

# BASIC INCOME IN THE WORLD

Arguments, Experiments, the History

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## Introduction

This book offers an introduction to an idea and practice of unconditional basic income, which is becoming a topic increasingly discussed not only among researchers but also among citizens and the politicians who represent them. The topic is also increasingly making its way into the mass media. Since people sometimes confuse unconditional basic income (also called universal basic income) with other financial concepts, it is first important to clarify how it is defined. Unconditional basic income is a financial sum that is provided to all citizens (or otherwise legally defined residents) by the state (or a city, a county etc.) at regular intervals (usually monthly) without any conditions being attached, i.e. regardless of whether the citizen has other income from wages or other sources, regardless of age, sex and gender, marital status or other characteristics. For basic income to make a substantial contribution to people's lives, it must also reach a certain minimum financial level. From our point of view, the provision of a basic income enables citizens' basic needs to be met. By doing this, it also enables their creative potential to be unlocked for their other activities which could then significantly raise their standard of living.

Our motivation for writing this book is our conviction of the importance of a basic income, which is based both on our theoretical analyses (in philosophy and the social sciences) and on insights from practice, specifically from experiments with basic income and, more generally, from people's historical experiences with their finances in many countries around



the world. The practical and theoretical efforts of the people we follow in our book are based on people's needs and their activities of social critique of the problems that prevent them from meeting their needs.<sup>1</sup>

As for the second motivation, current reflections on basic income in Europe and also in this book have been taking place under specific practical conditions, in particular as part of a citizens' initiative for unconditional basic income in all the countries of the European Union since 2020. This is the second initiative of its kind. The first initiative in 2013-2014 was one of the largest pan-European events in history to be organized by citizens. The „European Citizens' Initiative for an Unconditional Basic Income“ sought to inform citizens and have discussions with them at the European level, as well as in the European Parliament and the European Commission. Ordinary citizens, philosophers and social scientists, members of civil society, social movements and political parties organized seminars and lectures for the general and professional public, debated in the media, and collected signatures from January 2013 to January 2014. The proposal to introduce a basic income provoked a large wave of various responses from citizens, journalists and politicians thanks to the intensity of the one-year-long initiative and also due to the potential large number of citizens since the European Union and other neighbouring countries where the initiative also took place, involved more than five hundred million people.

The second European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) for basic income has now been under way in European Union countries since September 2020, and discussions are also taking place in

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Bidadanure, J. U. The Political Theory of Universal Basic Income. *Annual Review of Political Science*, No. 22, 2019, pp. 481-501; Hrubec, M. Authoritarian versus Critical Theory. *International Critical Thought*, Vol. 2, No. 4, December 2012, pp. 431-444. We also recommend *Basic Income Studies*.

Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey. Now we have co-organized an initiative entitled „Start Unconditional Basic Incomes (UBI) throughout the EU“ with colleagues from all the countries of the EU.<sup>2</sup> Originally, it was planned as a year-long initiative, which was later extended because of the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> The initiative includes information and discussion activities with citizens, politicians, scientists and journalists physically and online in seminars, conferences, newspapers, radio, TV and social media. Citizens also have the opportunity to sign a petition, as the introduction of a basic income depends on their support. Then basic income can be approved, or another initiative will take place later. Finally, basic income could be implemented in a coordinated manner across all EU member states, or in all EU countries according to individual decisions and rules in individual countries, or at least in some EU countries.

We have been working on basic income in theory and practice for more than fifteen years, and we are also planning to organize various activities in the future at different levels: local, national, macro-regional and global.

In the first part of this book, we have chosen to introduce a concept of basic income using an interview, as it is more readable and thus more accessible. From a theoretical point of view, the intersubjective method is an adequate basis for analysis. The interview represents our experience as theorists and as publicists and practical organizers of basic income initiatives.

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<sup>2</sup> We would like to thank Klaus Sambor from Vienna, who is an initiator of important basic income activities in Europe, and all our colleagues in the initiative in the Czech Republic and in other countries for their cooperation and those, who participated in our public events, for all their suggestions. We also thank to our academic colleagues in Prague and other cities all over the world.

<sup>3</sup> The initiative started in September 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Commission approved already the second extension of the initiative, namely until June 2022.

The second part of the book focuses on the main arguments for unconditional basic income. It is the most analytical part, which offers the key arguments in terms of the different aspects of basic income and also the different social groups it could help. Here we also focus on basic income in terms of its financing.

The third part is devoted to experiments with basic income around the world. We do not write in full about all the experiments that have ever taken place but we try to present the main and representative examples. Some experiments meet the criteria for basic income more, others less. Although the various experiments and pilots have produced positive findings as well as unresolved cases and methodological issues, they are all united by the basic sufficient orientation towards eradicating poverty and providing people with a higher standard of living than is usual within today's global capitalism. In this third part of the book, we look first at Europe, where a number of remarkable experiments have recently taken place. We concentrate on those in the Netherlands, Finland, Ireland, Germany, and Scotland. Most of these are experiments that have already taken place, but in some cases they are also those that are currently being discussed or prepared for implementation. We also analyse experiments in Africa, particularly in Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, and Uganda. We then focus on the Americas. We analyse how a version of basic income has been applied in Alaska since the 1980s, how it is being phased in Brazil, and what steps have been taken in Canada and the USA. Then, we look at basic income experiments in Asia, particularly in India, Iran, and Macau. Finally, we study efforts to introduce it through the United Nations at the global level. These efforts involve the unprecedentedly highest number of the population on the planet in the history of basic income experimentation, nearly three billion of the poorest people.

In the fourth part of the book, we examine history. We look at the pioneers of basic income throughout history, particularly

persons such as Thomas More, Ioannes Lodovicus Vives, Thomas Paine, Bertrand Russell, and Martin Luther King. They deserve attention in terms of explaining the gradual crystallization of the idea of a basic income and the context in which it was considered, both theoretically and practically.

Readers can read our book systematically in order to get a deeper and more complex understanding of the issue but it is also possible to select just some preferred parts of the book. That is why the book is structured into smaller sections. We hope that this book will contribute to clarifying the important idea of unconditional basic income and the efforts to implement the experiments in many countries around the world. Its implementation in practice will surely still entail the need to overcome various pitfalls, as has been the case in the history of mankind during various major civilizational changes.

*The authors: Marek Hrubec, Martin Brabec, Markéta Minářová*





**(1) Interview:  
Fundamental social change**

**Jan Rovenský:** Let's start by giving readers an idea of what unconditional basic income is with an interview, as this method of communication is more effective in getting points across. After all, engaging in dialogue to explain issues has shown itself to be a dependable approach since the time of Plato. Let's explain the issue by disentangling basic income from other types of income.

**Martin Brabec:** Unconditional basic income is a financial amount that is paid at regular intervals, usually monthly, to every individual adult citizen without a means test. The defining feature making basic income such a socially innovative instrument is its unconditional nature, i.e. with no strings attached. It is paid out to recipients regardless of whether or not they do paid work, own any property, are rich or poor, live alone or with family, have children, etc. These are all key parameters used by our current conditional social system to determine if an individual is to be granted a social transfer.

**Martin Brabec:** There are several angles from which we can view the word „basic“. What are they? It is a word underlying the fact that this sort of income is an amount that citizens can rely on to form a material, secure basis for their lives.

**Marek Hrubec:** First of all, „basic“ could be said to refer to a financial base that everyone would receive no matter what. However, it would come up short if it were so small as to be insignificant. Therefore, basic income should be conceived as a response to people's bare necessities. Ideally, a basic income should enable everyone's basic needs to be met. It is a path-breaking improvement which is a part of fundamental social change in human history. And it is not just a utopian idea. It is an important and well-reasoned concept, aspects of which have already been proven to work in practice by various countries' experiments and practices.