissance, Manifeste Pour Une Dotation Inconditionnelle d'Autonomie*, Editions Utopia, Janvier 2013.

39 Vincent Liegey, *Convivial Degrowth or Barbarity?*, in *Degrowth and Progress*, L'Internationale Online, February 2021, https://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics_of_life_and_death/156_convivial_degrowth_or_barbarity/

40 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, Farrar & Rinehart, 1944.

41 Anitra Nelson and Vincent Liegey, *Four Principles of Degrowth And why they matter*, September 2020, <https://www.pluto-books.com/blog/the-four-principles-of-degrowth/>

42 Vincent Liegey et al., *Neither protectionism nor neoliberalism but “open relocalisation”, the basis for a new International*, Bastamag, November 2015, <https://www.bastamag.net/Neither-protectionism-nor-neoliberalism-but-open-relocalization-the-basis-for-a>



might further create altruism and trust, essential for a fruitful and good democratic life. Sustainable and thus meaningful production of food and services are beneficial for creating more resilience and solidarity.

Last but not least, I would also like to comment on some common Left-wing criticism against UBI approaches, adding Universal Basic Services (UBS) and the notion of *gratuités* (free access for basic goods) to the picture. UBS in the form of a free health system, health insurance, education, public transport, and funeral services should be preserved. But it is also an opportunity to rethink them from a degrowth perspective: to question their meaning and organisation and to reform them in a way that only some parts would be incorporated into a new and better system; whereas others would be discarded. For example, a free health system should first be based on healthy life and acts of prevention, without for instance, junk food or stress, but with more care and lower overall health care expenses. A similar approach aiming at public deliberation is a core concept of *gratuités*: why should the same price be applied for one litre of water used for drinking, washing ourselves, or cooking; and one litre of water used for constructing an electronic chip, cleaning a car, or filling a private swimming pool? *Gratuités* is an invitation to question our habits, our basic needs and what should be protected and provided to all for free or for a very low price. On the other hand, it democratically questions misuse and proposes to exponentially increase the price above a certain level of consumption. Within the framework of *gratuités*, the space to rethink the production and distribution of basic goods and services is opened up, for example, with regards to water, food, energy, and square meters for decent accommodation or for meaningful activities. Like UBS, local currencies or exchange systems, through the *gratuités* framework, we question our basic needs and how to fulfil them in sustainable, fair and convivial ways. In this way, *gratuités* offers the opportunity to experiment with democratic governance of the commons.

In short, from a degrowth perspective, UBI should be implemented as a tool to reinforce democracy by reconnecting people by creating solidarities and by questioning basic needs and how to fulfil them in a sustainable way.

Degrowth in inequalities

One of the main goals of the degrowth movement is to address inequality⁴³. UBI has become one of our main techniques to not let anybody slip under a decent level of a good livelihood. But the agenda of the degrowth movement does not only focus on minimal and decent subsistence level (through UBI) but is equally proposing a maximum acceptable income to set an upper limit to the income distribution. However, for a fruitful discussion on basic income and maximum acceptable income to happen, a lot of work might be needed to re-establish a sense of upper and lower income limits on a societal level. But as wealth inequalities do not mainly depend on varying income levels – but are strongly associated with inheritance and especially ownership of land and real estate⁴⁴ – such a debate immediately touches on the questions of fair distribution of land and real estate and of tax evasion and optimization. To question maximum income and limits also means to re-evaluate subjective well-being and inclusive democracy. As those at the upper end of income distribution also consume the most natural resources (and thus have the largest CO2 footprint), the way of life of the wealthiest cannot be sustainable and is thus not desirable; it also creates ostentatious rivalry and frustration, exploited and intensified by mainstream media and advertisements. Serene democracy can hardly rest on large inequalities as the gap between the interests of the wealthiest and the poorest are so large that they are mostly incompatible.

To question inequalities from a degrowth perspective means to question the imaginary institution of society⁴⁵ and how narratives can create domination⁴⁶. Accordingly, the degrowth movement investigates and questions the role of the media in general and of commercial marketing strategies in particular as these industries tend to be not only influenced but governed more and more by very few oligarchs⁴⁷. Along the same lines, political debates are most strongly influenced by technological innovation and growth. As large infrastructure projects, such as new military and industrial complexes, airports, or roads, have a large impact on society, the underlying decision-making process needs to allow more democratic participation. Similarly, main investment decisions regarding research and development need to allow interference of those who are not already in (financial) power. The future of, for example, genetically

modified organisms, trans-humanism, autonomous cars or 5G telecommunications networks cannot be shaped almost exclusively by a lobbying industry of big pharma and big tech, but rather needs to reflect the interest of those most concerned: the general public. Instead of purely focussing on technological innovation and growth, the societal discourse should be guided by non-violent communication, care, conviviality, the commons, permaculture, and low-tech. The degrowth movement is not only about embracing and enforcing limits (i.e., in the form of basic income on one end of the income distribution and maximum acceptable income at the other end) and redistribution, but also about democratic participation questioning technology-focused progress, and about our basic needs and desires as human beings. A UBI with a strong degrowth flavour could only be implemented in a society that enables and performs a lively discussion on limits on income and more generally on wealth distributions, thus taking up a radical stance on re-evaluating nothing less than what is important to create good living conditions for all. Or, to make it short: what does really matter?

Re-embed the economy into society

Degrowth is an invitation to free ourselves from an almost exclusively economic mindset. As Mark Twain once said, “If your only tool is a hammer then every problem looks like a nail”. Our hammer is an economic one and when discussing UBI, one understandably – and, in some cases, even rightfully – faces economic questions, such as how much it costs, where this money comes from, and how to deal with risk of inflation. As much as these issues have to be addressed, the degrowth movement offers a perspective on UBI that first puts the economic view back on its feet, such that the economy is a sustainable system in the interest of the people, not vice versa. The degrowth movement invites one to question debts⁴⁸, the creation of money, and the role of central banks, and finally the financialization of the economy. In this light, UBI should be an opportunity to de-commodify what really matters: well-being, sustainability and a meaningful life. Pursuing these goals must not be left to some “invisible hand” seemingly optimally” guiding world markets of goods and services. Democracy at its core means to recall the supremacy of politics over business interests as a guiding principle for all major societal decisions. That is why public and transparent audits of public and private debts are nec-

essary. In parallel, the governance structure of central banks and the associated creation of money need to be overhauled to reflect democratic values again. In addition, democratic re-appropriation and control of banking systems should be implemented to eradicate a potential financialisation which could become out of control and again may expose our economies to another financial and banking crisis.

In 2018 and 2019, French President Emanuel Macron demonstrated how difficult it is to introduce taxes on natural resources without appropriate social compensation. Those most affected by his increase of a carbon tax formed the ‘Gilet Jaunes’ – or ‘Yellow Vests’ – movement and protested over multiple months. To give the people a direct say in how to achieve a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions “in the spirit of social justice”, President Macron accepted the proposal to initiate a citizen’s convention on climate.⁴⁹ To explore all the aforementioned issues regarding the dominance of economic thought in basic democratic and societal questions, a citizen’s convention, such as the one for the climate in France⁵⁰, would be very promising. Such a fundamental debate about UBI might prevent this topic from falling prey to purely economically motivated speculations about the effects of inflation or to a neoliberal agenda capitalising on the option of increased consumption through an overall increase in cash-flow from UBI.

Towards an Unconditional Autonomy Allowance (UAA)

All of these questions, principles, ideas, and proposals, including UBI, have been articulated together and created the notion of Unconditional Autonomy Allowance (UAA). The principle is the same as for UBI: to provide, individually, unconditionally, for all, from birth to death, what is democratically considered as enough to have a decent quality of life. UAA is necessarily associated with a maximum income and a partially demonetised or de-commodified economy: some basic goods and services could be given through *gratuités* and local and/or complementary currencies or exchange systems. A part could also be given in national/supranational currencies.

UAA is an economic and social tool-box enabled to re-embed the economy in a sustainable and people-centric way in society. UAA intends to re-define

43 Anitra Nelson and Vincent Liegey, Coronavirus and Degrowth, The Ecologist, April 2020, <https://theecologist.org/2020/apr/03/coronavirus-and-degrowth>

44 Piketty T., Capital in the Twenty-First Century, Harvard University Press, 2014.

45 Cornelius Castoriadis, The imaginary institution of society, MIT Press, January 1998.

46 Liegey et al., A Maximum Acceptable Income: beyond the symbolic limits, Moins!, September 2012, <http://www.projet-decroissance.net/?p=1154>

47 See, for example, the French media ownership: <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/cartes/PPA>

48 David Graeber, Debt: The First 5,000 Years, Melville House, 2011.

49 The results of the discussion among 150 randomly selected people representing the population of France are unfortunately not legally binding to the president’s decisions, but he promised they would be carefully considered and would influence his later ruling.

50 <https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/en/>

local, national and international production processes and limits to consumption in a democratic way in order to evaluate our basic needs and how to meet them. So, UAA is an invitation to free ourselves from a predominantly economic mindset preventing serene and democratic transitions but enabling sustainable and desirable models of society based on degrowth principles.

Concrete steps towards UAA

Based on cultural changes – which are already underway – a grass-roots transformation of society, always with more creation and extensions of local citizen initiatives, UAA could be gradually implemented. This could, for example, reform local food production systems which could be created based on a local currency. However, this approach faces two main challenges. First: it might not be able to keep up with the pace at which our society is headed towards a climate disaster and associated social challenges. Second: if the movement was only loosely connected with other political and activist movements questioning the current economic system, it runs the risk of attacks from market regulations favouring a neoliberal agenda.

For as many people as possible to get involved in initiatives in the spirit of the UAA, a first step of voluntarily sharing work hours could be implemented. This approach would follow the messaging of, ‘Work less to have work for all! Work less to consume less but better! And use your free time for useful activities like care.’

Still based on cultural transformations and developments of such local initiatives, facilitated by the share of the work hours, a sufficient UBI could be implemented. It could be associated with the implementation of a maximum income and the re-embedding of the economy through debt audits and debates for another type of governance structure of central banks, money creation and the banking sector. Step by step, in a decentralized and re-localized way, UBI could eventually be de-monetarised. For example, where a local currency has been implemented for sustainable organic local

food production, the part of UBI dedicated for food would be substituted by the local currency. Where free access for basic goods based on *gratuités* principles has been implemented, the part of UBI dedicated for those goods would be substituted by that free access. And, in this way, through public deliberation, basic needs and the fulfilment for all in sustainable and fair way would be implemented.

UAA has been inspired by UBI and its principles of autonomy and direct demand and decent conditions of life for all. UAA also questions the central role paid work – as opposed to unpaid – plays in this debate. In combination with other tools like *gratuités*, unconditional basic services, local currencies and exchange systems or maximum accepted income, UAA offers a public discourse platform for a more direct democracy, re-defining basic needs and how to implement a serene transition toward a sustainable, fair and convivial future. The experience of the Citizen’s Convention for Climate in France is a large-scale example of how deliberation could be implemented. Initially, the violently repressed Yellow Vests Movement emerged to fight against the introduction of a carbon tax, rendering the lives of millions of people in France very difficult. The citizen’s convention enabled long controversies and a respectful dialogue that resulted in a much deeper understanding of the global environmental challenges by 150 individuals representing the French population in all its diversity. Additionally, the convention took a large step towards fighting against climate change while also considering social and environmental justice. UAA proposes to follow such logic, with creativity and audacity, to collectively decide to reach sustainable and convivial societies of frugal abundance. Facing the collapse of the thermo-industrial civilisation, addicted to growth, the choice is between democratically chosen degrowth through UAA or a violent recession caused by the growth paradigm. UBI, within the UAA framework, could offer important emancipating dynamics for such democratic pathways, bringing forward questioning in a decentralised and re-localised capacity, but also in solidarity.⁵¹

51 Find more about UAA and its implementation steps on Exploring Degrowth: A Critical Guide (Pluto Press, 2020): <http://www.projet-decroissance.net/?p=2745>

The Ecological Euro-dividend: a step towards basic income in Europe

Ulrich Schachtschneider

In the public debate of the last three decades, a basic income has mainly been justified as a means to fight poverty, as an anti-bureaucracy measure for a liberal welfare state, as an incentive for economic creativity, as an enabling and empowering environment for political participation, an instrument to free labour, and as an answer to digitalisation. Only in the last few years have new arguments stressing the relationship between basic income and the large socio-ecological transition we are facing been brought forward. Similarly, the discussion about financing a basic income only recently started to revolve around ecological aspects. Many models rely on a value added tax, income tax, capital or inheritance tax, but it is not often heard that a basic income should be financed by eco-taxes.

In this article, I will argue that a basic income – if financed, to a large degree, by eco-taxes – is a very important tool for successfully performing the socio-ecological transition. I will conclude by outlining two initial steps in this direction: the Ecological Euro-dividend and the European Transition Income.

Some ecologists and degrowth proponents are afraid of an anti-ecological effect of basic income: with enlarged mass purchasing power, especially of the less wealthy, additional environmentally damaging goods could be bought and produced. Of course, this is, admittedly, not an implausible scenario. The overall effect of a basic income on the perceptions of what constitutes a “good life” cannot be predicted. If, however, with the introduction of a basic income, we would strongly increase eco-taxes –thus, creating revenues from activities polluting the environment –we would avoid such harmful effects and support an ecological transition. I suggest to call a basic income, financed in this ecological way, an “Ecological Basic Income”^{52, 53}.

But isn’t financing a basic income through an increase of eco-taxes unjust for the poor? Those with low income, don’t they suffer most under higher costs for energy, transport and other basic living expenditures? Well, the exact opposite is the case: those with a higher income consume more resources.⁵⁴ This is why someone with a high income – on average – pays higher taxes, while they receive the same basic income as anybody else and is considered a “net-contributor”. Those with lower income and those with many children are the beneficiaries as they – on average – pay lower (eco-) taxes and obtain basic income for each child separately. It is the same as with other types of taxes on income, heritage, wealth, or capital paid back as basic income: the wealthiest third or fourth will be the net-contributors. Basic income would not be financed by the middle class, as some critics say.

The redistribution of all revenues obtained through an eco-tax paid (in other words, an “Ecological Basic Income”) may lead us out of the dilemma of economic instruments used for environmental policies without social compensation: if the CO2 price is too small, it will not impact the consumer choices; if it’s too high, the sharp rise in basic goods and services becomes socially unacceptable. The Yellow Vests movement as a reaction towards the increase of CO2 taxes in France demonstrated this relationship very dramatically. In the case of Ecological Basic Income, the opposite holds true: the higher the eco-tax rate, the larger the redistribution impact also reaching those with a low- or middle- income.

But some critics might argue that if an increased eco-tax effectively reduces usage of natural resources, it will undermine the funds available for Basic Income. That is true, but for this “problem”, there is a simple solution. If the desired behavioural change is achieved (overall consumption of natural resources decreases), the overall amount of revenue provided by eco-taxes could be

52 First published in: Ecological Basic Income: An Entry is Possible. A Contribution to the BIEN Congress Munich 2012 http://www.bien2012.de/sites/default/files/paper_212_en.pdf

53 More details in: Schachtschneider, U. 2014: Freiheit, Gleichheit, Gelassenheit. Mit dem ökologischen Grundeinkommen aus der Wachstumsfalle. München.

54 Compare e.g.: Ivanova et al. 2017: Mapping the carbon footprint of EU regions, Environmental Research Letters 12 [<https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/aa6da9>, (13.09.2020)]
Ivanova, D. / Wood, R. 2020: The unequal distribution of household carbon foot-prints in Europe and its link to sustainability. In: Global sustainability 3, e18, 1-12

stabilised by adjusting the tax rate accordingly. And this is exactly what environmental scientists propose⁵⁵: increase eco-taxes step-by-step so that there is a constant incentive for technological and cultural progress directed to further decrease of resource usage. It is important for both industry and individuals to know how prices of resources develop in the long term so that they can develop alternative economic and behavioural strategies. In the far future, we might reach a balance with an acceptable degree of resource extraction, which – at the same time – continuously generates enough funding for basic income.

As a more socially just alternative to economic instruments of environmental policy, the Left often demands stronger regulatory policy that goes beyond setting limits for production processes and individual products. Namely, politics should simply ban environmentally harmful, unnecessary consumption. First and foremost, products attributable to advanced degrees of luxury, such as SUVs, strawberries in winter, short trips to the Caribbean etc., are the first targets. But, in general, all ecologically questionable consumption, from “unnecessary” car journeys to coloured toilet paper, should be banned for everyone. This might be fair in terms of distribution – because it would affect everyone equally – and it might also be ecologically appropriate, but it restricts individual freedom too strongly. Politics cannot prescribe which vehicles may be used on which occasions, which furniture may be placed in which flats with how many children, which food one may eat in what quantity, etc. All this – and much more – would have to be defined by pursuing an extreme path of regulatory policy to reduce society’s carbon footprint. The question is from which perspective can a specific lifestyle be prohibited, allowed or even supported? Through which societal decision process should such an endeavour be realised while respecting democratic values at the same time?

An Ecological Basic Income preserves the acceptance of a wide variety of lifestyles that can be lived within the framework of ecological-monetary restrictions, as described above. Certain types of goods and services become more expensive and thus less attractive, but they can still be carried out individually or in moderation. The redistributive effect of the basic income ensures that this individual freedom is not limited to the wealthy but, on the contrary, serves all members of society.

An Ecological Basic Income could thus lead out of the impasse of both economic and regulatory environmental policy through its redistributive and libertarian nature.

Social backbone for the socio-ecological transition

Financing a basic income through eco-taxes would make the socio-ecological transition more socially acceptable because it gives the individual more opportunities to realise their ideas of a good life and good labour.

Firstly, a basic income reduces the coercion to undertake ecologically problematic economic activities because it gives everybody more financial security. How many products known for a long time to be ecologically or socially damaging or socially disputable are accepted, if not stipulated? For people to embrace an ecological transition of the economy, including a fundamental change of workplace and careers, they need a mindset of “change without fear”. While mostly Green New Deal conceptions try to address such fears with the prospect of new (green) jobs, the concept of basic income consists of a guarantee of social security – a social security independent of economic growth!

Secondly, a basic income could also transform even deeper structures of contemporary growth economics and society, especially with regard to a productivist mode of production (i.e., the idea and practice that more is better can also be referred to as “green productivism”) and consumerism. Consumption aimed at compensating for hard, undesirable, and often alienated work might decline. The satisfaction of work might rise because people will rather take part in activities and working relationships which give them a sense of purpose and usefulness. Compensatory consumption may in effect be reduced.

Thirdly, basic income makes society more equal. Equality, both as an economic reality and as a social feeling, is important for the acceptance of environmental policies. More equality will also reduce status consumption (i.e., those parts of consumption made only in order to claim a certain social status). The more evenly wealth is distributed in society, the smaller the need might be to show your neighbours what you can afford.

In sum, we can say that an Ecological Basic Income promises to provide a friendly environment for both technical (efficiency, closed production circles) and non-technical (sufficiency, cultural change) ways to fight the ecological crisis. As a core of a redistributive, libertarian, and anti-productivist Green New Deal (that deserves this name), it might result in a qualitatively improved welfare state but also an increase in environmental action by the state. The structural problems of labour as well as the structural problems of depletion of natural resources would be answered by a reform concept which follows the “basic idea of equal liberties”⁵⁶.

The Ecological Euro-dividend

In 2013, Philippe van Parijs proposed a Euro-dividend⁵⁷ in which €200 would be paid out by the EU to every EU citizen on a monthly basis. Each EU member state would further be free to expand the program to a full basic income. The proposal of the Euro-dividend is based on two main insights:

Firstly: one of the main principles of the EU is the free movement of goods and services, but also the freedom of labour, movement and residence for persons. In this light, the hypothetical introduction of a basic income in one country, but not others, may lead to social tension between member states.

Secondly: Europe may solve its integration problem only when it will develop its own social pillar alongside its common monetary and economic policies. Most existing models of Basic Income suggest financing it by tapping into public budgets and interfering with public social systems. To introduce a new social security system would – in every country – be a very big step: the current national social welfare systems with their historically grown structures of giving and taking would be changed suddenly into completely new ones. Understandably, politicians and citizens hesitate to fully support such a paradigm shift even if they – in principle – support the idea of UBI as key to an emancipatory and less bureaucratic welfare state. This is true on the national level but is an even bigger problem if we want to change the social welfare system at the level of the European Union. The architectures of social welfare systems are very different between member states and even small harmonisation steps are difficult as national interests, needs and political situations vary both geographically and across time.

Van Parijs’ proposal is to finance the Euro-dividend by an EU-wide value added tax (VAT) of 19%⁵⁸. Even if member states could lower their national VAT to account for the Euro-dividend of €200, alleviating their national social system⁵⁹ and being free to fund their Euro-dividend contribution through different means, very large obstacles remain⁶⁰.

Instead, financing a (partial EU-wide) basic income through taxes towards the use of natural resources is

not only a so far neglected revenue for social purposes but also directly addresses the most pressing issue of our time: climate change. Taxed natural resources might include, but are not limited to: CO₂, water pollution with nitrates, sealing of land, fishing, and the extraction of minerals and metals. There are two main ways of implementing a price on CO₂ consumption: direct taxation and CO₂-certificates (for which a European Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) already exists). Both on a political and scientific level, it is much debated which of these two options (and its many variants) yields better results regarding a decrease in CO₂ emissions, though this discussion is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is, of course, important that the price of CO₂ emissions be so high that it is tangible and thus actually reduces CO₂ emissions.

However, under the assumption that it is politically easier to use a current institution for political change, the EU ETS could be used. Under the assumption that a reform of this already-introduced mechanism (such as no more free allocations, all sectors matched including heating and mobility, and an ambitious yearly reduction of the cap) results in a price of 100 €/tonne of CO₂ and a 40% reduction of overall EU CO₂ emissions, the revenue will amount to €270 billion. An Ecological Euro-dividend of about €500 per year or €42 per month could be paid out for each European citizen – one fifth of the €200 Euro-dividend proposed by van Parijs. Of course, other taxations of problematic use of resources have to be added; this would only be a first step.

The European Transition Income

A basic income in general and a Euro-dividend in particular may not only be financed by taxes on natural resources but also by taxing inheritance, wealth or on capital transactions within the EU. But in a hypothetical scenario of an immediate introduction of a monthly €200 Euro-dividend for every EU citizen, this constitutes a large financial and also ideological step, which will likely meet a lot of political resistance. Therefore, I would like to present a proposal for a preliminary form of a European Basic Income: the European Transition Income (ETI), which is likely to meet less resistance.

55 Compare e.g.: Edenhofer et al 2019: Optionen für eine CO₂-Preisreform MCC-PIK-Expertise für den Sachverständigenrat zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung, 70-75. (German only)

56 Idea by Claus Offe.

57 Van Parijs, P. 2012: No Eurozone without Eurodividend https://ethics.harvard.edu/files/center-for-ethics/files/2012_no_eurozone_without_eurodividend.pdf

58 Van Parijs, P. & Vanderborght, Y. 2017. Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 230-241

59 But that would mean that the Euro-dividend is no anti-poverty measure: the overall sum of benefits would be the same, even if they partly would change from means tested ones to unconditionality.

60 For further discussion of funding options on EU level, their advantages and problems see: Denuit, Francois: The European Universal Basic Income: A Clarification of the Debate. In: GEF (ed) 2019: European Green Perspectives on Basic Income

“In sum, we can say that an Ecological Basic Income promises to provide a friendly environment for both technical (efficiency, closed production circles) and non-technical (sufficiency, cultural change) ways to fight the ecological crisis.”

The ETI targets all 241 million EU residents, aged between 25-64, and allows each of them to receive 60% of the monthly median income in the respective member state (i.e., €1,160 in Germany; €299 in Poland) for a duration of 3 years and, importantly, without any form of means-testing. “Transition” may relate to the socio-ecological transition, a “Covid-19-transition”, to overcome the pandemic, or to other individual “transitions”, such as a change of one’s job or just one’s life perspective.

The EU would be paying a basic layer of €200 as Euro-dividend. The member states would need to fill it up to a “full” basic income. Two main payment modalities are: 1) the EU transfers a yearly/monthly subsidy to the member states, which equals €200 monthly for each applicant of this state, or; 2) the EU transfers €200 monthly directly to each applicant. With a proof of the EU payment, the beneficiaries would have the right to ask for the rest in their member state.

Assuming that 20% of the 241 million EU adults would take the advantage of the ETI, at any given point in time, there would be a need to fund 116 billion per year. This amount is less than half of the reformed ETS revenue of 270 billion. In this way, there would be enough revenue left to finance climate protection and mitigation in the member states (as is already recommended in the current EU ETS directive).

There are also two main options for the implementation of the ETI: member states can join voluntarily to the system, or they have to introduce the principle within a certain timeline, adapted to their own structure of social transfers (following an EU directive). Especially for poorer countries, the system is attractive because their net payment for co-financing this European social subsidy for the socio-ecological transition is relatively low. But wealthier countries would also benefit from EU support when they are ready to give everybody three years in life the “basic income-like” payment I am suggesting here in the form of an ETI.

There will be no direct state spending. Only a state’s citizens pay due to their ecological behaviour: the wealthier people would contribute more to the EU ETS revenue. When combined with the payment of the same amount of basic income this will also have a redistribution effect within Europe.⁶¹ In this way, the European Transition Income would be part of the just transition as part of the European Green Deal, which has not yet received the public attention it deserves: it helps during a phase of re-orientation

regarding life and job decisions, which will be especially important as soon as CO₂-intensive branches are forced to transform their business models. A European Transition Income may give security within the green transition for everybody. In parallel, it would be a very big basic income pilot project, even if, at the beginning, only some member states joined the project.

Many questions regarding legal aspects, administrative feasibility, the entitlement of specific age groups etc. remain. As a first step, it might be an option to take away the universality of the purest form of the Euro-dividend and only target people in a certain range of the income distribution. For some, such low-income targeting might betray the whole idea of basic income, but when fighting for radical reform, we need to look for concrete and feasible ways to our utopia, otherwise they remain pure visions.

As it is unlikely that national governments and the EU will decide by themselves to take the route to a Euro-dividend, political support from outside national parliaments will be necessary in order to realise it. There are three civil society movements which have so far fought their own battles without much interaction. If they join forces for this social-ecological reform that the Euro-dividend constitutes, they might develop more pressure than the individual forces are added up. First: the basic income movement has an attractive social-libertarian agenda. But the full and immediate implementation of a basic income that deserves the name is associated with such big changes on political, economic and social levels that it cannot be found on tomorrow’s agenda. Instead, the basic income movement pursues small but concrete and feasible steps towards its larger vision of a utopia with income for all. Second: the environmental movement has fortunately gained enormous traction over the last years but faces limits of social acceptability of bans and prohibitions. For example, the French President Emmanuel Macron has clearly demonstrated in 2018 and 2019 how the introduction of taxes on natural resources (here, a carbon tax) without adequate social compensation may lead to justified social unrest (here, the Yellow Vests movement). And, third: the young post-national pro-European movement is currently still suffering from a lack of substantial ideas for a more social and ecological Europe. If these three movements – the basic income movement, the climate movement, and the post-national pro-European movement – would join forces, they are likely to achieve more of their own and of their common goals.

61 Schachtschneider, U. 2021: Ecological Euro Dividend: Ein Schritt zum Grundeinkommen in Europa. In: Lüdemann, Neumärker, Schachtschneider (Hrsg., forthcoming): Grundeinkommen braucht Europa – Europa braucht Grundeinkommen!

Ecological Euro-Dividend – A Step to Unconditional Basic Income in Europe? Uni Freiburg 11-12. October 2018: Basic Income and the Euro-Dividend as socio-political Pillars of the EU and its Member Countries <https://www.ulrich-schachtschneider.de/resources/Ulrich+Schachtschneider+Ecological+Euro+Dividend+Freiburg+12-10-18.pdf>

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UNIVERSAL
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INCOME
IN THE
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DEBATE

Basic income in Austria | Giving people a tangible sense of security: a worthwhile political goal

Juliane Alton

I. Introduction

Back in October 2005, an international congress entitled ‘Basic Income – being active in freedom’ took place in Austria. It was organised by the Basic Income and Social Cohesion Network Austria and the Basic Income Network Germany. The Catholic Social Academy, Attac, and Swiss representatives of BIEN (Basic Income Earth Network) were all also involved.

At the congress, it was agreed that a basic income should be used to bring about a sustainable ‘redistribution of wealth and income’ and to close ‘the gap between the haves and the have-nots, which has been widening at an alarming rate in recent decades’.⁶²

The participants were predominantly academics and representatives of civil society institutions. Together, the participants developed a very colourful, diverse and detailed picture of a path towards a society in which social security is, at least, partially decoupled from formal employment; this can be seen in the documentation of the congress as well. However, the many critical and dissenting voices (i.e., from a number of representatives of organised labour) were also captured.

Representatives of political parties were nowhere to be seen. Politicians provided neither speeches at the congress nor introductory words for the documentation. Whether there was any attempt to involve politicians is not known to the author of this article. However, it is obvious that it would not have been easy to find acting politicians who support an unconditional basic income – even among the Austrian Greens. In fact,

an unconditional basic income has never been party policy: the Green basic social security proposal has been around since the 1990s, together with a detailed and carefully set out case for why it is preferable to a basic income.⁶³

For one thing, the Greens were concerned about how an unconditional basic income could be linked with the abolition of the welfare state. This would have the great advantage of doing away with social bureaucracy but the disadvantage is that it would amount to a redistribution from the bottom to the top. The Green basic social security proposal, on the other hand, entails (broadly speaking) basic income elements supplemented by infrastructural elements, such as an improved education and health system.

However, two of those who played active roles in the 2005 congress later became representatives of the political academy of the Greens (though, at the time, they had no formal connection either to the academy or to the party).⁶⁴ Both the *Grüne Bildungswerkstatt* (Green Education Workshop), in all of its eleven branches, and its successor, FREDa (the current academy), have addressed the topic of an unconditional basic income and worked on it with the help of academic experts – most recently together with the political scientist Barbara Prainsack (University of Vienna) in two public online events as part of the Green European Foundation’s transnational project on UBI in December 2020 and January 2021 based on her book.⁶⁵

62 Netzwerk Grundeinkommen und sozialer Zusammenhalt Österreich und Netzwerk Grundeinkommen Deutschland (Hrsg.): Grundeinkommen – in Freiheit tätig sein. Beiträge des ersten deutschsprachigen Grundeinkommenskongresses. Berlin, 2006. p.9f

63 Lukas Wurz, Social Advisor of the Green Group in the Austrian Parliament der Grünen im Parlamentsklub: Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen – Warum die Grünen dieses nicht fordern oder unterstützen; Version: 22.8.2013.

64 Andreas Novy in his role as associate professor at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, later Chair of the *Grüne Bildungswerkstatt*; and the present author, Juliane Alton, in her role as member of the board of IG Kultur Österreich, and now member of the board of FREDa – the Green Future Academy.

65 Vom Wert des Menschen. Warum wir ein bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen brauchen. By Barbara Prainsack, Vienna 2020.

II. The Greens’ position in Austria

Whereas the Green political academies in Austria have played and continue to play an active role in the discussion of an unconditional basic income, there has never been a commitment on the part of the Austrian Greens or the Green federal state organisations, i.e., of the Green Party as a whole, to the introduction of a basic income. Rather, party policy was and remains the expansion and strengthening of the existing social system in the – thoroughly social democratic – way it has evolved so far, with most social rights (or, at least, the most important, i.e., sickness, old age, and unemployment insurance, etc.) linked to formal employment.

Unemployment benefit in Austria, for example, at a net replacement rate of 55%, is one of the lowest in Europe. Social assistance is more than €200 per month below the poverty threshold. And even the compensatory supplement for pensioners is still below the poverty threshold.

The Greens’ answer to the deficiencies of the social welfare system is the Green Basic Social Security scheme which aims to expand the existing system into a genuine social safeguard for all emergency situations; one that is means-tested and whole-life-course-oriented and does not seek to dismantle or radically reorganise the system. The social welfare system should be a stepping stone back into independent living without any form of social exclusion.

For a life of dignity for everyone, not only an adequate income is required, but also a variety of additional support services which an unconditional basic income does not offer.

The Green Basic Security scheme is not a replacement for the existing social security system but provides a back-up where it does not offer sufficient protection. It addresses gaps in the social safety net and provides support when money alone is not enough to overcome hardship.

*Green Basic Security is not just about money. It is also about providing people with the support they need to overcome the underlying causes of their problems. So, it is also about access to education for people with a poor education history, access to health services for people with specific illnesses, and to support and care for overcoming family problems or help in getting out of debt.*⁶⁶

There are undoubtedly many members of the various Green Party organisations who would like to see the in-

troduction of a basic income, or at least a commitment by the Greens to a basic income. But, to this day, there has never been such a commitment. Leading Green social policy makers, including Rudolf Anschober, Katharina Wiesflecker, Birgit Hebein, Heinrich Schellhorn and Christine Baur, have been busy in the last few years fending off attacks on the social security system as a whole from the conservative right-wing ÖVP-FPÖ coalition government (2017-2019) and seeking to maintain arrangements that complied with the constitution. This is because part of the agenda of this short-term government was the restructuring of the existing social security safety net (the responsibility of the federal provinces) into a ‘new social assistance’ system with a restrictive framework law at the national level which aimed to put certain population groups in a worse position.⁶⁷

After environmental policy, social policy was and remains the most important portfolio in governments with Green Party involvement. However, a basic income has not been included in any of the government policy programmes where the Greens have been a partner, neither at the state nor at the federal level. This is not the result of negotiations and compromise, but rather a consequence of fundamental Green policy objectives.

III. Do the Greens need to justify their stance on an unconditional basic income?

At every Green federal state assembly, at every Green national congress, members of the party have the opportunity to introduce motions and resolutions or to put issues up for discussion. They can also hold ministers and federal state councillors to account. But a basic income is rarely a topic of discussion.

This is not only for reasons of ‘Realpolitik’, such as the unlikelihood of reaching an agreement with a political partner as part of a coalition agenda for government. It is not only the issue of financing that stands in the way. First of all, it is simply a matter of defending the status quo and fighting for real improvements – in Austria, for example, better protection for the unemployed, as explained above.

For this reason, the Green Basic Security scheme – which is linked to formal employment – entails a statutory minimum wage (complementary to the almost nationwide collective agreements) and a number of basic protections:

66 Lukas Wurz: Position paper for the Austrian Greens (Version 2013; currently in further development)

67 Eligibility criteria such as German language skills served to block claims by refugees and migrants; large families were also disadvantaged (only €43 per month in benefits for the third and every additional child).

- ▶ In the event of unemployment or incapacity;
- ▶ In old age;
- ▶ For children and families.

This package is supplemented by basic social security provided by infrastructure and social services; this is because it's not just about money.

IV. Is a change of perspective feasible?

Green participation in government has certainly not brought about a change in the Austrian Greens' perspective on the issue of a basic income. There has never been a commitment to an unconditional basic income. Rather, a change of perspective in the other direction seems possible. Indeed, Social Minister Rudolf Anschöber⁶⁸ said in interviews with various media at the end of 2020 that an unconditional basic income should certainly be given some thought.

In fact, of course, this has been happening for some time already. And this thinking will continue for a long time yet, even if the social crisis in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis is currently lending fuel to the discussion. A softening of ideological stances for or against an unconditional basic income would be helpful in this

process. The present author is convinced that the way forward lies in the expansion of existing social welfare systems. 'Unconditionality' is not a productive approach in this continuing debate because compromises will be necessary in order for progress to be made.

It would also be helpful to think about a new term – something far removed from the ideologised vocabulary of the past and closer to a terminology that makes sense of the security we are tangibly striving for.⁶⁹ This would be another worthwhile assignment for those championing this project. People think in metaphors, and most of the time these linguistic images have their origin in the body. But the term 'unconditional' is abstract, and it is also associated with negative phrases: unconditional obedience, for better or worse. Terminological experiments such as 'helicopter money' or 'money showers' seem more promising in comparison. These can of course suggest 'waste' or 'every person for themselves'. A 'money cushion', perhaps? Or would we lay back on the cushion and not do any productive work?

Perhaps the subtitle of the Basic Income Congress of 2005 is the right starting point: 'meaningful activity in freedom' - a *vita activa* without existential concerns.

In any event, finding a good name that describes a close-knit, supportive social network would be a worthwhile task for those championing this project.

Basic income in Belgium

Kim Evangelista

Universal Basic Income (UBI) is massively debated in Belgium. It has been the topic of many conferences, debates, studies and press coverage in the past few years and has had a strong resurgence since the Covid-19 crisis.

[Ecolo](#) (the French-speaking Belgian Green Party)⁷⁰ is a strong supporter of UBI and a very vocal actor in the public debate. In December 2020, the co-president of the party, Rajae Maouane, proposed, as a campaign pledge since 2019, an unconditional Basic Income for

the young (18-26 years old). The amount proposed is €460 per month. It would be granted to 1,25 million young Belgians and represents an annual expense of €3,2 billion.

The other political parties are cautious and hesitant to say the least. Even if some prominent members of the socialist and liberal parties voiced their support of a UBI, nothing concrete was proposed. From a liberal or more conservative perspective, many people see UBI as a way to efficiently fight the unemployment trap (since you keep

your income, whether you work or not), to facilitate entrepreneurship and new life choices and to avoid bureaucracy and heavy controls, such as means- and behaviour-testing. However, they fear the cost of the proposal and the necessity of new taxes. The Left is attracted to the way a UBI can make social protection more universal by avoiding non-take up of social rights and stigmatisation, but they fear it could weaken existing social security. For instance, trade unions, which are in a powerful position in Belgium, are strong opponents to the idea of basic income. Furthermore, forces from both the political right and left are concerned a UBI would undermine the importance of work in our society.

Nevertheless, the Belgian state has extended and simplified existing social protection schemes following the Covid-19 outbreak. The Covid-19 crisis has helped draw attention to the concept of basic income and to convince more people of the importance of providing a guaranteed income to people unconditionally, universally and individually. As some means- and behaviour testing schemes of our system of unemployment benefits have been suspended to adapt to the challenges of the pandemic, some have said that, for the first time, we were applying the concept of a universal basic income to our social welfare system.

Socialist political parties and anti-poverty associations have argued in favour of a direct cash transfer for specific profiles (€200 lump sum for precarious households and €2,000 to €5,000 for businesses and self-employed people). Liberal political parties have welcomed the "basic incomisation" of existing social transfers. The Greens proposed to go even further in this direction with less conditions, more automatic transfers and new profiles, such as precarious households or the self-employed.

Moreover, established academics have advocated for a UBI⁷¹. Many proposals were on the table (i.e., a tax credit; a payment in temporary consumption vouchers; a relatively low amount, which comes as a supplement of the existing social security; a higher amount that replaces existing social security; helicopter money; transition basic income; basic income in local currencies, etc.). However, this debate has not really taken place at the public or the mainstream level, but rather, has stayed within academic and expert circles.

A final proposal on the shape and type of financing a basic income is still being discussed within Ecolo: other schemes and possibilities are being discussed in working groups (minimum guaranteed income, tax credit, etc.). Financing propositions and net income effect of the propositions amongst specific groups (people under 25, people over 65, people with low income, different social benefit recipients, single parents and households with kids, etc.) are being assessed.

The Covid-19 crisis sheds light on a whole series of questions concerning our society and strengthens us in our analysis of the relevance of a basic income. It is clear that if a basic income had been put in place in Belgium, basic economic security would have been ensured more quickly and more fairly, automatically and universally. It also seems clear that the selective income support measures to be taken in an emergency could have been on a smaller scale. However, while the coronavirus crisis has helped to draw attention to the concept of basic income and convince new people of the importance of providing a guaranteed income to the population, many people still remain opposed to the proposal".

Finland in 2021: Further trials, but not quite a basic income in sight

Simo Raittila

The Finnish Basic Income trial was held through the years 2017 and 2018. While further studies based on the data should be expected in the coming years (the trial register can be connected with other administrative data registries), the main results were published in May 2020.

Basic income is still a model that lacks support in the Finnish parliament and many parties have offered their own solutions, drawing inspiration, among other options, from the UK's universal credit system and United States' earned income tax credit.

⁶⁸ This article was written before the resignation of Rudolph Anschöber from the post of Austrian Federal Minister for Social Affairs and Health on 13 April 2021.

⁶⁹ The findings of cognitive research in recent years (Lakoff, Wehling, etc.) are likely to enrich this discourse.

⁷⁰ <https://ecolo.be/>

⁷¹ <https://alfresco.uclouvain.be/alfresco/service/guest/streamDownload/workspace/SpacesStore/7acc537-7155-4689-af3d-bb0508b787b7/2020.10.BI%20and%20pandemic.pdf?guest=true>

Contrary to what many news sources claimed, there were no official plans in place to continue the pilot at the time. While investment in further and larger trials would have been the wish of many researchers, it never had much political support from prime minister Juha Sipilä's (Centre Party) right-wing government, which mainly hoped to find out if the monetary incentives of basic income would increase employment⁷².

In the trial, 2,000 unemployed people between 25-58 years of age received a monthly, tax-exempt €560 of basic income which replaced their basic social security benefits (unemployment benefit at the start of the trial). The participants in the experimental group were not obliged to participate in activation policies (no behaviour-testing was applied) and they could even receive the money if they found newer, paid work. On top of this, most of them also received the general housing allowance: a benefit depending on one's area of residence, housing costs and income.

The two most cited results of the study are that:

1. No difference was found between the people on basic income and those on the traditional unemployment benefit in the main outcome of employment;
2. Those who received a basic income reported increased well-being and health.

Both of these results come with their own set of limitations. First, the non-result regarding employment (measured as hours worked and money earned) means that people who are in long-term unemployment might not react very strongly to purely financial incentives. As the absence of evidence does not equal the evidence of absence, this leaves open the possibility of whether basic income can increase employment (in this kind of group), compared to more means-tested benefits⁷³.

"But... but!", one might reason, "Vice versa, doesn't this also mean that we can also not say that conditionality (here, in the form of behaviour-testing in the control group) doesn't increase employment?". The problem is that in this trial there was no clear way of separating these two effects. It could well be that the effects of mon-

etary incentives on the one hand and the unconditionality on the other cancelled each other out with regard to increasing motivation to additional hours worked or money earned. There is no way to know from the Finnish basic income experiment and further studies are needed to resolve this question.

Furthermore, the effects of unconditionality are further confounded as participants in the experimental group (receiving the basic income) were exempt from activation policies and even the new activation model – introduced by Juha Sipilä's right-wing government in 2018 – between the two study years. During the first year of the trial, in 2017, 65% of people in the experimental group had an employment plan compared to 75% in the control group.

One possible and partial explanation for this difference being so small was that those in the experimental group who also had children could still receive the additional child benefits tied to activity with employment services. They also still received letters from the employment services and might have found these services worthwhile when looking for a job.

Many academics have noted serious issues in the design of the Finnish trial. The model lacked changes to the tax system that would allow funding basic income, leading to more generous monetary incentives and possibly more extreme end-results than have been proposed, for example, by the Finnish Greens.

The focus of the study was on the hard, statistical measures of unemployment and the survey on well-being was – unfortunately – only added as an afterthought. Social policy professor Heikki Hiilamo labelled the preliminary results at the time in 2019 "disappointing"⁷⁴ and the final report in 2020 "surprising"⁷⁵. He wrote in the latter blog post:

"The final report also discussed the survey results showing that the basic income group had clearly higher subjective wellbeing across a large variety of measures. The survey was conducted at the end of the study period. There was no baseline survey to analyse changes during the experiment. Therefore, as the research group concluded, it is not possible to determine if the positive results can be attributed to basic income."

72 <https://www.ecosprinter.eu/blog/the-limits-of-the-finnish-basic-income-experiment/>

73 Note: the means-testing in Finnish unemployment insurance is already comparatively soft-handed. The first €300 earned in a month doesn't affect the benefit and, after this, the benefit tapers down at 50 cents per € earned until €1,700 per month. Many changes to this and other benefits were introduced throughout the 2000s and 2010s to decrease effective tax rates and incentivise part-time work.

74 <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/news/good-society/heikki-hiilamo-disappointing-results-finnish-basic-income-experiment>

75 <https://www2.helsinki.fi/en/news/nordic-welfare-news/the-basic-income-experiment-in-finland-yields-surprising-results>

This means that we cannot say with certainty whether the people receiving basic income and the comparison group were already different before the trial began. Another problem with survey questionnaires is that people's answers may be affected by many factors including the exact phrasing of the questions. Professor Olli Kangas, who served as a lead researcher of the trial, was cautious even of the participants in the experiment giving interviews during the trial in order to minimise the public discussion's possible influence on the results of the study.

Three new trials proposed by the government

To go beyond the ambiguous results of the first UBI trial, a separate, multi-faceted trial was proposed by a group of researchers⁷⁶. It would have multiple different trial groups studying the separate effects of monetary incentives, administrative barriers and lack of information about right to benefits. Something similar to this proposal has also been mentioned in the current government programme⁷⁷.

Instead of new rounds of basic income trials, it is not unlikely that there will soon be a negative income tax (NIT) trial in Finland. Such a trial was first included in prime minister Antti Rinte's (Social Democrats) government programme in June 2019 and was adopted by his replacement, Sanna Marin (Social Democrats), when she came into power in December 2019.

It can be argued that an NIT is able to achieve very similar results as through some UBI schemes – just via a different route. See, for example, a piece by Scott Santens⁷⁸ or the report Basic Social Security 2030⁷⁹, in which Lukas Korpelainen writes:

"Ultimately, a fixed basic income paid to all, regardless of their level of income and, correspondingly, unconditional negative income tax, are equal when it comes to the end result; in other words, the income that the individual takes home. The advantages of a fixed basic income include

predictability and clarity, as the individual receives the same amount of benefit each month regardless of their level of income. In addition, a benefit paid to even those with a high income may increase the acceptability of the benefit's universal nature, as well as its social cohesion. On the other hand, the benefit entails a higher nominal marginal tax rate. Moreover, some may question the system due to the "unnecessary" benefits paid to those with a high income."

The Social Democrats themselves have spearheaded the idea of "työtulotuki", which is essentially a US-style earned income tax credit. The main difference to basic income is that one already has to be employed to be eligible for these benefits.

After a government crisis in Spring 2021, it is unclear whether a new round of UBI trials will be realised any time soon in Finland as there seems to be funding only for a trial of NIT, "or another form of work and social policy trial" which – according to a social security expert – "could mean almost anything"⁸⁰. Unfortunately, if a trial is started in 2022 (according to the plan), there might not be enough time left to make it a worthwhile one⁸¹.

Lacking political support among MPs

In an earlier text on the future of basic income in Finland for the Green European Journal⁸², I looked into what Alma Media's vote matchers⁸³ revealed about the support for basic income of candidates, elected officials and parties.

Greens and the Left Alliance both had actual (partial) basic income models before the election and have almost unanimous support for it in their parliamentary groups. In contrast, the Social Democrats and the more economically right-wing parties are known to not endorse basic income. Interestingly, even a party that has publicly endorsed basic income – even multiple times throughout its history – the agrarian-centrist Centre Party, does not do so in practice.

76 <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161391/25-2019-Sosiaaliturvan%20byrokratialoukut.pdf> (Abstract in English)

77 The translation is a little misleading in its last lines: "There will be a trial on basic income, drawing on the outcomes of the basic income experiment of the previous government term". The Finnish original talks about a negative income tax experiment. <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/marin/government-programme/reforming-social-security>

78 <https://www.scottsantens.com/negative-income-tax-nit-and-unconditional-basic-income-ubi-what-makes-them-the-same-and-what-makes-them-different>

79 <https://gef.eu/publication/basic-social-security-2030/>

80 <https://twitter.com/JussiTervola/status/1389095876275195905?s=19>

81 <https://twitter.com/TapioRasanen/status/1389101527202156544?s=19>

82 <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/the-future-of-basic-income-in-finland/>

83 <https://www.iltalehti.fi/eduskuntavaalit-2019/vaalikone#/>

The Centre Party has called their model “basic income”, but have included in it details that call into question whether it is sensible to call it “basic income”. Their model is based on a negative income tax and includes sanctions for those refusing activation policies or looking for work. This is surprising insofar as in 2018 their party assembly voted for a continuation of the 2017-2018 trial and the implementation of an unconditional basic income during this parliamentary term.

Another interesting finding from Alma Media’s vote matchers⁸⁴ was that basic income was supported more by candidates who, later, were not elected than those who finally were. Even a government in which three parties have campaigned on basic income and have official pro-UBI policies, there is no strong force to openly and actively fight for UBI. For example, if all the elected Members of Parliament (MPs) would act consistently with their parties’ official policies, there would be a majority (almost 60%) inside the government for UBI. According to answers to the vote matcher, the real percentage of MPs supporting the idea is more like 30%.

Social security committee to reform Finland’s welfare state

While the current Finnish government is more left-wing – and even the Centre Party has historically and officially proposed a basic income – it is unlikely that the UBI will advance much in the current political landscape for the following reasons.

There is currently a committee⁸⁵ on social security reform consisting of experts, officials and politicians from all parties and it will be in place for two parliamentary terms.

Parties all across the political spectrum, such as the Social Democrats, the National Coalition Party, and the Christian Democrats, all support some form of a universal credit model. And even the OECD has argued for universal credit rather than basic income in Finland⁸⁶ – albeit based on calculations some researchers have found problematic.

Almost exclusively, the Greens and Left Alliance continue to work towards a basic income. Meanwhile the Greens still aim to refine their answers to other issues in the Finnish social security system, in education and in labour market policies. The Green think-tank Visio has worked on addressing how, for example, the current housing benefit should be changed if it were to be paid on top of a partial basic income (for details, see Visio’s proposals by Lukas Korpelainen, available in English⁸⁷). He currently co-chairs the party’s social security working group with Touko Niinimäki. The working group is working towards updating the party’s social security policies later in 2021.

To conclude, it is highly unlikely that a basic income will be introduced in Finland any time soon. There is not enough support from the big parties and the road has been paved for more incremental changes to the current social security system. Finland will hopefully provide further interesting trials, but unless something changes radically in the political landscape, the 2020s will unfortunately be a lost decade for basic income in Finland.

“Almost exclusively, the Greens and Left Alliance continue to work towards a basic income. Meanwhile the Greens still aim to refine their answers to other issues in the Finnish social security system, in education and in labour market policies.”

84 See previous footnote.

85 <https://stm.fi/en/social-security-reform>

86 <https://oecdecoscope.blog/2018/02/28/why-would-a-universal-credit-be-better-than-a-basic-income-for-finland/>

87 <https://gef.eu/publication/basic-social-security-2030/>



Basic income in France | Universal basic income, French political parties and the public debate today: a growing interest

Lucile Schmid

During France's 2017 presidential election campaign, Socialist Party candidate Benoit Hamon proposed the introduction of a universal basic income (UBI). The proposal sparked a heated debate on philosophy, the place of work in society and the financial stability of the welfare state. And it continued to shape public debate well beyond Hamon's campaign. In the same year, Julien Bayou, a regional councillor for Ile de France, who today leads the Europe Ecologie - Les Verts (EELV) party⁸⁸, launched an organisation called *Mon revenu de base* (My Basic Income). Modelled on the German non-profit *Mein Grundeinkommen*, its aim was to crowdfund a UBI for one randomly chosen person. Six people have benefitted from the scheme since its creation.

Several other local initiatives have also shown the positive effects that a UBI can have in helping those who fall through the holes in the safety net, i.e., those not covered by welfare programmes (young people aged from 18-25) or who do not apply for them⁸⁹, despite being eligible (1/3 of people entitled to existing benefits such as the *revenu de solidarité active* (RSA – €565 a month for a single person, €848 a month for a couple) do not receive them. In 2016, the Gironde department proposed experimenting with an unconditional UBI and was quickly joined by 18 other Socialist-run localities across mainland France and its overseas territories. But without legislation to allow this experiment – the right of French municipalities to experiment is severely limited, and France's parliament rejected the proposal – this initiative could not be implemented.

In 2019, a handful of localities (including Grande Synthe near Dunkirk in the north, as well as La Haute Vallée de l'Aude and Lot et Garonne in the south west) signed agreements with the Zoein foundation⁹⁰ allowing them

to experiment with an ecological transition income (ETI) – a guaranteed income for those acting to promote ecological and social transition – as part of a project that builds on the work of Sophie Swaton. More recently, in 2020, the city of Lyon, led by Green mayor Grégory Doucet, decided to try a *revenu de solidarité jeune*: an in-work benefit for 18-24 year olds who have left education.

Since 2019, the president's governing majority – and Emmanuel Macron himself – have responded to UBI proposals by putting forward a *revenu universel d'activité*, similar to the UK's Universal Credit. The goal is to roll as many benefits as possible into one (unemployment benefit, working tax credit and housing benefit, as well as disability benefits and others), for the same cost, with a view to simplifying access for beneficiaries while at the same time obliging them to prove that they are actively seeking work. Negative reactions from certain campaign groups (particularly those representing people with disabilities) led the government to abandon the proposal. But this episode laid bare the key issues surrounding UBI – whether or not to prioritise paid work, whether to adopt universality or a targeted approach, and how the programme would be funded – and the current government's firm opposition to looking again at conditionality.

The political Left divided on UBI

“At 18, you're old enough to vote and to go to prison but when it comes to benefits, you're not eligible until 25,” (Boris Vallaud, Socialist MP).

«A universal basic income would encourage employers to hire less, jobs done by women would be hit first and, above all, it would break the relationship between capital and labour: income would be financed through taxation, whereas we think that it's employers who should pay wages,” (Adrien Quatennens, La France Insoumise)

Since the start of the pandemic, the idea of a UBI has seen a resurgence in public debate. Over a million more people have fallen into poverty, with more than 10 million people now living below the headline. While schemes like furlough have proven their effectiveness, the predicament of young workers, whether students or not, has often appeared dire. Thousands of students have had to rely on food aid and many young people have not worked long enough to qualify for unemployment benefit. They had to wait until November 2020 to receive temporary assistance (up to €900 a month). In February 2021, Socialist MPs Boris Vallaud and Hervé Saulignac tabled draft legislation that would have given young people a monthly universal basic income of €564 and a lump sum of €5,000 upon turning 18; it was to have been funded by taxes on the financially wealthy. The proposal didn't pass, with Macron's administration condemning the proposal as a “mirage” and boasting that the government was prioritising a “return to employment”.

But the debate also saw some MPs close to Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the far-left La France Insoumise (LFI), refusing to support the initiative. And yet, just a few weeks later, LFI MP François Ruffin tabled a draft bill to extend the RSA to young people aged 18-24. The idea of a UBI is not unanimously supported by two of France's largest unions, the CGT and FO, either. It is perceived as giving up; as an admission that it isn't possible to give everyone a job. The fact that a UBI is advocated by small-state libertarians as a sort of “final settlement” also arouses suspicion at another of France's biggest unions, the reformist CFDT, who would prefer to see better sharing of working time.

EELV has long supported UBI, with senator Jean Desesard having tabled a motion on the subject as far back as 2014. When, in 2017, Yannick Jadot – being initially the candidate for the Greens in the presidential race – decided to join the socialist candidate, Benoit Hamon, it might have played a role in the choice of emblematic measures, such as UBI. What is sure is that in 2021, Hamon announced that, at the coming regional elections in Ile de France, he would be running on the EELV list headed by Julien Bayou; the party that he founded after the 2017 presidential election, Generation-s, has become a permanent ally of the Greens. And Hamon also said that, at the next presidential election in 2022, he would support whichever candidate proposed a UBI.

In the wake of Hamon's presidential campaign proposal and similar pledges by department presidents, a UBI enjoys strong support among a number of senior figures in the Socialist Party and may well make it into the manifesto for 2022.

La République en Marche are against, Les Républicains are interested, and Le Rassemblement National are hesitant

After its failed attempt to introduce a *revenu universel d'activité*, the government now wants to focus on making the *garantie jeunes* (youth guarantee) universal. Created during François Hollande's presidency, this scheme guarantees young people who are not in education, employment or training a monthly benefit of up to €497 for one year in return for following an intensive employment preparation pathway. The government intends to widen access to the programme and double the number of beneficiaries to 200,000 in 2021. But universality is still a long way off.

On the political right, the Les Républicains party has launched a review led by Aurélien Pradié, a young MP from the south of France. Pradié said that he favours a “universal vital income” of around €1,700 a month that is conditional on working for a non-profit for two months, while, at the same time, reiterating the fundamental role of work and the need to raise wages. He has also proposed backing this up by giving anyone aged 16 to 30 with a project for social innovation or the common good access to a state-backed bank loan of up to €50,000. As for the far-right Rassemblement National, it has announced a review but shows some openness without giving details.

The current debate on UBI in France has revealed a growing awareness of the flaws in the welfare system when it comes to young people, students and those who have left school without qualifications. The wide variety of proposals and stances means that, so far, there's been no real convergence towards a consensus at national level, even on the left and in the union movement. There are, however, local experiments, but these can't be rolled out more widely because of the way France's constitution distributes power between central and local government, and because of a lack of maturity in the UBI debate. So, the place of work in society, how it is shared and what constitutes fair remuneration remains far from settled.

88 <https://www.eelv.fr/>

89 <https://www.vie-publique.fr/en-bref/274497-comment-lutter-contre-le-non-recours-aux-prestations-sociales>

90 <https://zoein.org/>

Basic income in Germany | The Green discussion on basic income in Germany – its development and current status

Michael Opielka and Wolfgang Strengmann-Kuhn

The early years

The discussion on basic income in the Green Party in Germany is as old as the party itself. The debate in the 1980s was influenced by writers such as André Gorz⁹¹ and Thomas Schmid⁹². Within the Greens, one of the main advocates was Michael Opielka, who was the academic advisor for social policy of the Greens parliamentary group in the Bundestag from 1983-1987 and had already written extensively in the 1980s about basic income.⁹³ In addition, some Green Party members (such as Claus Offe) were among the co-founders of the Basic Income European Network (BIEN) in 1986, which later became the Basic Income Earth Network.

The start of the millennium: Broadening discussion

In the 1990s, after German reunification, other topics were at stake in the German Green Party as well as in German society, and the discussion about basic income receded into the background. However, that changed as a result of the discussions around the so-called “Hartz” labour market reforms in Germany at the start of the millennium. Particularly the reform of social assistance (known as “Hartz IV”) generated contradiction and discussions about alternatives; not surprisingly, one of which was basic income. On the same day as the Hartz IV act was adopted

in the German Bundestag, the independent “Netzwerk Grundeinkommen” (Basic Income Network) was founded, with the support of several Green Party members, among others.⁹⁴ The discussion on basic income then became more prominent again and also within the Greens.

In contrast to the discussion in the 1980s, which mainly took place within the Green Party and its surroundings and in academic circles, this new discussion about basic income was much broader. At the beginning of this century, representatives beyond the alternative-left-academic scenes also participated in the discourse. Dieter Althaus, prime minister of Thüringen and member of the conservative party (CDU) proposed his own very specific basic income model, which he called *Solidarisches Bürgergeld*⁹⁵. This model proposed a basic income at the upper end of the current minimum income (like Hartz IV) and was to be implemented as a negative income tax. It also included a health flat rate of €200 per month. The unemployment insurance was to be substituted by the basic income, but there was an additional pension insurance which was fully financed by the employers. Interestingly, the CDU-affiliated political foundation Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung hired two Green academics, the two authors of this article, to carry out a financial study of Althaus’s proposal.⁹⁶

91 Gorz, A. (1984). *Wege ins Paradies. Thesen zur Krise, Automation und Zukunft der Arbeit*. Berlin: Rotbuch.

92 Schmid, T. (1986). *Befreiung von falscher Arbeit. Thesen zum garantierten Mindesteinkommen*. Berlin: Wagenbach.

93 See, for example: Opielka, M. (1985a). *Jenseits von Armut und Kapitalismus. 20 Thesen zur Begründung eines “garantierten Grundeinkommens”*. *Widersprüche*, Heft 14, February 1985, 55-60; Opielka, M. (1985b, ed.). *Die ökosoziale Frage. Alternativen zum Sozialstaat*. Frankfurt: Fischer 1985; Opielka, M. & Ostner, I. (1987, eds.). *Umbau des Sozialstaats*, Essen: Klartext; Opielka, M. & Vobruba, G. (1986, eds.). *Das garantierte Grundeinkommen. Entwicklung und Perspektiven einer Forderung*. Frankfurt: Fischer; Opielka, M. & Zander, M. (1988, eds.). *Freiheit von Armut. Das grüne Modell einer bedarfsorientierten Grundsicherung in der Diskussion*. Essen: Klartext

94 <https://www.isoe.org/en/aktuelles/blog/15-jahre-netzwerk-grundeinkommen-blick-zurueck-nach-vorn/>

95 Althaus, Dieter (2007). *Das Solidarische Bürgergeld. Sicherheit und Freiheit ermöglichen Marktwirtschaft*. In: Borchard, Michael (ed.): *Das Solidarische Bürgergeld – Analysen einer Reformidee*. Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius.

96 See: Opielka, M. & Strengmann-Kuhn, W. (2007). *Das Solidarische Bürgergeld. Finanz- und sozialpolitische Analyse eines Reformkonzepts. Gutachten für die Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*. In: Borchard, Michael (ed.): *Das Solidarische Bürgergeld – Analysen einer Reformidee*. Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius.

2007: A year-long debate culminating in a showdown

In 2007, there was a particularly intense debate on basic income within the Greens. The party board founded a committee known as “Zukunft der sozialen Sicherung” (Future of social security) under the leadership of Reinhard Bütikofer, the main topic of which was the discussion on basic income. One half of the committee were advocates of a basic income while the other half were against it. In the end, there was no total agreement between these two sub-groups; although, a lot of common ground was found, such as on basic goals, the necessity of a better minimum income system, and critique of the Hartz IV system. Therefore, the final report took the form of a Y, with a trunk of agreement and two branches: one arguing for a basic income with a concrete basic income model and the other branch arguing for a means-tested minimum income system.⁹⁷

In parallel to this committee, there was a broad discussion going on within the Green Party in most local and federal states.⁹⁸ Some states (Länder) adopted resolutions that advocated for a basic income. The resolution of the Greens in Baden-Württemberg⁹⁹ was based on the proposal that was made by the committee of the federal party and was then an alternative at the federal party congress of 2007 in Nuremberg. The end of the Nuremberg-resolution stated: “With this resolution the debate on basic income is not finished, all the more so as the discussion is going on in society. The discussion shall go on. For example, on the question of whether and how a negative income tax, which is proposed in some basic income models, can be combined with the Green minimum income concept.”¹⁰⁰

One of the points of common agreement within the Greens in Germany is the further development of social insurances into citizen insurance schemes (Bürgerversicherungen)¹⁰¹. This is important for the basic income supporters within the Greens as well because basic income should not be a substitute for social insurance. For most of the Green basic income supporters, the idea of basic income and the idea of citizen insurance schemes for pensions, health, and care belong together. Michael Opielka even made a proposal of a basic income insurance that combines both ideas.¹⁰²

2010 to 2013: Looking for a compromise

In the years following the Nuremberg-resolution, the discussion on basic income somewhat slowed down within the Greens. From 2010-2012, another committee of the federal party dealing with the social profile of the Greens once again was implemented. The committee was called “Zukunftsforum Antworten auf die auseinanderfallende Gesellschaft” (Future forum for answers on the diverging society). The aim was to describe and to sharpen the Green social profile. As a result, two consecutive reports were published, each containing a chapter on basic income, based on the work of a sub-working group of five persons: some of them in favour of; some against a basic income¹⁰³. In contrast to the committee in 2007, this group made a compromise proposal, which they called “*Grüne Basissicherung*” (Green basic security).

The basic idea of this compromise was the assessment that, on the one hand, an *unconditional* basic income *for everyone* was not a consensus in the party, but that on the other hand, a basic income or benefits like a basic income focusing on some groups could make sense for

97 Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen (2007a). Bericht der Kommission „Zukunft Sozialer Sicherung“ von BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN. http://www.stefan-ziller.eu/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/202219.bericht_der_kommission_zukunft_sozialer.pdf

98 For an overview of proposals discussed within the Greens, see: Strengmann-Kuhn, W. (2007b). *Armut und Grundeinkommen*. In: Zwengel, Ralf (ed): *Gesellschaftliche Perspektiven: Arbeit und Gerechtigkeit. Jahrbuch der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Hessen*, Klartext Verlag Essen.

99 Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen in Baden-Württemberg (2007). *Armut bekämpfen, Bildung verbessern, Chancen eröffnen. Der Weg zu einem grünen Grundeinkommen – eine solidarische und freiheitliche Zukunft gestalten*. <https://www.gruene-bw.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Grundeinkommen.pdf>

100 Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen (2007b). *Aufbruch zu neuer Gerechtigkeit*. <https://wolke.netzbegrueung.de/s/5JacEQFKG-2k4rrA?path=%2F2007-11-N%C3%BCrnb%20erg>

101 See: Strengmann-Kuhn, W. (2005, ed.). *Das Prinzip Bürgerversicherung. Die Zukunft des Sozialstaats*. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag.

102 See: Opielka, M. (2005). *Die Idee einer Grundeinkommensversicherung – Analytische und politische Erträge eines erweiterten Konzepts der Bürgerversicherung*. In: Strengmann-Kuhn, W. (ed.): *Das Prinzip Bürgerversicherung. Die Zukunft des Sozialstaats*. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag; Opielka, M. (2009). *Gerechtigkeit und Garantismus. Grundlagen grüner Sozialpolitik*. In: Siller, P. & Pitz, G. (eds): *Politik der Gerechtigkeit. Zur praktischen Orientierungskraft eines umkämpften Ideals*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 101-120.

103 Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen (2011). *Erster Bericht des Zukunftsforums „Antworten auf die auseinanderfallende Gesellschaft”*. Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen (2012). *2. Bericht des Zukunftsforums „Antworten auf die auseinanderfallende Gesellschaft” Teilhabe* https://www.gruene.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/20120618_Zweiter_Bericht_Zukunftsforum_Institutionen.pdf



a large majority of the party, particular a *Kindergrundsicherung* (children's basic security), a guarantee pension, and a negative income tax for workers. Besides these priority groups, in further steps, there could be basic income benefits or basic income-like benefits implemented for further groups. Additionally, there should be a better means-tested minimum income scheme, which should be simpler and should better safeguard against poverty. A *Kindergrundsicherung* and guaranteed pension has already been agreed by the Green Party. The *Kindergrundsicherung* was not very specific, but a specific guarantee pension model already existed as part of the Green pensions concept¹⁰⁴. What was still missing, however, was a concept for a negative income tax for workers.

The election programme for the federal elections in 2013 contained the following: "We want to further discuss the idea of a financial basic security or the idea of a negative income tax. Particularly in the debate on minimum income security and basic income for everyone, it is important to combine our guiding principles of justice and an emancipatory social policy with the importance of public institutions and financial feasibility. We want to bring this discussion into society. Therefore, we think the implementation of an 'Enquete Commission' (Study Commission) of the Bundestag makes sense, in which the idea and models of basic income, as well as fundamental reform perspectives for the welfare state and the social security systems shall be discussed".

2013-2017: Further development of basic income modules

However, this decision was only implemented in part. The Green parliamentary group decided – with the support of the Green MPs in favour of a basic income – against requesting a Study Commission. This was mainly because in times of a grand coalition of parties who were all against a basic income and two opposition parties in which only a minority was in favour of a basic income, there was a high risk that such a committee, even with considerable effort, might fail to generate any productive debate, or could perhaps even result in a rejection of the basic income idea completely. What was done in the years 2013 to 2017 was to carry on developing the Green concept for a guaranteed pension and to develop a concrete concept for a *Kindergrundsicherung* by working groups of the party and of the parliamentary group in the Bundestag.

What was not fulfilled during these years was the promise to bring the debate into wider society. There was no intense, public debate on basic income within the party or in society as a whole. However, that changed due to the increasing

debates in other countries; especially the referendum in Switzerland in 2016 and the basic income experiment in Finland. In 2016, a conference took place that was organised by several Green Party working groups; particularly the working group on the labour market, social policy and health policy, and the working group on economic and financial policy.

2018-2020: Long-term programme, Covid-19 and Future lab

Since January 2018, the Green Party has a new federal Board with two new chairpersons: Annalena Baerbock and Robert Habeck. Robert Habeck supports the basic income idea and was already a member of the party committee dealing with basic income in 2007. In the same year, the party started the work and discussion on a new "Grundsatzprogramm" (long-term programme), which is the third such programme, following those of 1980 and 2001, and which was subsequently adopted in 2020. Both party chairs emphasised that the discussion on basic income would be a prominent discussion point. The goal was not to have a showdown at the end of the discussion as in 2007, but to have as broad as possible a consensus around a Green concept, which should supersede Hartz IV.

Not only within the Greens, but also in society, we now have a lively discussion about basic income. One reason behind this is the related debate on digitisation and the future of work. Even some top managers in Germany, such as Joe Kaeser from Siemens, Timotheus Hoettges from Telekom and others argue for a basic income, along with the philosopher Richard David Precht, who is often a guest in TV talk shows and who linked his demand for a basic income with the expected changes from digitisation. Thus, basic income is regularly a topic in the media.

Nevertheless, in Germany, none of the mainstream political parties are in favour of a basic income. Only a few social democrats have begun to contemplate it. Although, 10 years ago, a conservative prime minister of one of the federal states put forward an income proposal (see above), nowadays, in the conservative party, there are only a few supporters of a basic income, whose role in their group is only marginal. In the left-wing party, Die Linke, basic income is also controversial, discussed by some prominent advocates – such as the party's former chairwoman Katja Kipping –, but which also faces prominent opponents, such as the former chairwoman of the parliamentary group in the Bundestag, Sarah Wagenknecht. Compared to the discussion within the Green Party, it is even more controversial, and the opponents are even more strongly against a basic income.

“Not only within the Greens, but also in society, we now have a lively discussion about basic income. One reason behind this is the related debate on digitisation and the future of work.”

104 See: Strengmann-Kuhn, W. & Jacobi, D. (2012a). Die Grüne Bürgerrente gegen Altersarmut – garantiert für alle. In: Christoph Butterwegge, Gerd Bosbach, Matthias W. Birkwald (eds.): Armut im Alter – Probleme und Perspektiven der sozialen Sicherung. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.

Thus, the discussion within the Greens – which has the aim of being more constructive – can have an important role for the debate on basic income as a whole in Germany. In this discussion, some key points are now at stake. The first step is that there should be a consensus about the goal to “overcome Hartz IV” and to look for an alternative. One of these alternatives is, of course, basic income. Thus, we need to have a new concrete basic income model. One possibility is an update of the 2007 model of Baden-Württemberg with a partial basic income, additional means-tested benefits and citizen insurances for health, care, and pensions. This update should also include the new concepts of child basic security and a guaranteed pension. However, the question remains as to whether the basic income should be partial or not. The key point of this question is how to deal with housing costs: should they be included in a basic income or not?

Besides the discussion on a new Green basic income model, there is a need to further develop or create new concepts for single groups for a gradual introduction of benefits, such as the child basic security, the guaranteed pension, a negative income tax for workers and – potentially – a basic income for students or artists, a minimum unemployment benefit, and so on. This could be one strategy to implement a basic income group by group¹⁰⁵.

In 2020, the basic income debate was given an additional boost by the Covid-19 crisis because the flaws of the current minimum income scheme and the gaps in the social security system became clear. The debate accelerated by the Covid-19 crisis also had an impact on the discussion of the Green Party’s long-term programme. As expected, the issue of basic income was one of the controversial points at the party conference in November 2020. The Green Network on Basic Income (Grünes Netzwerk Grundeinkommen¹⁰⁶) had prepared the debate intensively with a campaign “Grundeinkommen wird Grundsatz” (Basic income becomes principle), including a series of online discussions on different dimensions to the basic income debate. A few days before the party conference, an online event called “Grün. Europe. Grundeinkommen” (Green. Europe. Basic Income) with various guests from all over Europe was held¹⁰⁷.

In the draft of the basic programme, there was a demand for a means-tested guaranteed security (“Garantiesicherung”), which is an individual right and should be paid out without

sanctions. It is also to be gradually integrated into the tax system to prevent hidden poverty. So, there are already some basic income elements in this guarantee security, although it should be still means-tested. In the end, there was a vote at the party conference on the supplementary sentence “Dabei orientieren wir uns an der Leitidee eines Bedingungslosen Grundeinkommens” (In doing so, we orient ourselves towards the guiding idea of an unconditional basic income), which then received a majority of over 60%. The basic position of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen is thus clarified. In the short term, they advocate for a means-tested guaranteed income without sanctions, which they then want to develop, step-by-step, in the direction of an unconditional basic income. What this further development will look like in concrete terms, however, must be further clarified in future debates.

It was therefore of the utmost importance for the basic income discussion in Germany as a whole, and for the Greens in particular, that a “future laboratory” was agreed in June 2017 as part of the coalition agreement for a so-called Jamaica coalition of Christian Democrats, Greens and Liberals in the state of Schleswig-Holstein: “We will therefore set up a future laboratory with stakeholders from labour market policy and academia, in which the feasibility of new security models, i.e., a citizen’s income or further development of social security systems, will be discussed. The lab will discuss and evaluate the feasibility of new security models, such as a citizen’s income, a basic income or the further development of social security systems. Just as important as the social and economic flexibilisation of working life will be the debureaucratisation of labour and social administration. We want to carry the results of this process into the federal political debate in order to make our country fit for the challenges of the future and to keep existential fears away from our citizens.”¹⁰⁸

The fact that Robert Habeck, who had led the coalition negotiations as deputy prime minister, left the state government in 2018 and took over the federal chairmanship of the Green Party, proved to be unfavourable for the Future Lab. After a two-stage tendering process, the ISÖ, led by Michael Opielka and with Wolfgang Strengmann-Kuhn on the board of the sponsoring association, together with subcontractors, above all the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW), was awarded the contract to coordinate the “Schleswig-Holstein Future Lab” project.

105 Strengmann-Kuhn, W. (2012). Schritt für Schritt ins Paradies. In: Strengmann-Kuhn, W. & Jacobi, D. (eds.). Wege zum Grundeinkommen. Berlin: Bildungswerk Berlin der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

106 www.gruenes-grundeinkommen.de

107 Find the video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjigO_pG7SM

108 Coalition Agreement 2017, 31, cited in Opielka, M. (2019a). Ein Zukunftslabor für die Soziale Sicherung. In: Opielka, M. (2019, ed.): Zukunftslabor Schleswig-Holstein. Demographie und Digitalisierung #ZLabSH. ISÖ-Text 2019-1. Norderstedt: BoD, 5f.

The project started at the end of 2018 and led to many workshops, surveys and model developments in 2019.¹⁰⁹

In the end, a differentiated model of four reform scenarios was developed, which were to be simulated by the German Institute for Economic Research, DIW¹¹⁰, for their effects on fiscal and labour market policy.

All four reform scenarios included a more or less far-reaching basic income: 1) Citizens’ income; 2) Basic income; 3) Social insurance (with basic security or guarantee insurance); 4) Citizens’ insurance (see figure).¹¹¹ Unfortunately, the Ministry of Social Affairs led by the Liberal Party (FDP) –surprisingly, without any resistance from the Greens – cancelled the Future Lab at the beginning of 2020. The planned public discussion of the eagerly awaited research results therefore did not take place. Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, these results could have provided significant guidance for the future.

Reform scenario 1: Citizens’ income	Reform scenario 2: Basic income	Reform Scenario 3: Social insurance (with Basic Security or Guaranteed Security)	Reform scenario 4: Citizens’ insurance
The Citizens’ Income in the form of a “negative income tax” serves primarily to support labour market and performance motivation in the lower labour market segments.	The basic income in the form of a “social dividend” is available to every legal resident on a monthly basis and is subsequently taxed as “primary income” and subject to contributions (if applicable, according to allowances).	Contribution-financed, living standard-securing (“Bismarckian”) social insurance with “capping” by means-tested basic security (“guarantee security”).	Basic income insurance based on the Swiss AHV model for all life situations (old age, unemployment, parenthood, illness, disability, childhood, education).

Figure: Four reform scenarios for the future of social security with basic income

109 www.zlabsh.de, see Opielka, M. & Peter, S. (2020). Zukunftslabor Schleswig-Holstein. Zukunftsszenarien und Reformszenarien. ISÖ-Text 2020-1. Norderstedt: BoD

110 <https://www.diw.de/en>

111 See in detail: Hutflesz, T. & Opielka, M. (2020). Online-Delphi in der Zukunftsforschung zur Sozialpolitik. ISÖ-Text 2020-3. Norderstedt: BoD, 64ff.

Basic Income in Greece

Christina Efthimiadou and Alexander Pagoulatos

The idea of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) is rather underdeveloped among the Greek public. It is often misunderstood as and mistaken for welfare/unemployment benefits and many political parties have used the term to refer to classic welfare schemes. In Greece, social welfare benefits have been very limited since the 1990's. Today, the unemployed receive a meagre compensation of €400 per month per person for a maximum of 12 months; this amount used to be even lower, at around €300, only 10 years ago. Whereas there are more generous benefits for those with previously high incomes, the great majority of the Greek people are not eligible for this form of state support.

Greece suffered severely and disproportionately high under the general economic crisis following the financial crisis of 2008/9¹¹². After 2014, the political picture of social benefits in Greece changed, mainly due to the severe economic and social effects of the financial crisis. A pilot programme entitled “Universal Guaranteed Income”, following an EU “Second Economic Adjustment Programme for Greece”, took place in 13 municipalities across the country in 2014 and 2015¹¹³. However, “universal” in the title of the programme was misleading since it was means-tested insofar that only people and families with no or a very low income were eligible. With a newly elected government at the beginning of 2015, the left-wing party SYRIZA introduced a new social welfare scheme called, “Social Solidarity Income”. This scheme provided alternative measures of support for those severely hit by the crisis across Greece and was a rather strong and effective form of help for those in need. However, even this scheme was very different from a UBI in that it was not “universal” but subject to income and social criteria. In 2019, the right-wing party New Democracy (ND), re-introduced the term “Universal Guaranteed Income”, first used in 2014; although, it described a very similar scheme to the “Social Solidarity Income”, introduced by the SYRIZA party in 2015. Due to the pandemic and the increased popularity of UBI in Spain and Italy, the Greek press picked up these international basic income activities and re-initiated a public UBI debate in Greece.

The nature and application of basic income has also been a field of debate, especially between the government of ND and the centre left opposition SYRIZA. The only party which expressed and defended UBI in its original form was the newly shaped (2012) party “POTAMI” (the River) – meaning no income or other social criteria are applied, and each individual – even those with high income – would be eligible. POTAMI sit with the Socialists & Democrats Group in the European Parliament. The party introduced basic income in its original form as a proposal for its political programme in the party's Congress in 2016 and also presented a UBI concept in the Greek parliament.

“Basic income-resembling” fiscal schemes analytically

The first social welfare programme in Greece resembling basic income was paid out for 6 months by the centre-right coalition government, starting in late 2015, deriving from the Second Economic Adjustment Programme for Greece.¹¹⁴ It was named “Universal Guaranteed Income”; although, it was not actually universal. The guaranteed income plan was directly related to the marital status and the family status of the beneficiary. Amounts of the minimum guaranteed income, typically provided as “tax-free, unseized and not subject to any withholding”, were subject to the following conditions:

Beneficiaries had to have permanent residency in the municipalities for the last 2 years;

Those without other income received the full amount, starting from €200 per month for individuals and increased according to the number of other dependent members of the household.

The second phase was imposed by the new first time elected SYRIZA government in 2015. A few months after the elections of January 2015, additional welfare measures were introduced for the whole country. Then, in July 2016, the “Universal Basic Income” was renamed as “Social Solidarity Income”, applied first in 30 municipalities,

and from February 2017 to the whole of the country. Benefits were quite similar to the previous programme. Households were subject to constraints according to their income, tangibles (€90,000-150,000 per household) and intangibles (€14,400 per household).

The third phase came in December 2019, after the elections, when the new right-wing government changed the name again, but the benefits and constraints, etc. stayed the same. At that time, the programme concerned 240,000 households and covered a total of 450,000 people. Of these, 156,000 were unemployed. In particular, it covered 20,000 single-parent families and over 56,000 households with children. Of the total number of families, 236,000 had an income of less than €5,000, while 130,000 households had zero income. Finally, by 14th April 2021, the number of households had reached 273,000 with the amounts per household staying the same.

“Spreading the idea” of a basic income in Greece

The largest organisation supporting the idea of UBI in Greece is “The Greek Group on Basic Income” (UBI Greece), founded in April 2013, which is also a member of Unconditional Basic Income Europe (UBIE).

In 2014, UBI Greece hosted an important conference on Basic Income entitled: “A vision for the future: NOW is the time. Turning the crisis into an opportunity to implement the Unconditional Basic Income in Europe”. The event was accompanied by workshops by European UBI activists from UK, Germany, Ireland, Finland, to name but a few. The keynote speaker was Guy Standing, founder of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) and author of “The Precariat”. Members of the Greek Green Party and the Greek Pirate Party were also among the organisers and speakers. And, in 2015, UBI Greece promoted a global Facebook Initiative, under the title “May 1st - Basic Income Day”.

Another well-known political person to interact with basic income is the former Greek minister and economist, Yianis Varoufakis, who leads the pan-European movement DIEM25 and who recently founded a new party called Mera25. As Greek Finance Minister, he proposed to Eurogroup President Jeroen Dijsselbloem in 2015: “Establish a closer link between pension contributions

and income, streamline benefits, strengthen incentives to declare paid work, and provide targeted assistance to employees between 50 and 65, including through a *Guaranteed Basic Income* scheme, so as to eliminate the social and political pressure for early retirement which over-burdens the pension funds.”¹¹⁵ This reference was in the context of tackling the humanitarian crisis and reforming welfare policy for specific ages close to retirement. In September 2017, the Greek branch of DIEM25 published an article: “Why is a single basic income not enough?”¹¹⁶ The article supported the idea of UBI but suggested that the funds to finance a UBI should not come from additional taxation or from the other state funds, but from taxation on corporate gains instead. According to the article, this could be achieved by the creation of a global independent and transparent body acting as the collector, distributor and controller of the dividend. In 2021, Yanis Varoufakis – as the Secretary of Mera25 – argued in favour of the institutionalisation of a basic income scheme on the condition that it would not be paid from taxpayers' money. He proposed funding directly credited to the citizens' accounts by the ECB in a form of direct cash creation.

The Green Institute Greece was involved in the Green European Foundation's project on basic income and organised the event: “Basic Income and its Prospects: Is there an Alternative in a Europe of Crisis?” in 2017 in which Greek MP's, other officials and academics participated. Further to this, in the spring of 2022, the Greek Green party (Ecologist Greens) considered officially proposing to the government that some of the funds of the Recovery and Resilience Facility programme of the EU be given as a pilot UBI programme to the citizens of coal areas in Greece.

SYRIZA, apart from its fiscal contribution to government, proposed in May 2020 through its president, Alexis Tsipras, an increased income support system called “Emergency Income” following Spain's and Italy's example, where the existing amounts were doubled, i.e., €400 for the first adult member; €200 for each additional adult per household, etc. It is interesting to note that in further announcements in the Greek press, the SYRIZA ex-Secretary of Finance described the original idea of UBI as “neoliberal”, accusing the authors of trapping people into continuous poverty and encouraging undeclared labour.¹¹⁷

112 For example between 2008-2014, employment fell 19.5% in comparison to 3.0% for the Euro area (EU-19, <https://data.oecd.org/chart/6on9>) and 1.7% for EU-27 and GDP/capita fell 13.9% in comparison to a rise of 11.7% for the Euro area (EU-19) and 5.1% for EU-27 (<https://data.oecd.org/chart/6ona>).

113 https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/occasional_paper/2012/pdf/ocp94_en.pdf, page 46, paragraph 4.3.4.38

114 https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/occasional_paper/2012/pdf/ocp94_en.pdf, page 46, paragraph 4.3.4.38

115 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eurozone-greece-text/greek-finance-ministers-letter-to-the-eurogroup-idUSKBN0LS0V520150224>

116 <https://diem25.org/free-money-for-all/>

117 <https://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/theano-fotioy-sto-tvxsgr-elaxisto-eggyimeno-eisodima-i-isaniki-lysi-kai-i-diki-mas-prot>

The winner of the Nobel Prize for Economy, Dr. Christoforos Pissaridis, published alongside his working group a report including recommendations on the Greek economy¹¹⁸ which set all political forces in Greece in motion. The report suggested the consolidation of all social benefits into one, which should be given to people with low family income, even if they were employed. Unemployment, disability and housing benefits should be excluded from the consolidation. SYRIZA claimed in reaction that this “benefit-consolidation” policy would actually shrink the social support funding as a whole; it would take away all the funds in favour of the middle class in order to raise slightly the support for the poor and very poor.¹¹⁹

Can basic income be Green? The history, the present and the future of BI in Hungarian Green movements and parties

Ferenc Büttl, Bence Tordai, and Henriett Horváth

The debut of basic income in Hungarian discourses

First mainstream public discussions

Although the idea of basic income (BI) has been emerging in terms of popularity since the 1960s, there has not been any significant discourse on the concept up until the late 2000s in Hungary. After the fall of state socialism in 1989, the country was quick to switch to the capitalist system, very much subscribing to the dogma of meritocracy. Thus, the idea of an allowance on a universal basis is regarded as an unrealistic notion of “free money,” and, therefore, has enjoyed very little support. BI has thus been regarded as a very radical and far-reaching idea in public discussions until very recently. Consequently, it is no surprise that BI in Hungary is predominantly a leftist concept.

After the end of the first lockdown in May 2020, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the idea of UBI became much more popular than before. Mainstream newspapers published articles “introducing” the idea to the rather unaware greater Greek public. The main political parties and major economists started to make more statements and dedicate a bit more “effort” in the public dialogue to basic income than before. After UBI has been on and off the Greek political table for a few years now, it seems that the concept is finally picking up momentum in the public mainstream but it remains to be seen whether this will translate into actual policies.

BI was introduced into the wider public discourse by international trends, namely as part of the European Citizens’ Initiative, called “Start Unconditional Basic Incomes (UBI) throughout the EU” in 2012. The initiative was taken on by the First Hungarian Association for UBI that was founded a year prior. The initiative was also promoted by László Andor, EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social rights at the time, who argued that UBI could be part of an effective framework of social policies managing the aftermath of the 2008-2009 economic crisis. He claimed that, “basic income could revitalise the economy and would promote purchasing power in remote and impoverished areas by ensuring greater demand for local economic actors.”¹²⁰ Entering the mainstream, the initiative was even backed by the Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Párt – MSZP) and the Green party named Politics Can be Different (Lehet Más a Politika – LMP).¹²¹

Basic income in academia

Yet, even before 2012, basic income had been an emerging topic in a small, anti-capitalist subculture. Around 2009, the concept was first promoted in Hungarian left-wing academic social circles by housing rights activist, Bálint Misetics, and it was debated at the Corvinus University affiliated College for Advanced Studies in Social Theory (Társadalomelméleti Kollégium – TEK) as part of their introductory courses on environmentalism. Misetics, affiliated with LMP, also edited a BI-dedicated issue of *Esély* (Chance), a socio-political journal in 2010,¹²² as well as a published article about BI in *Fordulat* (Revolution), the academic journal of TEK.¹²³ Shortly thereafter, in 2014, a group of academics – called the Life Working Group – published a study on the potential Hungarian model for the implementation of UBI, which they titled, “Life dime.”¹²⁴ The study was endorsed by left-wing social policy expert, Zsuzsa Ferge, as well as György Surányi, liberal economist and former president of the Hungarian National Bank. The latter claimed that BI would not only prevent the total disintegration of society, but it could be a historical turning point in social integration.¹²⁵ Thus, the Life Working Group began to lobby all opposition parties so that they would endorse the concept and use it to win the following elections later in the year. However, although some of the left-leaning politicians of MSZP, LMP and the newly formed Green Party – called Dialogue for Hungary (Párbeszéd Magyarországért) – took a positive stance on the issue, BI did not make it to any of their campaign programmes.

BI and the Green parties¹²⁶

LMP

The Green party LMP was founded in 2009, a year before the upcoming parliamentary elections. In 2009 and 2010, Misetics was an influential member of the party; however, BI was never introduced in its programme. He attributes

this to two factors: the first being that, as a new party in preparation of its first parliamentary cycle, LMP had to present itself as a serious and respectable political entity, and BI would have been far too radical for that image. They instead campaigned with a fairly moderate social democratic programme. Secondly, Misetics argues that the Green organisations LMP relied on at the time focused on global issues (such as the global division of labour and manufacturing), rather than national ones; hence, even the left-leaning Green organisations overlooked the concept.

In January 2013, LMP members leaning towards the political left decided to leave the party and founded Párbeszéd. After the subsequent split, LMP supported the European Citizens’ Initiative, but BI was not taken on as part of their central political agenda. At last, their National Political Council decided against BI as a campaign flagship by a large majority.

Párbeszéd

Hungary’s current second Green party, Párbeszéd, was founded in 2013 after the left-wing of LMP decided to quit the party. The Párbeszéd politician (and one of the authors of this article), Bence Tordai, former member of TEK, brought BI into the party’s inner discourses in the spring of 2014 after the parliamentary elections, where Victor Orbán’s FIDESZ party won their second consecutive term. The first major debate about the idea of BI was held during the congress of Párbeszéd in autumn 2014. From that point onwards, Párbeszéd began to brand itself as the “party of basic income.” In 2015, Tordai, alongside scholars Gábor Scheiring and Miklós Sebők, published a proposal for a basic income scheme in Hungary that was heavily influenced by “Life dime.” It had four eligibility groups, the highest serving as a net minimum wage. The financial resources would come from capital, consumption, wealth and progressive income taxation. In their “humanist” model, only the top 10-20% of Hungarians would be worse off, but everyone would be ensured at least an adequate standard of living.¹²⁷

118 https://government.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/growth_plan_2020-11-23_1021.pdf, page 111

119 <https://www.syriza.gr/article/id/101107/Th.-Fwtioy:-Eimaste-kathgorhmatika-antithetoi-me-th-syghwneysh-twn-pronoiakwn-epidomatwn-se-ena-eniaio-Elachisto-Eggyhmeno-Eisodhma-poy-schediazei-h-kybernhsh-kai-tha-kalyptei-toys-akraia-ftwchoys.html#>

120 László Andor, “Jön a szociális minimum?” Népszava (19th December 2013) https://nepszava.hu/1005953_jon-a-szocialis-minimum (accessed on 25th February 2021).

121 Babet Oroszi, “Ingyenpénzt adna a munkanélkülieknek az LMP és az MSZP,” 24.hu (18th August 2013) <https://24.hu/belfold/2013/08/18/ingyenpenzt-adna-a-munkanelkulieknek-az-lmp-es-az-mszp-is/> (accessed on 27th February 2021).

122 Bálint Misetics, “Egy radikális társadalompolitikai reformgondolat: Előszó az Alapjövedelem – minimumjövedelem tematikus számhoz,” *Esély* 5 (2010): 3-8.

123 Bálint Misetics, “A kapitalizmuson túl,” *Fordulat* 11 (2010): 11-15.

124 Lét független szakértő csoport, “A Lét: Ajánlat a magyar társadalomnak” (11th January 2014). <http://let.azurewebsites.net/upload/tanulmany.pdf> (accessed on 26th February 2021).

125 “Alapjövédelmet adna mindenkinek a LÉT,” Mandiner (11th January 2014) https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20140111_alapjovedelmet-adna-mindenkinek-a-let (accessed on 1st March 2021).

126 Nota bene: The authors of this article are affiliated to Párbeszéd. Their account of the positioning of the green parties is a reflection of their own assessment and does not reflect the opinion of the publishers of this publication or the Green European Foundation.

127 Gábor Scheiring, Miklós Sebők, Bence Tordai, “Basic Income as a Realist’s Transformative Strategy,” in Conny Reuter (ed.), *Progressive Structural Reforms: Proposals for European Reforms to Reduce Inequalities and Promote Jobs, Growth and Social Investment* (Brussels: Solidar & Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspra, 2015.): 103-116.

“Overall, BI has been on a weak trajectory in Hungary, but since 2015, it has slowly started infiltrating the mainstream. Thus, its future might just be much brighter.”

In 2020, Ferec Büttl and Miklós Kis published an update to the 2015 study, titled *Basic Income 2021: Road to Safety!* adjusting the scheme to current wages, financed by the current flat personal tax system.¹²⁸ This way, the authors could show that the implementation of basic income was possible in the current system of taxation, “i.e., Viktor Orbán himself could also implement it tomorrow, if he decided.”¹²⁹ Since 2015, Párbeszéd has been submitting amendments to the annual budget at the parliament, including the introduction of BI.

Pilot BI schemes

In recent years, Párbeszéd had some success with the implementation of some versions of BI on a municipal level. In March 2015, in the municipality of Zugló, Budapest, then-mayor Gergely Karácsony introduced a minimum income scheme. This conditional basic income was not a universal nor an automatically issued money transfer. Rather, eligible locals had to apply for it. Households with less than 23,000 HUF (€65) net income could receive the supplementary amount.¹³⁰ The minimum income scheme was quite successful, and, over time, it reached some of the most deprived social strata.¹³¹ Applying for the scheme has been difficult due to its strict eligibility criteria and the insufficient information provided by the authorities; yet, the programme has been deemed successful by the municipality.

A more recent attempt for BI was introduced by mayor and Párbeszéd politician Márta V. Naszályi in a district of Budapest in April 2020 as a response to the Covid-19 crisis. As part of the “crisis managing” BI scheme, the income of almost 400 locals in need was supplemented up to a certain amount for three months. Yet, the district is not representative for many other districts as it is relatively affluent and has a relatively small population. Thus, it remains to be shown how the scheme can work in poorer districts. However, these lessons learnt might benefit the implementation of unconditional and automatically transferred basic income in other districts in the future.

Why left-wing; why not Green?

The current Hungarian BI discourse was brought forth by the fact that our current capitalist “work-based” society actually has more members out of than in the workforce. There are more people who are students, pensioners, or on maternity leave, etc. than there are active members of the labour force.¹³² Simultaneously, the welfare state has been systematically dismantled over the last five decades. Today, the state is unable to reach those most in need, and thus, the implementation of new and innovative social policies is indispensable. Basic income in this context promises to secure the livelihood of everyone in the given community, reversing the social crisis and even the erosion of democracy. In 2015, Scheiring and Tordai stated that instead of working in order to survive, people should have their basic needs ensured, enabling them to work or study.¹³³

Overall, BI is predominantly backed by left-wing groups, both in the political and the academic sphere. The discourse on BI is lacking a Green narrative; it is not tied to sustainability goals or climate preservation. This is due to the historical development of the Green movement in the country, which took off in the 1980s, partially in opposition to the socialist regime. Therefore, ever since, the concept of solidarity and capitalism-critical views are still mainly absent from these Green circles. Basic income, consequently, has not been introduced in their agendas.

2022: Turning point for BI?

What is the future for BI in Hungary? It seems as though tides are shifting. The current political climate – probably greatly due to the Covid-19 crisis – is more and more accepting of BI. In the spring of 2022, Hungary is facing its next parliamentary elections. With FIDESZ’ control of the media and the judicial, legislative and electoral systems, all other parties are obliged to enter into a coalition and face the governing party together. The parties who now refer to themselves as the “dem-

128 Ferenc Büttl and Miklós Kis, *Alapjövedelem 2021: Út a biztonságba* (Budapest: Modern Magyarországért Alapítvány, 2020).

129 Ibid. 8.

130 Bálint Misetics, et al. “Konceptió a zuglói pénzbeli szociális ellátások átalakítására,” Budapest Szakpolitikai Elemz Intézet, 26th February 2015, 6–9. http://www.budapestinstitute.eu/uploads/BI_Zuglo_konceptio_20150226.pdf?fbclid=IwAR188u-COK2ReH6zGFNH-RPEITgWFgXUAJfTi5Bidg-NVdJyJO-1djOTSX5o (accessed on 28th February 2021)

131 Tamás Molnár, et al. “Második monitoring jelentés a zuglói szociális támogatási rendszerről,” Budapest Szakpolitikai Elemz Intézet, 15th December 2017, 7. http://www.budapestinstitute.eu/BI_Zuglo_Masodik_monitoring_jelentes_final.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1eqqnSF5C7LuTqPN3U0dvV8rUqufPKiOlucYCbD5jJvjhQrlxUv8TGY-R8 (accessed on 2nd March 2021).

132 See “Gyorstájékoztató: Foglalkoztatottság, 2021. január,” KSH. <https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/gyor/fog/fog2101.html> (accessed on 1st March 2021).

133 Scheiring and Tordai (ed.), *Biztos Alap: Javaslat a magyarországi alapjövedelem bevezetésére* (Budapest: Megújuló Magyarországért Alapítvány, 2015): 1.



ocratic opposition” are drafting a common political programme. The question is if basic income can be pushed onto the coalition’s agenda. Overall, it is evident that the current political climate in Hungary is more and more open to the idea of BI (according to a recent study, 80% is in favour of it)¹³⁴ and it seems that most of the coalition partners are becoming more and more susceptible to it as well. For instance, in the second half of 2020, the liberal party Momentum campaigned for a minimum income of 100,000 HUF for all citizens during the crisis. Still, it remains to be seen which BI model might be accepted by all opposition parties.

Universal Autonomy Allowance (UAA): The Green future of BI?

Although one of the Hungarian Green parties has branded itself as the “party of basic income,” it has done so based on its left-wing principles and not because of any environmentalist ones. The question is whether there is a possibility for a BI concept with a focus on sustainability. However, discourse on a Green BI is not unprecedented in the country; more specifically, in circles of the degrowth movement. The concept of degrowth criticises the logic of globalist capitalism and its never-ending pursuit of economic and material growth, which leads to the exploitation and mistreatment of people and the planet. It is a process of radical political and social transformation that reduces the use of energy and resources throughout society, while improving the quality of life; shifting our common values towards care, solidarity and autonomy.¹³⁵ Activists and researchers of the degrowth movement advocate for prioritising social and ecological well-being instead of corporate profit-chasing, overproduction and overconsumption, and aim to change people’s notion of economic growth.¹³⁶

For degrowth scholars, the concept of universal autonomy allowance (UAA) represents the means of ensuring a decent and modest way of life for everyone in the same way as BI does for those on the left-wing. The approach consists of a number of schemes such as UBI, limited maximum income, and free access to

basic services.¹³⁷ In the short term, BI is understood as a potential temporary agent for transformation from our economic growth-oriented capitalist system to a sustainable, green and “happiness-based” society. BI could induce a paradigm shift from our work-fetishising to a “post-work” society. Vincent Liegey, part of the French degrowth movement – who is currently active in Hungary – and ecological economist Alexandra Köves both favour universal basic services or allowance over simple money transfer. On a practical level, both the Hungarian society as a whole and the other opposition parties are more open to this than the idea of giving away “free money.” Under this scheme, everyone would have access to good quality services such as education and health care, as well as housing. In addition, the state could provide a limited amount of the utilities for free, while it would heavily tax overconsumption.¹³⁸

The question remains whether there is any prospect of transforming the Hungarian economy to this alternative model. Both scholars deem Hungary (and Eastern Europe in general) to have a greater chance in going through a degrowth transition and implementing UAA. Köves argues that the natural resources of the country and its geopolitical status make it an ideal candidate for hosting a pilot programme. Hungary could be close to being agriculturally self-sustaining, which could help fostering alternative local economic systems. Likewise, Liegey argues, Eastern Europe has another advantage: informal solidarities and non-money-based food and other goods exchanges are still much more common practice than in Western Europe, although their significance has been declining.¹³⁹ By building on these relationships, it is easier to reinvent social constructs about non-money-based exchanges. According to Liegey, for transitioning to a sustainable mode of living in Hungary and for implementing the framework of UAA, it is important to support alternative local economic systems. There is a small but growing subculture, a circle of the radical leftist grassroots movement, who have been installing a couple of pilot projects. A good example is Cargonomia, a formation of a number of social enterprises, including an organic vegetable farm and sustainable agriculture community

education centre distributing produce to Budapest food communities.

Overall, BI has been on a weak trajectory in Hungary, but since 2015, it has slowly started infiltrating the mainstream. Thus, its future might just be much brighter. There is growing support backing it, its perception shifting away from being radical, idealist or abstract, and due to the Covid-19 induced social and economic crisis, its popularity is even more on the rise. Furthermore, there is great potential in the Hungary-based degrowth

academic and activist circles to shift BI from a purely leftist concept to a *Green*-left-wing one. Connecting degrowth, sustainability and a socially progressive BI concept could also make Hungary a pioneer in the European Green sphere. The country possesses both the intellectual capacity to build a political programme on and the social and environmental characteristics to subserve the implementation of a “Green basic income.”¹⁴⁰

Basic Income in the Netherlands

Alexander de Roo & Jan Atze Nicolai

A short history of discussions on basic income in Dutch politics

In 1977, the Political Party of Radicals (PPR; one of the founding parties of GroenLinks) was the first party represented in the national Parliament to put basic income in its party Manifesto. It stayed there until the formation of GroenLinks, around 1989-1991. In 1985, the Scientific Council for Government Policy (Dutch: WRR) published a report advocating a partial basic income of FL 450 (now €500).¹⁴¹

The other main founding parties of GroenLinks were the CPN (communist party) and the PSP (Pacifist Socialist Party). The CPN were sceptical about basic income and the PSP was divided. The PPR negotiator at the time, Bram van Oijk, did not push for BI to be included in GroenLinks’ first election manifesto in 1989. Since it wasn’t pushed for here by van Oijk, the idea was not formerly recognised by the party until many years later.

As the PPR negotiator Bram van Oijk did not push for basic income to be included in the first election manifesto of GroenLinks in 1989, this idea did not make it in.

From the late 1980s to 1996, the internal discussion continued within the Green Party until its leadership proposed the following compromise: a half basic income, going by the name of “Foot Income” (Dutch: Voetinkomen). At this time, one of the co-authors (A.d.R) argued for an amendment for a “double Foot Income”, pointing out that “only with two feet you can jump on a trampoline”. Unfortunately, that idea was very narrowly defeated, with 201 to 200 votes.

In other parties, such as the social democratic party, PvdA, there was also a lively discussion about basic income. Advocates of basic income – including former ministers – reached around 40% of the vote at multiple party conferences.

In 1994, the formation of the so-called Purple Coalition – PAARS (the first coalition government in the Netherlands without the Christian Democrats) – the negotiators of the right-wing liberal party, VVD, and the social democrats, PvdA, proposed a slow introduction of a basic income scheme, but the idea was never endorsed by the respective party leaders.

Ever since the 1990s, the basic income discussion in the Netherlands has abated, as economic prosperity grew and unemployment levels decreased.

134 Zsolt Papp, “Tetszene a magyaroknak az alapjövdelem,” *Népszava* (21st September 2020) https://nepszava.hu/3092683_tetszene-a-magyaroknak-az-alapjovedelem (accessed on 28th February 2021).

135 Giorgos Kallis et al. “Research on Degrowth,” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 43 (2018): 292.

136 Vincent Liegey and Anitra Nelson, *Exploring Degrowth: A critical guide*, (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 20–21.

137 Ibid. 134.

138 Hugo Carton, “Le revenu d’existence: Pour des sociétés libres et égalitaires,” *Momentum Institute*, (October 2013): 5. Available: <https://www.institutmomentum.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Le-revenu-d’existence.pdf>

139 Joe Smith and Petr Jehlicka, “Quiet sustainability: Fertile lessons from Europe’s productive gardeners,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 32 (2013): 148–157.

140 For this essay, interviews were conducted with Vincent Liegey, founder of the French degrowth movement; former Green MEP, Benedek Jávor; Párbeszéd MP, Bence Tordai; ecological economist, Alexandra Köves; 8th district deputy mayor, Gábor Eröss, and Bálint Misetics, Housing and Social Rights Officer to the mayor of Budapest.

141 <https://english.wrr.nl/binaries/wrr-eng/documents/reports/1985/05/22/safeguarding-social-security/Summary-Safeguarding-social-security.pdf>

A new basic income discussion in the Netherlands starting in 2014

What revived the basic income discussion in the Netherlands was the publication of “Gratis Geld” (Free Money), a book by Rutger Bregman in 2014, and several programmes on television. What added to the liveliness of this discussion was the Swiss referendum in June 2016 in combination with plans for large scale experiments in Canada¹⁴² and Finland.

At the GroenLinks party conference in December 2016, two amendments were brought forward: the first, to introduce basic income within eight years; and the second to conduct a large-scale basic income experiment, similar to the one planned in Finland. The first was rejected, whereas the second received an overwhelming 80% of support. This success led to a coalition agreement stating that “Local communes are free to experiment with basic income.” As GroenLinks decided against participating in this government and the other parties were not in favour of the idea, it soon died. At the time, polls showed that 40% of the population (mainly left-wing voters) were in favour of a basic income and 45% (mainly right-wing voters) against. It should be noted that this was a strong increase of votes in favour of basic income, when compared to the results from the 1990s, where only 19% had been in support of the concept of basic income.

In order to raise support for the concept, the NGO Basic Income Union (Dutch: “Vereniging Basisinkomen”) took the initiative to make calculations about the impact of a basic income on the most vulnerable people in society. Their proposal was a basic income of €635 for every adult, €300 for the first two children and €600 for every household. A single person would get €1,235 basic income and a couple would get €1,870.

The state funded organisation for budgetary advice Nibud thoroughly examined the model (all adults receiving €600 and each household €600) and found out that the long-term unemployed would gain between €22 and €200, depending on the number of children per household. Shortly thereafter, the government body, CPB – which makes all the financial- economic calculations for the government – took the initiative to calculate the basic income 2.0 model, which follows as such: the model can be financed by an increase of income tax of 50% for the great majority of the population and of 75% for the top earners. In comparison, present tax levels are at 37% and 49,5%, respectively.

The purchasing calculations were based on 200,000 households and showed that the introduction of basic income 2.0 would have the desired progressive effects where those with high incomes would contribute more relatively to their overall income: the bottom 20% would be better off by 20% and the top 20% of earners would lose about 10%. However, the report also stated that voluntary unemployment might rise by 8%. Maybe not surprisingly, this figure of a potential increase of unemployment of 8% dominated the press coverage. However, in a hypothetical Basic Income society, unemployment will very likely have a completely different meaning when compared to our current system. Many experiments worldwide have shown that young people would study longer, that young parents would take more time with their new-born children, and that low-income jobs would have to be paid better. However, these aspects were neglected by the CPB government officials in their public communication.

The GroenLinks leadership as well as the public was shocked by the potential 8% increase in voluntary unemployment and thus turned away from the basic income idea. This decision could not be changed by a 96% vote during the 2020 GroenLinks congress, which asked the leadership to propose an amendment to Basic Income 2.0. According to this amendment, the scheme would have become targeted instead of being unconditional, in that the top 20% of earners would not receive basic income.

In the preparation of the March 2021 elections¹⁴³, a political debate about basic income was ongoing within GroenLinks regarding the next election manifesto. For example, an amendment suggesting a partial basic income of €500 was closely defeated. However, another amendment – which suggested realising a full basic income in eight years – obtained a majority. Interestingly, the party leadership was overruled with this result and basic income became part of the campaign for the 17 March 2021 national elections.

Current basic income activities in other Dutch parties

In addition to GroenLinks including basic income in its political programme, the left-wing party, Liberals D66, also campaigned for a basic income in the form of a negative income tax. The social democratic party, PvdA, is in favour of basic income experiments at the local level.

And the Animal Rights party is now demanding a large-scale experiment, much like the one conducted in Finland.

There is a possibility that the Greens, the left-wing Liberals D66, and the Social Democrats will be involved in government negotiations with the liberal party of Mark Rutte and the Christen Democratic party.

The shift of many Dutch political parties’ official position to basic income is not surprising when looking at the public opinion in the Netherlands: nowadays, there are slightly more people in favour of basic income (36%) than there are people against it (32%). Mainly left-wing voters are

in favour of basic income, though 25% of the voters for the liberal VVD, the party of prime minister Mark Rutte, support basic income, too. Right-wing voters are now more undecided on the concept of basic income following the findings of I&O in 2020.¹⁴⁴ It remains to be seen if UBI can become a concept of the political mainstream in the Netherlands in the future.

Basic income in Norway | Universal basic income for sustainability

Kjell Magne Fagerbakke

Gain Democratic credibility

Less consumption is the way to achieving sustainable ecology. This reasoning is easy to understand, but parts of the solution are probably counter-intuitive. In order to create sufficient democratic credibility when forming a society with reduced consumption, there are many arguments that point out that higher equality is very important. The simplest method of achieving this is through a cash payment in the form of a universal basic income (UBI).

Everyone has to pay the price for change

Deep structural changes in society are necessary to reduce the footprint on nature and climate. This change can be achieved by removing privileges that allow environmentally destructive behaviour and by using targeted measures at areas that provide the best effect.

To reduce footprints on natural resources, targeting those with high incomes to adjust their behaviour is key as they – on average – use much more natural resources than those with low incomes. But eventually, it does not matter who – whether the poor or the rich – use more natural resources. The only thing that counts is the overall usage of natural resources. Ecologically motivated change to reduce our carbon footprint and, more generally, the depletion of natural resources might not only need an actual price tag in the form of carbon taxes, but also a

social price tag in the form of decreased consumption. What we need to avoid is that those who are worse off do pay a higher price (financial and social) than the rest of society because, otherwise, inequality increases and might lead to social tensions.

On the way towards sustainable society significant reforms are needed. For people with low incomes, even every small reduction in living standards is either very difficult or just plain unacceptable. On the other hand, it is also challenging to strip people of their privileges in a society, of which one main building block is constant acceleration and growth.

Inequality shapes life and shapes politics

The report “Premature death from non-communicable diseases”, (Norwegian Institute of Public Health updated on 16 May 2019) reveals some interesting but sad information on the relation between one’s social situation and life expectancy. The socio-economic status at birth determines a difference in life expectancy of up to 14 years. It is not unlikely that if basic needs were covered through a basic income, socio-economic status would be improved at the lower end of the distribution and the span of 14 years might be reduced.

This and similar studies may encourage politicians to tackle the problem of social and financial inequality by getting to the root causes of these issues. In a world of

¹⁴² <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200624-canadas-forgotten-universal-basic-income-experiment>

¹⁴³ The article at hand was written prior to the elections in the Netherlands 15 to 17 March 2021.

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.ioresearch.nl/actueel/basisinkomen-nu-meer-voor-dan-tegenstanders/>

disastrous climate conditions with a global average increase of more than 1.5° Celsius, stable and functional societies as we know them are hard to imagine. However, to obtain wide and strong societal support for a real socio-ecological transition, i.e., in the form of a Green New Deal that deserves the name, social equality will be key.

The Ministry of Finance's presentation, or a new narrative

Norway's Ministry of Finance regularly publishes reports on income distributions in our country and thus – one might think – addresses social inequality at least in some way. However, the ministry somehow manages to describe drastic inequalities in a way not directly eliciting concern. These reports contain advice that yield small improvements for low-income households at best and thus miss their target of highlighting the largest inequalities of our society and proposing effective action to reduce them.

In 2018, the French President Emmanuel Macron introduced a type of carbon tax leading to an increase in prices for fuel and other goods related to a high CO₂-footprint, which were not affordable, and thus not acceptable for many people in France. The introduction of carbon taxes without appropriate social compensation thus triggered a strong nation-wide response led by the Yellow Vests movement. In the Spring of 2019, Norway experienced a similar political upheaval originating from increased road tolls and congestion charges, which saw the new anti-tolls party, People's Action – No to More Road Tolls (FNB), gaining around 10% of the votes in the regional elections.¹⁴⁵ This suggests that the narrative needed for a Green New Deal must address social equality. It appears reasonable for any (and thus also the Norwegian) government to consider social compensation when taxation carbon emission specifically and natural resources in general. In this light, it is hard to conceive how a government can take decisive action to cope with the challenges of the climate crises and the depletion of natural resources without creating a social buffer first.

Can a common economic floor change the mood?

It is both pragmatic and fair to tax goods and services relative to their base price and not in relation to the income of the person purchasing it. The proportion of primary expenses relative to the overall income are high for people with low income and vice versa. If the money to cover “the costs to be alive” and thus a basic income would be granted to each member of society, this problem would not be solved, but very much alleviated.

Social benefits are justified by the right to receive enough money to cover the bare necessities. A universal basic income can provide enough to cover basic life expenditures, while at the same time simplifying a complex mix of other social policy tools. UBI promises to eliminate the stigma associated with means and behaviour testing and instead offers a dignified approach to social security: unconditionality. The prospect of a guaranteed income to cover basic expenditures provides financial security and thus changes the current financial status of all members of society. By its nature, UBI is a social floor that continues to be a part of additional income from paid labour, and thus increases low wages. With a basic income, everyone will be better equipped to meet flat environmental taxes and society will be more socially flexible to make the changes needed to become sustainable. It is no coincidence that the countries with the strongest welfare systems also have the strongest economies.

The UBI is a modernisation of the tax system

Norway has, for a long time, had a progressive tax system. Thus, those with higher incomes pay more taxes not only in absolute terms, but also relative to their income. UBI extends the scope of progressive taxation by including those without income. For Norway, therefore, the source of funding can be monetarily balanced by a redistribution crane that adjusts wage differences. Students in Norway find themselves in a comparably good economic situation, but a UBI would constitute a great improvement. The approach does not only make sense from a social perspective, but also economically: education could and maybe should be regarded as an investment into increased future tax revenue. According to numbers published by the Norwegian Bureau of Statistics (SSB), in Norway, there is a rising economic gap between generations. In the last 20 years, the income ratio between those above 35% in the income distribution vs. below has risen from 1.3 to 1.7. A UBI could lower this ratio to 1.4. What democratic deficit this development gives a society may lead to speculations; however, it may conserve old solutions far longer than desirable if conserving nature needs a new paradigm.

A basic income will cover expenses for basic needs, such as mobility, food, housing and energy. According to UBI advocate Hilde Latour, UBI will contribute to meet 11 of the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The basic income can, in a way, be seen as a distribution from the surplus we all create through the voluntary social efforts we make. Jean Ann Kochevar estimates the value of this work to more than \$21 per hour in 2012 and illustrated the high value the voluntary work gives our society¹⁴⁶. A system with security for all is a society where everyone has equal

basic opportunity in life. Of course, this basic equality is good for the economy too.

Climate reward with social consumption profile

The biggest contributors to carbon consumption and environmental pollution should bear the greatest burden. A carbon or environmental tax increases the price of each product or service contributing to climate change and thus creates most revenue from those people polluting the environment most. However, if the overall revenue generated in this way is distributed evenly among all members of society, the mechanism has a compensatory effect: those with an environmentally friendly lifestyle are net beneficiaries and those with a higher carbon footprint are net contributors to the system. For example, cheap energy plays a non-marginal role in the ecological crisis we are facing. Higher energy prices are necessary to overcome this crisis. Reducing energy consumption and a smarter and thus reduced use of goods are two important steps towards a sustainable society. Energy prices are easily adjustable through a climate reward scheme. But, at the same time, we need to make sure that increased costs for energy can be afforded for the worst off in society. A carbon tax and the even distribution of the associated revenues (“fee and dividends”) and UBI are two simple financial instruments we must use to bring our economy on a sustainable path without excluding anybody.

Necessity of life or just prioritisation

Increasing road tolls are a good example demonstrating the difficulties of measures introduced to reduce overall carbon emission. Road tolls are not part of basic life expenditures in a strict sense but are crucial for many people (with low-incomes) in rural areas in which public transport is not available. Ideally, a UBI will nevertheless contribute to an increased ability to pay and may give people the opportunity to negotiate other proposals for car-free solutions.

Most importantly, UBI creates a dynamic economy with room for change without constantly producing new losers. It is time to address the structural problems of society. When environmental measures for the benefit of all create enormous anger, we need to find out the exact causes leading to protests to avoid a response as we have seen with the Yellow Vests movement in France. If environmental policy ends in polarisation and great division, you might find it is hard to reverse the mood. UBI builds trust in the society and, therefore, makes reforms less controversial.

In the search of the return to “paradise”

If one were to ask how we can reach sustainability, focusing on specific goals may soon be prioritised over how we can achieve them. However, some utopian thinking and associated arguments may be very valuable on the way. It should not be expected that, in this way, all questions are asked, nor that all answers are given, but that such an iterative and creative process might reveal many useful options to make steps in the right direction. We should not aim for less than “paradise” (in the sense of a unique stable climate as in the Holocene and in the sense of a diverse and healthy nature). The greatest question is how today's social fabric can create a social movement leading us to this utopia. It is not absurd to pursue the dream of “paradise” as described above; it is rather absurd not pursuing it: the status quo and the direction we are headed in is devastating for nature and humankind. We are, today, in the fortunate situation that we know the sustainability level of the planet and we thus know what amounts of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases we can still emit to stay within limits allowing liveable conditions on most places on earth. I am not talking about some unsubstantiated optimism regarding technological solutions against climate change in the sense of geo-engineering. I am talking about the societal change that must happen to stay within the boundaries that science dictates us. It is a social, not a technological question of how to stay within ecological boundaries and create a just, social space for humans.

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/08/road-rage-norway-goes-to-polls-split-over-environmental-policies>

¹⁴⁶ <https://thebusinessstimes.com/value-of-volunteering-acts-small-and-large-priceless/>

Basic income in Poland

Ewa Sufin-Jacquemart

General context

Poland underwent, as other post-communist countries did, a profound transformation of the political and economic system in 1989/1990, moving from a socialist state economy with a marginal private sector and a system of well-developed and cheap or free public services to a capitalist, free-market economy system.

For historical reasons, Poland followed the American model, rather than the model of Western European welfare states. The transformation was fast, with many human and social difficulties and tragedies; massive privatisation of state-owned enterprises was associated with a deep restructuring of many firms and the collapse of others. State-owned farms in particular were simply liquidated without any programme of social support for the agricultural workers; all the giants of hard industry, like metallurgy, were closed or divided into many private entities with massive job cuts. Importantly, unemployment without a sufficient social protection system forced the creation of many small businesses and their gradual consolidation. In this light, entrepreneurship, resourcefulness and business smartness were, and still are, highly valued, whereas poverty is regarded as an expression of helplessness and laziness.

The new social policy introduced in the 1990s in Poland was largely based on market mechanisms and realised, like housing policies, through loans, or through all kinds of training and aids to start a business. Hence, people benefiting from social assistance from the state or local governments were stigmatised and stripped of their dignity. Despite high unemployment in the first decade after the fall of the iron curtain, no system of fair unemployment benefits – proportional to earnings and provided over sufficiently long periods to find work again – has been developed. Family benefits are so low they are practically insignificant in household budgets and the same holds true for housing benefits reserved for people at the lower end of income distribution. The social protection system became hostile towards applicants, extremely bureaucratic and demanded a lot of patience and humility from its applicants.

The post-communist left transformed into the social democratic movement and gained great popularity a few years after the change of regime in 1990. The Social Democrats' popularity decreased after introducing very neo-liberal reforms and they gradually lost electoral support until they became unable to re-enter the parliament in 2015 for four years.

The new conservative coalition, led by the Law and Justice (PiS) party, won the 2015 national election with the promise of introducing a child allowance called "500+" of 500 PLN by month (approx. €120) for each child, except the first one. The government extended the programme to the first child before the presidential election of 2020. These days, a re-evaluation is being discussed because the minimum wage has been increased since 2015, so the child allowance must be adapted to keep its proportional importance in the family budget – but also because the prices of the primary basket of household spending have risen on the back of rising energy prices.

Universal basic income in the public debate

In such a general context, prior to 2020, universal basic income was discussed mostly in academic circles and rather outside the mainstream in Poland. There was no discussion on UBI within the national political authorities, even when the short report "Unconditional Basic Income" was prepared in 2018 by the Analysis, Documentation and Correspondence Office of the Senate (the higher chamber of the parliament), which contained no recommendations; just a review of theories, previous experiments, and expert opinions. There was no debate in the Senate on the topic.

An expert group was formed a few years ago (registered as association in 2016): the Polish Basic Income Network¹⁴⁷, which gathered (mostly) academics and researchers in the fields of social sciences and economics. It became the place of exchange and debate for the majority of Polish specialists dealing with the topic. The leaders are Prof. Ryszard Szarfenberg, Dr. Maciej Szlinder and Dr. Jacek Warda (author of the first scientific article on UBI in Po-

“Polish society is not ready for a UBI, but basic income has more supporters and much more media interest in 2021 than ever before since the Covid-19 crisis.”

147 <https://www.dochodpodstawowy.pl/>

land). The main topics discussed in the network concerned the concept of an unconditional and universal Guaranteed Minimum Income (Minimalny Dochód Gwarantowany, MDG), developed by Dr. Jacek Warda, which would replace, like UBI, many other social benefits subject to conditionality. Another idea that has been discussed is the concept of a Guaranteed Living Wage (Gwarantowane Minimum Życiowe, GMZ), conceived by Jarosław Wocial. GMZ is a renewable debit on a special debit card delivered to each citizen. Both concepts are aimed at supporting people in times of crisis and temporary difficulties.

At the end of 2018, Maciej Szlinder published the book “Unconditional Basic Income”¹⁴⁸, which described the concept of UBI and the debate around it. The book caused some initial debate in 2019; for example, a live-streamed debate of the publication was organised by the Polish Economic Society¹⁴⁹. The book and the idea of UBI was supported by a well-known left-wing journalist, Rafał Woś, and was strongly opposed by some neoliberal economists, such as Arkadiusz Sieroń and Jan Cipiur.

In 2019, Dr. Jacek Warda and Wojciech Kłosowski (co-founder of the Polish Green Party) developed an educational module for high schools, accessible to teachers nationwide, entitled “Money for everyone?” which was implemented in the Lublin province. As part of this module, students and teachers learned about the idea of a UBI and discussed the arguments in favour of and against it¹⁵⁰.

Concerning political parties, only one left-wing party, Partia Razem, managed to garner media attention supporting the idea of a UBI (Dr. Maciej Szlinder is the party speaker on the topic). The Green party, Partia Zieloni, has included unconditional basic income in its programme, but has not gained much press coverage in this regard. In 2020, the Green political foundation, Fundacja Strefa Zieleni, organised a series of debates as part of the Green European Foundation’s international project “Change of mindset – Civil society dialogue around UBI, social justice and climate impact”, reviving both the public debate around the UBI and the internal debate inside the Green Party.

Revival of the debate as a result of the Covid-19 crisis

The interest of the general public in UBI grew with the social crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The successive anti-crisis measures did not keep up with growing societal needs and the deteriorating economic situation of various social groups. For the first time, articles on UBI appeared

in the Polish mainstream media and some popular radio journalists started to invite and discuss the concept of UBI with economists and social policy activists. EuroActive.pl, obserwatorfinansowy.pl (financial observer), TOK-FM radio, Hallo Radio, the prestigious Krytyka Polityczna (left-wing think-tank and opinion leader) were involved in this debate. Gazeta Wyborcza published a long online report on the initiative of the “Mein Grundeinkommen” association in Germany, where supporters donate to allow a randomly chosen person a basic income of €1,200 per month for one year. In the beginning of 2021, the publishing house “Krytyka Polityczna” published the book “Basic Income” by the British economist Guy Standing and promoted the book through interviews with the author in various media outlets.

Before the book was launched, the Polish Economic Institute (PIE) presented the report “Basic income – A new idea for a welfare state?” which presented the opinions of Poles regarding a UBI. 87% of respondents did not know exactly what a UBI was; 51% supported its introduction in principle; 30% supported its introduction if accompanied by an increase in taxes; and 28% supported the introduction of a basic income, even if some current social benefits would need to be cut.

Conclusions

Polish society is not ready for a UBI, but basic income has more supporters and much more media interest in 2021 than ever before since the Covid-19 crisis. Only one other left-wing party, Partia Razem, alongside the Greens have included UBI in their programmes, but the debate inside the Green Party is intense and it is far from reaching a consensus on this issue. Hence, the Polish Green party is not an active actor in the discourse. In the public debate in Poland, people are sceptical – if not critical – towards UBI for multiple reasons: first, the question on funding UBI (where does the money come from?); second, the fear of a new “transformation” after the painful experience of the social and economic transformation of the 1990s. And, finally, the promise of the 500+ child allowance has helped the conservative party PiS come to power. Nowadays, it is questioned whether this allowance has effectively reduced poverty; what is more, since then, PiS has drastically and unacceptably weakened Polish democracy and rule of law in the country. With that, it seems there is a dark cloud hanging over the potential for an ambitious social policy: the “buying” of voter support and the excision of authoritarian power.

Basic income in Scotland

Peter Ryan

The Covid-19 pandemic has led many in Scotland to re-examine the case for a Universal Basic Income (UBI) as a means of providing for the basic needs of the people of Scotland. During the pandemic, the United Kingdom (UK) has used a series of targeted interventions to support people who have been unable to work due to health and safety measures, but all of these have fallen short of universal protection. This has led many people to miss out on UK government support, such as the 3 million self-employed taxpayers who have become known as “The Excluded”. It has also exposed the injustice at the heart of the UK social security system (Universal Credit). This system is designed to force people into whatever work is available rather than focusing on their welfare. It has led to children going hungry and a rise in the use of food banks. This failing system has led many in society to ask if there is a better way to provide social protection. It has led to renewed calls for a fully funded basic income to be introduced as a simpler and more equitable system that will prevent people from missing out on support.

“As the world looks for ways to build back better from this global crisis, Scotland is well placed to take a world-leading role in developing new radical approaches that provide a real safety net for the most vulnerable people in society,” Alison Johnstone – Scottish Greens Social Security spokesperson.

UBI has been a longstanding policy objective of the Scottish Green Party (Scottish Greens). However, the Scottish Greens long-term support for UBI has not prevented the party from making regular reviews of the policy based on the lessons from the many UBI experiments taking place globally.

The last major revision of their UBI policy by the Scottish Greens was in 2018 when it was transformed from a “Citizen’s Income” to a truly Universal Basic Income. This change was supported by an overwhelming majority at the 2018 party conference. The change was thought necessary as the party membership felt that a UBI should be universal and should not exclude people who have made their home in Scotland but may not be “citizens”. The party felt that UBI should be used to help build a cohesive society that values every member and

not be a two-tier system that includes some but excludes others based on their citizenship. The party’s policy is hence to support a UBI paid to those who reside in Scotland for at least a year and who intend to remain permanent resident in Scotland.

The Scottish Greens feel UBI will be a force of economic liberation, providing personal choice and freedom in how the people of Scotland live their lives. This is in contrast to the current social security system, which impoverishes those who rely on it. The Scottish Greens feel that if a UBI was introduced that was set at a rate that met an individual’s basic needs, it could have a hugely positive impact on health, wellbeing, poverty, and inequality of individual recipients. As a result, throughout the pandemic, the Scottish Greens have been active campaigning in support of UBI, using webinars and e-campaigns to ensure UBI enters the mainstream political discourse¹⁵¹.

The Scottish Greens vision of a UBI is one that is:

Paid individually - this is in contrast to the UK Government Universal Credit scheme, which takes the income of the household into account. Paying a Basic Income to an individual ensures that no-one is left economically dependent on anyone else;

Values unpaid work - the current Universal Credit scheme is designed to “make work pay” and pressures people into paid employment. People who do unpaid work, such as caring for a close relative, could receive less as a result. In contrast, the Scottish Greens see UBI as a payment that values unpaid work and supports those with caring responsibilities;

Set at a level at least high enough to allow people to provide their basic needs, including food, clothing, and heating, from UBI alone. One of the lessons of coronavirus is that any member of society is vulnerable to a sudden economic shock;

It will not be subject to means testing, is non-taxable, and there will be no requirement to be either working or actively seeking work.

148 [Bezwarunkowy dochód podstawowy, PWN, 2018](#)

149 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZrqlxdCqM&feature=youtu.be>

150 <https://www.lscdn.pl/pl/publikacje/cww/zmieniajacy-sie-swiat/11052,02-A-2-Pieniadze-dla-kazdego.html>

151 <https://greens.scot/news/scotland-can-lead-the-world-with-universal-basic-income-pilot>

However, introducing a UBI is not something that can be done in isolation. The rate at which a Scottish UBI is set, and the rate of taxation applicable to other sources of income, would need to be the subject of detailed study, including real UBI experiments in a Scottish context, prior to introduction. From the current analysis, levels of direct taxation would be likely to rise for any income earned in addition to the UBI payment.

While it is believed that people on low and middle incomes will be net gainers under the proposed system, this needs further investigation. This is why the Scottish Greens welcome research into UBI, such as the recent feasibility study for a Citizens Basic Income (CBI) in Scotland. This study was published in October 2020 and was the result of 2 years work by 4 Scottish councils¹⁵² (Fife, North Ayrshire, City of Edinburgh and Glasgow City) – together with NHS Health Scotland and the Improvement Service – to look at whether a CBI pilot was desirable and what form it should take. The Scottish Government supported the study by providing £250,000 in funding for this experiment.

The feasibility study¹⁵³ recommended a 3-year pilot study of CBI. The purpose of the 3-year pilot would be to measure the impact of a CBI in a Scottish context. The feasibility study recommended that the CBI used in the pilot should be:

- ▶ A cash payment – not a payment in kind such as a voucher;
- ▶ Periodic – paid regularly (weekly, fortnightly, or monthly);
- ▶ Individual – individual payments for adult, with child payments made to the parents (usually the mother);
- ▶ Universal – paid to the total population within the study area with no means-testing or restrictions by age, income, or individual characteristics;
- ▶ Unconditional – received as a right.

In addition, the feasibility study recommended carrying out the pilot in two areas and paying the CBI to the whole community in both areas. The difference between the two areas would be that in one area the CBI would be set at a ‘low level’, aligned with current social security payments, and one at a ‘high level’, based on the Minimum Income Standard. However, the study makes the point that no participant should be financially disadvantaged, so care will be needed to ensure that no-one experiences detriment (financial or otherwise) from taking part.

The feasibility study was welcomed by the Scottish Greens. Reacting to the publication of the report, Alison Johnstone said, “This feasibility study shows that whatever the challenges to introducing a universal basic income in Scotland, set at an adequate rate, it would have a potentially hugely positive impact on health, wellbeing, poverty and inequality at a time when inequalities are being exposed by the current public health crisis.”

However, under the current devolution settlement¹⁵⁴, the study cannot be run by the Scottish Government and Scottish local government without support of the UK government; in particular, that of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP – the social security agency in the UK) and the HMRC (the UK tax authority). At the time of writing, there is no support within those agencies or the UK Government to initiate the pilot study.

While the Scottish Greens are certainly leading the case for UBI in Scotland, across the political spectrum, there is increasing support for UBI. Indeed, at the Scottish Election leadership debate on 30th March 2021¹⁵⁵, four out of the five party leaders who took part in the debate said they either supported UBI or supported trials of UBI during the next parliament. Support for UBI came from the leaders of the Scottish National Party, Labour Party, and the Liberal Democrats in addition to Lorna Slater, co-leader of the Scottish Greens. The only party opposing UBI were the Conservatives, who currently form the UK government.

It is not just among politicians that there is growing support for UBI within Scotland. The Citizens Assembly

of Scotland made a recommendation in support of UBI in October 2019¹⁵⁶. This support among the general population has led to bolder statements in support of UBI from Scottish politicians, such as Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland, who said the “time has come” for UBI in Scotland at a Covid-19 briefing in May 2020¹⁵⁷. She added that “the experience of the virus and the economic consequences of that have actually made me much, much more strongly of the view that it is an idea that’s time has come.”

However, as with many other political debates in Scotland, the debate around UBI comes back to the question of Scottish independence from the United Kingdom. As made clear from the CBI Feasibility Study, under the current devolution settlement, the Scottish government does not have the necessary control over taxation or social security to begin a UBI pilot; far less the political power to introduce UBI as a policy. These powers are reserved for the UK government, so it would not be possible to introduce UBI in Scotland without their support. While the Scottish Government is hopeful of “constructive discussions” with the UK government over UBI, the UK chancellor (finance minister), Rishi Sunak, has said that the UK government was “not in favour of a universal basic income”¹⁵⁸. So, as with much of Scottish politics, the UK government (which is supported by only a small minority of Scottish voters) is increasingly out of step with the people and politicians of Scotland.

As Lorna Slater said in the Scottish election leadership debate in March 2021, “the Scottish Greens are committed to working towards UBI and will support trials of it in the next parliament”. The only thing preventing a UBI trial in Scotland appears to be the attitude of the UK government.

The Scottish Greens are committed to introducing UBI in Scotland. While Scotland does not currently have the legal powers to introduce a true UBI experiment in Scotland, the party will continue to support any studies and simulations that are carried out to understand the impacts of introducing UBI. The May 2021 election saw a record number of Green MSPs¹⁵⁹ elected to the Scottish Parliament, all of whom are committed to introducing a UBI in Scotland at the earliest opportunity. It may need independence for this to happen, but the Scottish Greens are confident we will get there.

¹⁵² Municipal Authorities

¹⁵³ https://www.basicincome.scot/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/175371/Draft-Final-CBI-Feasibility_Main-Report-June-2020.pdf

¹⁵⁴ Devolution is the transfer of some authority or power from a central organisation or government to smaller organisations or government departments. In the context of the UK, this refers to the Parliament of the United Kingdom’s statutory granting of a greater level of self-government to the Scottish Parliament, the Senedd (Welsh Parliament), the Northern Ireland Assembly and the London Assembly and to their associated executive bodies the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and in England, the Greater London Authority and combined authorities.

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/uk-scotland-56564915>

¹⁵⁶ <https://www.citizensassembly.scot/vision-and-recommendations/recommendations/recommendations-majority-supported>

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/universal-basic-income-ubi-scotland-uk-nicola-sturgeon-coronavirus-a9498076.html>

¹⁵⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-52997031>

¹⁵⁹ Member of the Scottish Parliament

Basic income in Serbia

Predrag Momčilović

Serbia, as well as other Eastern European countries, followed a different path to socio-economic development than the one taken by Western European countries. Once liberated from fascism, Serbia, as one of the constitutive republics of Yugoslavia, contributed to the establishment of a “self-managing” socialism. After parting ways with Moscow in 1948, in order to preserve its independence, Yugoslavia increasingly began to diverge from the Soviet Union. Finding itself at a crossroads between the East and the West, Yugoslavia was building its own way towards socialism, while nurturing the idea and practice of the Non-Aligned Movement and intensively cooperating with so-called developing countries. The beginning of the 1990s, the breakdown of the Warsaw Treaty and the Soviet Union, along with the Washington Consensus, and the inner struggles and conflicts Yugoslavia was facing at the time, all led to the bloody civil war and, eventually, to the breakup of Yugoslavia. At the same time, the intensive re-establishment of capitalism took hold as an overall trend in the whole of Eastern Europe. The re-establishment of capitalism was characterised by processes of privatisation, deindustrialisation, marginalisation and unemployment on a massive scale. This brief historic insight allows for a better understanding of why the idea of universal basic income (UBI) does not enjoy broad support in Serbia, as well as highlighting both the potential and the limitations of this idea.

The idea of UBI is not so well-known in Serbia these days. Until only a couple of years ago, this concept was neither familiar to the public, nor was it the subject of debate among political activists. Over the past few years, the situation has slightly improved, with several debates on UBI being organised and a handful of activist and scientific articles published, which even led to a brief introduction to the concept of UBI in some mainstream media. The interest was mostly prompted by international debates on basic income. Nonetheless, the majority of the population is still not familiar with the concept of UBI, while certain media has even worsened the situation by presenting false information about the concept. The way the concept of UBI is portrayed in Serbian media these days depicts it as a utopia where money is given out for free. One of the main counter-arguments states that Serbia is not wealthy enough to consider introducing universal basic income. While UBI is regarded as “the latest communist conspiracy” by the political right, liberals criticise it as a concept that would discourage people from participating in the labour market.

While considering UBI as a free-money utopia, Western Balkan countries continue to pursue foreign direct investments by offering subsidies to foreign investors. Faced with the lack of money for investing, these countries turn towards huge loans and foreign capital in order to boost their economies. These economic policies are shown to be counter-productive since they have not resulted in reduced inequalities; rather, the reverse. We are now witnessing the race to the bottom between countries that are competing to offer as favourable conditions as possible to investors, while, at the same time, decreasing labour and environmental standards. We often see investors gaining free land and infrastructure, followed by subsidies for every job they offer, which often surpass €10,000 per workplace. To paint the whole picture, it is important to know that the minimum monthly wage for a full-time job in Serbia is €343.

“The whole-year, full-time employment, during an entire career span, is becoming more of a minority privilege”. The unemployment rate, decreasing salaries and job opportunities and increasing precarity of the workforce – these are all trends placing Serbia on the economic outskirts of Europe. The current economic policy, based on subsidising foreign direct investments, has resulted in growing inequality in society and GDP barely reaching the level it once had in the late 1980s. In this light, UBI is now emerging as one of the emancipation tools which could help achieve social change with the aim of reducing inequalities in society while offering liberation from the structural constraints of the labour market.

Universal basic income – The United Nations experiment

In 2017, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) gathered a team of experts to conduct research on the potential for introducing UBI in Serbia with the purpose of starting a public debate and carrying out the first UBI experiment. In the first phase, the social security system – as well as mechanisms for implementing UBI on a state level – were analysed and a framework for a UBI experiment was created. The research was mainly focused on monitoring employability and participation in the labour market in the UBI experimental group. The investigation also monitored the impact of UBI on various health indicators. Additionally, the effect of UBI on the situation in households was investigated.

The experiment was carried out in a single city called Niš. Niš is the largest city in Southern Serbia and was once a big industrial centre but was heavily hit by deindustrialisation, resulting in an increased poverty rate. Another reason Niš was selected as the location of the experiment was that local authorities were very open to cooperating with the UNDP on carrying out this comprehensive experiment. The study not only consisted of an experimental but also a comparison group to exclude alternative explanations of the effects of UBI. The experimental group consisted of 1,000 unemployed people not receiving any social benefits. They were supposed to receive a UBI of 15,416 RSD per month (or €131,60 – the poverty line in Serbia) over the period of two years. The comparison group consisted of another 1,000 unemployed people receiving social benefits, but no UBI payments. However, the experiment has not been conducted ever since its inception three years ago and it is questionable if the experiment will ever be realised.

Had the research been completed and the experiment carried out, this proposal should have been introduced into the public debate with the goal to also engage political decision-makers in the discussion. The experiment was supposed to be financed both by the project and other activities, which would not be possible if UBI was tested at the state level. Although the experiment has its shortcomings, we are witnessing the topic of UBI slowly entering public discourse as these pioneer projects raise interest in the subject and open up space for debate. The UBI debate is still mostly confined to academia and activists, but some media have shown interest in following this debate.

The Covid-19 pandemic and UBI

The global Covid-19 pandemic, which also affected Serbia, stopped the further development and implementation of UBI-related projects. Due to the pandemic, all activities have been postponed for a time when the health situation normalises.

Despite stopping the activities related to the planned UBI experiment in Serbia, the debate on this topic has opened at other levels. The economic crisis due to the pandemic hit the tourism sector hard and left many people without jobs. In this light, the introduction of a partial basic income has been discussed as a means to alleviate the economic situation for workers in the tourism sector until the economic and health crisis have ameliorated.

In the light of the UBI debate in Serbia, it is interesting to analyse some of the economic measures that the Government of the Republic of Serbia has implemented in order to stimulate the economy and increase pub-

lic spending. The government has twice adopted a package of measures by which some money was paid to all adult citizens of Serbia as a lump-sum. In June 2020, each citizen received €100, while in May 2021, each citizen received €30, and the direct payment of another €100/30 is planned for November 2021. The fact that every individual received the same amount independent of their needs was criticised by the opposition and economic analysts. They would have preferred a targeted approach, helping the worst off most, and criticised the unnecessary spending as further increasing state debt. Contrary to the professional public, the citizens accepted this move with sympathy.

It seems that the Covid-19 pandemic has led many to reconsider the neoliberal dogmas dominating Serbia since the early 2000s. More and more people now believe that health and human well-being should be prioritised over purely economic interests. This can be a good initial step for building a narrative around UBI as one of the mechanisms needed for a new normality in a post-pandemic society.

The potential of UBI

The emancipatory potential of UBI in Eastern Europe is large but remains to be fully explored. UBI is certainly not the silver bullet that erases all issues in our society, but it could indeed be a very handy tool to tackle at least some of them. For a fruitful public debate to take place, it is important to distinguish between different models of UBI as they can be found all across the political spectrum, from strongly neoliberal accounts to radically leftist ones. UBI has the potential to help the countries of Eastern Europe to move away from the economic periphery of Europe and become major players in the European economy. This holds true, as throughout the Balkans and other parts of Eastern Europe, the overall historical and socio-economic situation is similar to that in Serbia, and nowhere has the idea of universal income entered the mainstream political debate.

To this day, there is still no political subject in Serbia able to popularise the idea of UBI and make UBI a mainstream topic. Most political parties are against the idea or don't have any position. Those familiar and close to the idea of UBI are liberal parties who demand that all welfare, including healthcare and education funds, be replaced with universal basic income. However, this type of universal basic income could potentially result in increased inequalities in society and prevent the majority of the population from meeting their fundamental needs, such as free quality education and free timely healthcare.

Instead, a universal basic income that would provide a decent income, while preserving other social aspects of the state, could succeed in reducing inequality and meeting the basic needs of the population. UBI could strengthen the position of workers on strike because it would liberate them from the duty of quickly returning to their workplaces when putting pressure on their employers. Young people could enjoy better education and could be compensated for unpaid internships. UBI could furthermore strengthen the position of women and other marginalised groups in society, since marginalisation largely results from economic dependence that would

be alleviated through regular cash-flow in the form of a UBI. Next, environmental activists would be able to dedicate themselves more to their cause, since they would not need to combine their activism with a regular job. Unfortunately, in Serbia, there is still no left-wing or Green political party strong enough to turn this idea into reality. Until there emerges a progressive political actor, competent enough to lead the idea of UBI into the mainstream, we need to continue with public debates to further increase the visibility of UBI.

Basic income in Spain

Raúl Gomez and Julen Bollain

The pandemic has exposed many of the problems that Spanish policy has been unable or unwilling to solve over the past decades. When the winds of the Green New Deal began to blow in Europe and it was time to address the socio-economic challenges of the 21st century, Spanish policies rather contributed to enlarging the real estate bubble and betting on outsourcing and subcontracting the workforce while neglecting a reindustrialisation directed towards sustainability. In short, the Spanish political class was focused on fixing and patching the most pressing issues while entirely neglecting to tackle long-term reforms aiming at the socio-ecological transition of our economy.

Certain policies had just begun to address important challenges after the first coalition government of Spanish democracy had been formed (with the help of parties to the left of the Socialist party and with the support of the Green parties). In this moment, a global pandemic profoundly changed our lives, restricting mobility and thus aggravating the economic impact. These effects are especially strong in a country which is heavily dependent on income from tourism, the main economic driver up until 2020, when it accounted for 12.4% of gross domestic product and 12.9% of employment¹⁶⁰. This situation, however difficult, might offer an opportunity for change.

One of these necessary changes is undoubtedly the modernisation of the Spanish social welfare system. At the moment, the system has a very decentralised architecture, with a different minimum income programme for each of the 17 Autonomous Communities, to which a state

minimum income is added. Although this Minimum Life Income serves to overcome a deficit that the Spanish state had with the rest of Europe (as it has not had a state-wide minimum income), it is not sufficient to alleviate the serious damage caused by the pandemic or to tackle the harsh and structural realities that have been entrenched since the last financial crisis starting in 2008 and the following years. In fact, not even the strongest advocates of minimum living income defend its effectiveness anymore. Many people and various groups have raised their voices against a welfare state network that is only covering a small proportion of the target group. Unfortunately, this is a very good example of how the realisation of means- and behaviour-tested benefits fall prey to overbearing bureaucracy.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, there has been a strong increase in public support for basic income to allow tackling current structural problems, such as the aforementioned failure of minimum income schemes or the uncertain future of employment. Even people who traditionally have defended minimum income programmes are now stating that the better solution might be one related to basic income. Many groups from civil society have uttered statements in this direction: the LGBTIQ+ community, cultural associations, social work groups, various social movements, trade unions and feminist groups – to name but a few – are all in favour of basic income.

Furthermore, the Spanish Basic Income Network conducted a public opinion survey on basic income between in May 2020¹⁶¹. The basic income model presented to the interviewees was the following:

“One of the main results is that an astonishingly large group of 56% of people are in favour of establishing a basic income in Spain. In contrast, only 30% of those surveyed disagree with this measure.”

¹⁶⁰ Tourism Satellite Account in Spain (Cuenta satélite del turismo en España, CSTE) for the year 2019 of the National Statistics Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE). https://www.ine.es/prensa/cst_2019.pdf

¹⁶¹ <http://www.redrentabasica.org/rb/nueva-encuesta-sobre-la-renta-basica-en-espana/>

“Basic income is an unconditional and universal income of €715 per month which all accredited adult residents (€143 for minors) will receive as a citizenship right, which would be financed by a tax reform that would redistribute part of the income of the top 20% of the income distribution to the rest of the population”.

One of the main results is that an astonishingly large group of 56% of people are in favour of establishing a basic income in Spain. In contrast, only 30% of those surveyed disagree with this measure. People with a lower level of income (<€1,000 per month) agree even more with the idea to establish a basic income (67%), and even the majority of people (55%) with higher levels of income (>€5,000 per month) are in favour of basic income.

Young people (18-24 years) are most in favour of the introduction of a basic income (62%). Independent of age, among women, the approval rate is 74%, whereas a slightly lower, but still large number of men (66%) are in support of basic income.

Another point that always emerges in discussions on basic income is whether it disincentivizes people to pursue paid work. Fortunately, in this regard the results of the survey are very clear. Only 5% of people who work full-time say that they would stop working in a paid way if a basic income of €715 per month were introduced and 8% would reduce their working hours. Interestingly, the survey results suggest that a basic income would *not* lead to a significant reduction in job searches. Among people who are actively looking for work, 80% would continue to look for work in the same way and only 7% would look for a job with fewer hours.

Unfortunately, neither the claims of activists, academics or social groups, nor the results of this survey have been reflected in the political debate. More than twelve million people (26.1% of the population) in Spain are at risk of poverty or social exclusion and many families have not received a single euro in social benefits in 2020. Unfortunately, these tragedies and the similarly difficult prospect for 2021 have not had much influence on the public debate regarding our social welfare system¹⁶².

We can therefore see that civil society is beginning to support a proposal such as the basic income, but there is still a lot of work to be done to open up a serious social dialogue on this issue in Spain. The media and political spokespersons often do not even know how to distinguish universal and unconditional basic income from other subsidies, generating terminological confusion. Unfortunately, in the public debate, the support of the majority of political parties is almost non-existent.

The situation in which the pandemic has placed us, the current situation of the distribution of the EU rescue fund and the support reflected in the aforementioned survey, lead us to affirm that this is the perfect moment to start a serious debate on basic income in Spain. It is time to determine why the political parties, as they approach power, are reducing their sensitivity and support for this measure, despite the fact that their bases are in favour of basic income.

Basic income in Sweden

Rebecka Le Moine

In the Swedish Green Party, the issue of basic income has more or less always had its place, even if it has not been actively pursued. Beyond our party, however, a discussion of these issues has not been seriously present in the public debate; at least, not more than marginally.

The notion of ‘work at all costs’ – which, in Sweden, is referred to as “line of work” (arbetslinjen) – dominates the

discussion on labour and it is often perceived as provocative if people were to receive money “without demands”.

When the Green Party a few years ago succeeded in pushing through a reform called “Friår” (free year), the idea and its supporters faced harsh criticism. The Green Party called it a freedom reform. In its essence, the “free year” would allow people in working life to take time off for up to a year, provided that another unemployed person

could take the job in her or his place. On the one hand, the suggested system allowed the unemployed to gain a foot in the door of the labour market. On the other hand, it gave working people the option of a sabbatical; during which, financial compensation matching unemployment benefits was provided by the state.

From the Swedish Greens, the idea was seen as a win-win situation for society; a welfare reform that a rich society as ours should be able to afford and would benefit from. In Finland, a very similar reform is known as “Alternating leave” (Alterneringsledighet).

The idea of the “free year” is, of course, not closely related to basic income, but the reform challenged the predominant notion of work at all costs (“line of work”). The “free year” reform was introduced in Sweden in 2005, but when the right-wing parties came into power, they immediately abolished it as soon as possible in 2007. The right-wing rhetoric against the reform was mainly based on pictures of the social hammock people would use when not forced to work and similar claims.

The political opposition is often adverse to both risk and change regarding challenging the current accepted image of work. And even the Green Party’s proposals for shorter working hours receive a lot of criticism in the public debate; although, I believe there is quite strong support for the idea in society as a whole.

Over the years, the Swedish Green party’s focus on basic income has varied greatly. The party has had an ambiguous relation with basic income as the term has appeared in various party programmes in different forms but is often expressed as a long-term goal, rather than an immediate policy issue. It has also varied whether the idea emphasizes a basic income as such or as a basic security when other income is lacking.

Most often, there have been at least one or more motions submitted to the Green Party Congress each year that raise the issue of basic income from different perspectives in an attempt to get the party to pursue the issue more actively. So far, however, there has not been enough support for the issue within the party to include it in our election manifesto.

A few years back, the highest decision-making body of the Swedish Green party – the party congress – approved a motion suggesting that the Swedish Government appoint a state-funded, official investigation on basic income. An investigation could help the issue and discussion to be taken more seriously in Sweden.

The current situation in the Swedish parliament with regard to support for appointing a basic income committee is very difficult. On the one hand, the Swedish Green Party is part of a minority government, together with the Social Democrats. On the other hand, the Swedish Green Party has a budget cooperation and a joint agreement with the Centre Party and the Liberals for the ongoing political term. The Swedish Greens currently seem to lack the political will to prioritise the issue.

When it comes to basic income in Sweden in general, there is definitely a discussion going on via social media, but not very much in other established media outlets. Apart from the Swedish Green Party, however, there are no other parties in the parliament in favour of the idea. But outside the parliament, it is great to see that the feminist party (feministiskt initiativ)¹⁶³ and the newly founded basic income party (basinkomst partiet)¹⁶⁴ are all in favour of basic income and are actively promoting the idea. In addition, a new chapter of the worldwide, non-partisan, basic income network BIEN has been founded in Sweden.

For more action to happen on the issue of basic income in Sweden, greater pressure from other actors will be needed. When global organisations, representatives and business leaders begin to express thoughts in this direction, the situation and discussion could very well change in Sweden. Likewise, when other countries try ideas in this direction, this might further fuel the debate in Sweden. And it is equally important that other parties raise at least some interest and understanding of the issue in order for something political to happen in the Swedish context. Covid-19 has shown that it is possible to do things in new ways. Perhaps this will make it possible to pave the way for a new discussion in this area as well.

162 This text was written at the end of 2020.

163 <https://feministisktinitiativ.se/>

164 <https://www.basinkomstpartiet.org/>

Basic income in Switzerland

Irina Studhalter, Pierre Eckert, and Ralph Kundig

BIEN.CH's activities for the UBI since 2016

Following the UBI 2016 popular referendum¹⁶⁵, BIEN.CH continued its activities to promote the UBI in Switzerland and worldwide. In particular, it supported the introduction of the UBI principle in the new constitution of the Canton of Valais, without success, despite some good support. BIEN.CH also presented a survey on the UBI to all candidates in the last federal elections in 2019 and collaborated in the launch of two other federal referendums related to the UBI, one for the idea of “**Vollgeld**” (direct translation: “full money”) and the other for the introduction of a micro-tax on all electronic financial transactions (currently in the collection phase of signatures). BIEN.CH also collaborated with the Greens of Geneva in drafting the legislative motion for a pilot experiment (see below), participated in the debates on Happiness at Work in Paris, organised by the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Sea, together with the Ministry of Housing and Sustainable Habitat, and finally presented the Swiss UBI project to the Mexican Senate.

Today, the Covid-19 crisis reveals the increasing precariousness of a large part of the Swiss population and highlights the limits of the existing social system. Institutions providing social assistance are forced to relax their rules in the face of the exponential increase in requests for help and still find themselves overwhelmed. As a result, the idea of the UBI is being given new impetus, as well as the idea to launch a new federal popular initiative.

In Switzerland, the system of direct democracy allows the proposition of a new law that all adult citizens can vote on. At the federal level, a popular initiative is declared valid when at least 100,000 signatures have been collected over a maximum period of 18 months. It is then discussed by the Parliament before being submitted to a vote of the whole population. The majority of the country's population is rather conservative and cautious of new ideas. Therefore, ideas outside of the mainstream political debate are generally opposed and rejected when they are proposed by popular initiatives.

But the value of a popular initiative is not limited to its success at the ballot box. It is the preferred means for a group of citizens to introduce a new idea into the political debate, a goal that the UBI initiative perfectly achieved. The population was passionate about this exceptional debate on UBI proposed to them in 2016. The initiative also enabled the UBI networks to study and understand the forms of reticence expressed within the population.

On the basis of this understanding, the BIEN.CH network, together with other networks in favour of the UBI, interested organisations and political parties – in particular the Greens – is currently preparing the launch of a second federal initiative. Following our observations, the main issues this time will be to better define the economic implications, the scope of the unconditionality that radically differentiates the UBI from classical social support, and the necessary adaptation of the social system.

Concerning the financing of the UBI, BIEN.CH currently favours two complementary approaches. The first is the funding model proposed by Prof. Martino Rossi, economist and former director of Social Action in Ticino and member of BIEN.CH. He proposes a direct levy on a share of the net added value produced by companies. The second approach consists of the micro-tax, as mentioned above. Other complementary possibilities are envisaged, such as an ecological incentive tax.

Due to the Covid-19 crisis, it is not yet possible to define a timeline for the launch of this UBI II initiative, which we called “Back to the Future”. Among the conditions that we need to meet is a consensus between the different UBI networks on the text of the law to be proposed, the necessary funds and support, and finally, one or more campaign committees.

Moreover, the various basic income networks in Switzerland are very encouraged to restart a nation-wide campaign. They are supported by the testimonies of those who voted against UBI in 2016, of which many now say they understand the concept much better and

might have changed their minds. The debate is now focusing more on the concrete modalities of the UBI, with the emergence of new caveats, such as the risk emerging from Covid-19 of increased state control on the possible UBI allocation. This confirms that the idea of the UBI has recently evolved from a simple utopia to a concretely feasible project.

UBI in German-speaking Switzerland

Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, several petitions for a Basic Income were started in Switzerland. One petition by the Young Greens reached 13,000 supporters; another one by Erwin Fässler, an activist, reached more than 90,000 supporters. To put this into perspective: a national popular referendum¹⁶⁶ (“Volksinitiative”) needs 100,000 supporters with Swiss citizenship. These petitions got the ball rolling. In the city of Zurich, a loose group of activists and politicians started a referendum for a scientific pilot project. This referendum demands a scientific experiment on Basic Income in the height of the social margin of subsistence (“soziales Existenzminimum”), referring to the humanistic – not the liberal – tradition of Basic Income. The committee consists of politicians from the political left to liberal parties. This is a very new development, as liberal and/or conservative parties have not supported Basic Income so far. The referendum was handed in to the authorities in May 2021; the people of the city of Zurich will be able to vote on it in about two years. Currently, the Zurich referendum is coming to different cities. There are similar projects in the making in Lucerne, Bern and Basel.

A group of Swiss German activists are also working on a second national referendum on UBI. Similar to the project in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, this group is planning on including a concrete mechanism of funding into the referendum as the first referendum in 2016 was kept very open and did not address the questions of height and funding of a UBI. This project is currently in preparation without any specific date to launch.

Since the 1990s, Switzerland has implemented a “Lenkungsabgabe” to fight the climate crises. A tax was imposed on oil (around 0,09 Swiss francs per 1 litre heating oil and 0,18 Swiss francs per 1 litre petrol); the money gets back to inhabitants by reduced health insurance. Switzerland also has child benefits (“Kinder-

zulagen”/“Ausbildungszulagen”) for parents. Depending on the canton one lives in, the child benefit is around CHF300 per month (roughly €270 per month). Redistribution of financial resources, even with the intention of a (very soft) redistribution of wealth is nothing new and has already been implemented in Switzerland. Still, the shift to a UBI seems to be big and challenging.

UBI in French-speaking Switzerland: pilot projects

The national popular referendum (German: Volksinitiative; French: initiative populaire)¹⁶⁷ to introduce a Universal Basic Income (UBI) was passed on 5th June 2016. While the German-speaking part of the country clearly rejected this text, the French-speaking part was more receptive to it, with up to one third of votes in favour; for example, 34.7% in Geneva. This lack of success was due to arguments that were not always rational and based on alleged Swiss values, such as paid work and individual responsibility. The belief that a guaranteed income would lead to idleness might also have played a role. Various doubts about the UBI's sources of funding were also raised.

In order to demonstrate that these beliefs and doubts are not justified, various groups proposed to set up pilot projects. In French-speaking Switzerland, we are aware of two such actions.

The first was initiated in Lausanne, a city in the canton of Vaud with 145,000 inhabitants and 120,000 jobs. The motion submitted by the Greens in October 2015 was entitled “requesting a study on the feasibility and opportunity of a pilot experiment regarding unconditional basic income (UBI)”¹⁶⁸. The following passages contrast a pilot experiment to a full UBI: “local initiatives pave the way, show that it is feasible and that fears about its supposed adverse effects are unfounded” and “This experiment will not be able to implement a full UBI, but it should at least allow to verify one of the central premises of UBI; namely that people benefiting from UBI do not take advantage of its unconditionality and indulge in idleness, but on the contrary, take charge, become more autonomous and more effective in seeking paid work, conducting socially useful activities or creating their own business.” The motion was accepted in April 2016 by the Municipal Council and passed on to the Executive. Ever since, we are eagerly awaiting next steps in this regard by the municipality.

¹⁶⁵ By “popular referendum”, we are here referring to what in Swiss politics is actually called a “popular initiative” (German: Volksinitiative, French: “initiative populaire”). Please bear in mind that what in Switzerland is called a “referendum” has a similar, but different function. If at least 100,000 signatures have been collected, in order for the Swiss people to vote on a change in a law or the constitution – as was the case in 2016 – a popular initiative – in the text referred to as popular referendum – will be taking place.

¹⁶⁶ See first footnote in this contribution.

¹⁶⁷ See first footnote in this contribution.

¹⁶⁸ https://bien.ch/sites/bien/files/misc/story/2015/10/postulat_rbi_lausanne_rebeaud.pdf

The idea was taken up again in 2019 by the Geneva Greens, who tabled a motion also calling for a UBI pilot project in the canton of Geneva with around 500,000 inhabitants and 330,000 jobs¹⁶⁹.

The social safety net in the canton of Geneva is fairly dense, but also highly complex. The number of people receiving aid has increased sharply in recent years and will be further amplified by the consequences of the Covid-19 crisis. UBI and its unconditionality would simplify the system and might avoid “hidden poverty” – the phenomenon that social benefits do not reach those eligible for them as they are unaware of their entitlement.

The motion calls for the involvement of the academic community (namely the University of Geneva) in order to frame the project. In particular, for the sample to be representative, the number of participants needs to be sufficiently high. Further, it is also necessary to

define indicators allowing an appropriate evaluation of the experiment. As this is not a full implementation of the UBI, however, the traditional social assistance will continue to be paid to those participating in the experiment. A mechanism must thus be found in order to avoid double income which would spoil the experiment.

The motion is currently being examined by the Economic Affairs Commission of the Grand Council of Geneva. Although right-wing circles are usually quite sceptical, we are hopeful to soon see further steps towards a basic income pilot in the canton of Geneva.

Basic income in the United Kingdom

Natalie Bennett

As Greens, we’re used to condescending pats on the head from traditional political players; words along the lines of, “Well, you mean well, but you just want to move too fast. Change takes time; lots of time.” But the tragic, verities-smashing arrival of the SARS-CoV-2 virus – Covid-19 – has blown away such claims forever. Within weeks, entire nations had locked themselves down, changed their arrangements for work, for schooling, for medical care, for personal and business support.

In the UK, support for universal basic income has grown at almost the same velocity, in large part due to the impact of the virus. The crucial place of security for every individual, even those previously apparently comfortably well-off, has risen right up the political agenda, as has an understanding of the need for resilience at the community scale. Commentary has sometimes come from the public health perspective, as in an article in the British Medical Journal¹⁷⁰.

That was probably an inevitable impact of such a shocking change, but has been magnified by the gaping holes in the government safety net – an estimated 3 million people, mainly the self-employed – being ineligible for income support and furlough payments, often for reasons of pure chance; whether their exact mix of self-versus PAYE-employment, or because they were shifting jobs just as the pandemic struck, or even because their income was more than £50,000. It is not easy to manage if that suddenly falls to zero for a year and counting.

The number of claimants of Universal Credit, the government’s complex, highly conditional payments – generally seen as a disaster – reached 6 million by January 2021. And that’s highlighted the whole problem of the costs – both in administration and stress on recipients – of conditionality.

At the centre of the rise in interest in universal basic income (UBI) is a grassroots network, the UBI Labs, that’s built around campaign groups – some based geographically, with long poverty-hit Northern England (including Sheffield, Manchester, Hull, Leeds and Bradford) being of particular focus; others being non-geographical, from the UBI Lab Womxn to UBI Lab Disability¹⁷¹.

Also new is the Cross Party Parliamentary and Local Government (CPPLG) [Working Group on Universal Basic Income](https://www.ubilabnetwork.org/applg)¹⁷², an innovative structure drawing together local principal authority councillors, metro-mayors, members of parliament and peers from all national legislatures in the UK. (Declaration of interest: the author is vice-chair.) Every party except the Conservatives is represented on it. The structure is roughly modelled on the All-Party Parliamentary Groups in Westminster (APPGs) and it makes a political statement in itself in that it brings (almost) all levels of government together and treats them equally.

The UBI Labs and CPPLG members have worked together to promote the passing of motions of support in local, regional and national government in the UK for calls for trials of UBI in their areas. By May 2020, 32 such motions had been passed, including in the Senedd (the Welsh Assembly)¹⁷³.

In Scotland, the Royal Society has been at the forefront of the push for a trial that was the subject of a two-year feasibility study¹⁷⁴ with grassroots groups pushing for the trial coming from Glasgow, Edinburgh, Fife and North Ayrshire. Momentum on that has, to some degree, stalled, but with the election of eight Green MPs to the Holyrood Parliament in 2021, progress on pushing a

trial forward is still possible with the (firm) presence of the Scottish Green Party in government.

Across the border the Green Party of England and Wales (GPEW) has been regularly and heavily promoting the concept of a UBI on social media in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, it having been a party policy for decades. GPEW went into the 2019 general election¹⁷⁵ with a fully-costed proposal to introduce a UBI for all within the term of the next parliament – the first time such an explicit commitment has been made and costed.

In September 2020, the Liberal Democrats (aligned, pre-Brexit, with what is now the Renew group – formerly ALDE, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats Europe in the European Parliament) voted at their national conference to back a UBI for the first time¹⁷⁶. The Labour Party, under the leadership of Keir Starmer (who replaced Jeremy Corbyn), has, however, expressed no interest in pursuing a UBI as a policy and seems unlikely to do so.

There have also been proposals for a temporary “emergency UBI”, put forward at various critical stages of the pandemic as both an economic and social security measure. These have attained less traction. The current Conservative Government, however, has remained totally resistant to the concept, with a minister telling the author – after having put the same question to them several times – in February 2021 that it has “no plans to introduce it”¹⁷⁷.

169 <http://ge.ch/grandconseil/data/texte/M02587.pdf>

170 <https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n193>

171 <https://www.ubilabnetwork.org/ubi-labs>

172 <https://www.ubilabnetwork.org/applg>

173 <https://seneddhomes.com/2020/10/senedd-backs-call-for-universal-basic-income-trial-but-its-unlikely-to-happen/>

174 <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-48207818>

175 <https://campaigns.greenparty.org.uk/manifesto/>

176 <https://www.libdems.org.uk/a20-ubi>

177 [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2021-02-11/debates/D97C3621-FAF7-4A60-8420-F48AAC24618C/UniversalCredit\(TransitionalProvisions\)\(ClaimantsPreviouslyEntitledToASevereDisabilityPremium\)AmendmentRegulations2021#contribution-F9655B10-10AA-4BA9-A138-F6791EB07C41](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2021-02-11/debates/D97C3621-FAF7-4A60-8420-F48AAC24618C/UniversalCredit(TransitionalProvisions)(ClaimantsPreviouslyEntitledToASevereDisabilityPremium)AmendmentRegulations2021#contribution-F9655B10-10AA-4BA9-A138-F6791EB07C41)

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Irina Studhalter was part of the campaigning team for the national initiative for a Basic Income in Switzerland in 2016. She is a member of the parliament of the city of Lucerne for the Young Greens and co-president of the Green Party of Lucerne. Irina Studhalter studies Social Work and works in community building and cultural mediation.

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European Green Network of Basic Income Supporters

The idea to assemble views on basic income from many nations in Europe in this compendium stems from the European Green Network of Basic Income supporters. To join the network's quarterly meetings and its email list, please contact the basic income working group of the German Greens: kontakt@gruenes-grundeinkommen.de



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