

Update on basic income's advancement in France

A growing interest in basic income

Since the government of Finland announced it would carry out a UBI experiment in order to assess the feasibility of such a project on a national scale, we noticed increasing interest on the subject on the part of the French mainstream media, and actually all over the world. And indeed, the French Movement for a Basic Income has been contacted by many journalists in the past few months.

So it seems that people are just discovering this topic, but above all, they are starting to consider it, not as a utopian idea as it has so often been designated, but more like a realistic project that might actually occur in their countries as well.

Additionally, as the media (and the people more widely) have become more interested in the subject, we have also been noticing a surge of interest among decision-makers and politicians on both the left and the right.

Several political attempts to get basic income in the limelight

Lately, even at the government level, there have been some careful moves towards the idea:

- **A report written by a government agency dedicated to Digital Affairs**, on the demand of the French Ministry of Labor recommended experimenting an unconditional basic income to cope with the transformations of work in the context of the growing digital economy.
- Even more recently, the current **Minister for the Economy, Emmanuel Macron**, stated that he supported the idea of a basic income on a well-known radio program, as well as on [better to say 'social media'] Twitter.

In terms of lobbying, basic income has also been a key subject in the past few months and has been supported by a wide range of politicians on the left and on the right.

- December 2015: right-wing MP Frédéric Lefebvre, from "Les Républicains" Party (LR) deposited an **amendment to the 2016 Budget Law**. The amendment was rejected, but it was only the first political action supporting the idea of a basic income. In the next few weeks, several other initiatives would follow.
- January 2016: MPs Lefebvre (LR) and Batho (Socialist) supported **two similar amendments aiming at introducing basic income into the Bill on Digital Republic**, which were eventually rejected. However, the rapporteur Luc Belot and the State Secretary for Digital Affairs, Axelle Lemaire, showed their interest and support to the topic.

It is yet important to highlight that MFRB already had the support of several politicians, and it [we?] even managed to organize a debate at the Senate in May 2015, with the participation of several MPs from the Socialist Party such as Gaetan Gorce, and the Green Party MP Jean Desessard.

More recently in Paris, we organized a conference on the Brazilian experiment run by ReCivitas, and we also had the support of the Green MP Isabelle Attard.

The next step will be the Sirugue Commission

When the amendments supported by Delphine Batho and Frédéric Lefebvre were rejected by one vote at the beginning of the month by the National Assembly, the main argument was that the basic income was not an issue to be discussed in the context of the digital bill.

However, there seemed to be a general agreement that UBI had to be debated within the current commission Sirugue.

This parliamentary working commission, led by Socialist MP Christophe Sirugue, is planning to produce a comprehensive review of the welfare system, in order to assess how it can be improved. So it now seems that this commission is the centre of attention and might play a key role for the future of basic income in France.

Within this framework, the MFRB has been invited to explain how a basic income might be a good option if they decided to reform the welfare system. The MFRB will be auditioned on February 11th, and will present several options towards the introduction of a basic income, either directly, or gradually, with steps such as:

- a basic income for children
- automatic unemployment benefit
- individual unemployment benefit
- universal unemployment benefit

The commission is due to hand out its report at the end of March.

(Besides from this commission, there have also been several appeals to create a parliamentary working group on basic income, since Mr. Lefebvre presented the first amendment on basic income in December 2015. However, this group has not yet been created but might, in the future, if decision-makers continue to openly support the idea at the political level.)

Laying the foundations for basic income experimentations

Along with the political moves towards a basic income in France, there has also been important progress related to experimentation possibilities in France.

Last July, the Aquitaine region voted in favor of an experimentation of a basic income, that would start with an automatic RSA. This project, led by the Green MP Martine Alcorta (now vice-president of the region) also got the support of the Socialist Party during the regional elections last December, which, initially was more reluctant to the idea, but accepted to include it in their common program, when they decided to form a left-wing alliance for the second round of the elections.

Although this experimental project has been voted unanimously, it is still facing three main challenges:

- **the responsibility to the welfare distribution comes within the competency of the department, not the region.** So it will be necessary to get the support of every department where the pilot-project will be experimented, which means a long process.
- **the territorial reform, which entails a restructuration of the French regions.** This measure, enforced in January, implies that the regional council of Aquitaine, as well

as the other regions, will need time to adapt to this new organization. So the experimentation will be far to be a priority.

- **The State is considering the option of re-nationalizing the welfare allowances,** which are currently under the responsibility of the Department.

So this project might be more difficult to enforce than expected, but the MFRB is already considering the options that might help us to have a stake in the future moves towards UBI, such as:

- **planning a strong lobbying strategy in the region,** by getting in touch with the department councils
- **promoting a feasibility study**
- **impulsing the creation of an association composed with local decision-makers** in order to follow the experimentation on a long-term basis

Besides from the Aquitaine Region's experimental project, the MFRB also has one of his members, Frédéric Bosqué, who is planning to experiment basic income in the form of a local currency within the ecovillage he is working on with his association, Tera. This sustainable development project already started in the south of France and has now more than 400 members. Its members are also in contact with the director for the innovation pole of the Aquitaine region, so it seems that this is where UBI will most probably first appear in France. Even though the basic income is only one component of the project (they call it autonomy income), it will enable us to know more about the option of a basic income in the form of a local currency.

This is a long-term project yet, as it is planned on a 10 years basis and is only in its first years. So we will have to wait before we get to see the first results of this project!