

Basic income evolutions in France

Basic income has been steadily gaining ground all over the world, especially in the past year. This is also what happened in France, and it is clear that the Finnish and Dutch experiments to come as well as the Swiss referendum have played a key role in this evolution.

While 3 years ago, very few people knew about this idea, there has been a real surge of interest since the end of 2015, especially in the political sphere as well as in the media.

In the French context as it is certainly the case in most countries, we have been able to highlight three major factors that are crucial to put basic income in the center of the public debate:

1. **Politics:** introducing and implanting basic income in the political sphere, so that politics take hold of the idea at the institutional level;
2. **Popular support:** popularizing the idea more widely among the French population, through a wider communication in the media but also through the organization of public debates at the local level, in order to gain a strong popular support;
3. **Pilot-projects:** pushing for the implementation of several experiments in the French territory.

These three elements are obviously closely linked as they influence each other: the more the media and the civil society will talk about basic income, the more politics will support this idea and dare to make political moves in favor of it. This is particularly true in the French current context, as the political campaigns for the elections of 2017 (presidential and general) have already started.

The first two elements are fundamental to make it possible to have basic income experiments in France, and we can say that we are in a very positive trend right now, as several important actions have been taken in favor of the idea.

Firstly, two major reports handed out to the government have given basic income a major importance:

- **January 2016: National Digital Council's report:** basically, this aimed at analyzing the coming digital evolutions and how to cope with unemployment related to them. In this report, written on the government's demand, basic income was thus presented as one of the 12 propositions that could help the French society adapt itself to the evolutions of work to come.

- **April 2016: Report on the welfare system reform:** lead by Socialist MP Christophe Sirugue and presented to the Prime Minister, this report supported several measures presented by the French Movement for a Basic Income (MFRB) when it was auditioned by the commission in charge of the report, especially those related to the scenario of a gradual instauration of a basic income, that could start with the automatic and individual payment of the minimum income scheme.

Following this report, Prime Minister Manuel Valls, announced that the government was opening the debate around the question of a “*universal income*” in order to be able to implement it by 2018, yet declaring in the same sentence that this same project would only target the poorest. He stated later on that by universal basic income he actually meant *universal* basic income, but we are still waiting for complementary information about this decision.

This declaration followed several others from the part of members of the government, such as former Minister of Economy, Emmanuel Macron, and Minister of Labour, Myriam El Khomri, just before she launched her very controversial Labour law that triggered upheavals all over France.

For that matter, it is interesting to highlight that this Labour law has led to the creation of a social movement called *#NuitDebout*, which is now compared with similar movements such as the *Indignados* or *Occupy Wall Street*. In the context of this specific social movement, basic income has been a central subject of debate during the gatherings in the Place de la République in Paris and elsewhere in France, and is actually still being debated as a common event has been organized for the international basic income week 2016.

At the Parliamentary level, three amendments have been presented to either the Budget Bill 2016, or to the Digital Bill, from both right and left-wing Members of Parliament: Frédéric Lefebvre, from the party Les Républicains, and Delphine Batho from the Socialist Party. The amendments asked for the launching of pilot-projects as well as feasibility studies, but were eventually rejected, even though several MPs admitted there was a need to look deeper into this idea. The Senate is also working on the subject, as a parliamentary working group of Senators has been constituted, which will present its conclusions in October 2016.

In this context, will thus France be the next European country to launch basic income experiments?

All this media coverage and political turmoil have clearly helped to convince many people of the interest of having basic income experiments, in order to spread the idea, and to assess its actual feasibility.

In France, several projects are emerging right now, or being discussed.

The most advanced one is the pilot in the New Aquitaine region (South-Western France), that has been under preparation since July 2015, when the Aquitaine Regional Council voted unanimously in favor of such experiment; a project led by Martine Alcorta, Vice-President of the Regional Council and member of the Green Party.

Additionally, within the framework of an alliance for the second round of the regional elections last December 2015 between the Socialist Party and the Green Party, the Socialist Party eventually accepted to introduce this project in their common program.

The frame and conditions of the pilot are now being debated within a dedicated working group. This task will involve members of the civil society, politicians from most political parties, researchers and journalists. In total, three meetings have been planned to define the framework of the pilot:

- The first will focus on the **interest of basic income** (arguments in favor, philosophical reasons, etc.).
- The second will focus on its **financial framework** (how to fund the project, on what basis, for which amount),
- And the last meeting will aim at defining the **exact conditions of the experiment**, in order to finalize the final framework of the pilot.

The results of this feasibility study are due to be presented in June 2017.

In parallel, several other projects are also under preparation or discussion.

There is a small project called Tera, led by Frédéric Bosqué (also a member of the MFRB), which is an eco-village project, also located in the South of France that will include a basic income component aimed at being distributed in the form of a local currency. The interest of this project is that it is due to last at least 10 years, so the results will enable us to have a better vision on how basic income can have an impact on a longer-term basis.

Other pilots are being debated as well in the north or the west of France, and even in the island of La Réunion. What is interesting is the fact that several projects could possibly be launched almost simultaneously, so it could be very interesting to test several different schemes. For instance a partial basic income experiment based on the automatization of the minimum income scheme, or a basic income that would be

combined with a local currency and free services such as transportation or access to culture. These are only a few examples that are being discussed right now between members of the MFRB and decision-makers.

At the national level, the MFRB has also launched a working-group with all actors related to the pilots in different fields (political, civil society, research) in order to ease the communication among them and maybe reach a national coordination to encourage further experiments.

Similarly, at the European level, the European network UBIE is also planning to promote pilot-projects in several European countries, which could be funded by European institutions. These pilots could also have different schemes in order to have a wider range of results.

There is for instance the project of an agrarian basic income, based on the fact that the Common Agriculture policy has failed in sustaining a localized and sustainable agriculture in Europe.

There is therefore an important turmoil around basic income in France, and this will definitely have an impact for the elections of 2017, that could eventually lead to the implementation of several experiments all over the country in a near future. It's an encouraging trend that we are following closely, and we are very hopeful that it will be a real success.