

Green Observatory: Basic Income

GREEN OBSERVATORY: BASIC INCOME

Universal basic income (UBI), the radically simple idea that everyone should receive a periodic cash payment from the government, is on the agenda and part of the public debate across the globe. Regardless of whether you deem UBI affordable or politically feasible, the proposal raises crucial questions about society today, from its economic structure to the very idea of citizenship. Green circles and movements have always been interested in basic income, seeing its potential for enhancing individual freedoms and capacities. But there are many sides and nuances to the debate, which today extends across the political spectrum.

The Green European Journal asked experts, activists, and politicians active on basic income around Europe and in or around the Green galaxy about the basic income debate in their country or region. The second question of this Green Observatory seeks to map progressive responses to basic income.

Is universal basic income a part of the public and political debate in your country?

Dr. Wolfgang Strengmann-Kuhn: There is a lively discussion about basic income in Germany. One reason is the connection with the ongoing debates on digitisation and the future of work. Even some German top managers like Joe Kaeser from Siemens, Timotheus Höttges from Telekom, and others argue for a basic income. In addition, the philosopher Richard David Precht, who is often a guest on TV talk shows, argues for a basic income, with his claim based on the expected changes due to digitisation. Thus, basic income is regularly a topic in the media. Besides these new players, there were already some prominent supporters for a basic income over the last decade. Thomas Straubhaar, professor of economics and former head of the Hamburg Institute of International Economics, and Götz Werner, a German billionaire and founder of the drugstore chain dm who published new books on basic income, are some publicly known stakeholders. Furthermore, there is an initiative called mein-grundeinkommen.de with significant media response. This organisation gives away basic incomes of 1000 euros per month for a whole year and is financed entirely by crowd funding. The Swiss referendum as well as the basic income experiment in Finland are also drivers of the discussion in Germany.

What is the position of the Green party, other parties, and social movements in the UBI debate in your country?

Dr. Wolfgang Strengmann-Kuhn: There has been a controversial debate on basic income within the German Green Party since the 1980s. In 2007, there was an intense debate and finally a party congress, where 42 per cent of the delegates voted for a concrete basic income proposal. However, the adopted resolution declares: "With this resolution the debate on basic income is not finished. The more the discussion goes on in society, the more the discussion shall go on in the party." In the last election programme in 2017, German Greens declared that many of their proposals, from the basic social security for children to the guaranteed pension, were also influenced by the basic income proposal, and that they wanted to take experiences in other countries into account and to test basic income with a model project. This year, the party started a discussion on a new long-term programme to be adopted in 2020, and the

new party chairs emphasised that the discussion on basic income will be a prominent topic. The goal is not to have a show down like in 2007, but to discuss as broadly as possible a Green way to overcome the current system known as “Hartz IV” which was brought about by a controversial reform of welfare benefits and unemployment insurance in 2003. So far, none of the mainstream political parties is clearly in favour of basic income in Germany.

Read more interviews from other countries: <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/green-observatory-basic-income/>

Quelle: <http://www.strengmann-kuhn.de/?id=3021144>

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