



“Basic Income: A 21st Century Economic Right”, Guy Standing

“Every person, regardless of age, sex, marital status or work status, should have the right to a basic income, adequate to enable him or her to cover basic needs.”

This principle should be regarded as the most fundamental of the *economic rights* to be attained during the 21st century. It would give reality to the views espoused by a long line of great thinkers of the world, including Thomas Paine, Bertrand Russell, the Nobel Prize-winning economist James Meade and many others. A basic income as a right of citizenship would help counter the systemic insecurities that are pervasive in the open economies of the era of globalisation.

Basic Income - defined as income paid by the state, as a right of citizenship, to each member of society, whether he or she wants a paid job or not and independently of other possible sources of income – would constitute an instrument capable of guaranteeing a right of material existence for the whole population.

A basic income is essential to give meaning to *real freedom*. It would help promote what Isaiah Berlin called *positive liberty* and *negative liberty*, in that it would strengthen an individual's capacity to escape from oppressive and exploitative relationships and help enable people to make choices about their lifestyle and time allocation without being forced to do so.

A basic income would give real meaning to the idea of *citizenship*. Being a right of everybody in society, it would be a means of enhancing *social solidarity*. Real freedom is essential for citizenship, and this can only come from having a right to economic resources.





A basic income would give real meaning to the promotion of *human dignity*. A person who has the assurance that his or her daily needs for food and shelter are met will not feel fearful of becoming dependent on others for bare survival.

A basic income is also a matter of *societal justice*. The wealth of a nation, of any society, is largely the result of the endeavours of past generations, not just the individual efforts of the current generation. Sharing the 'capital' or wealth is a matter of justice, and a means of strengthening every person's sense of social responsibility.

A basic income is preferable to *workfare*, which has been strengthened by so-called *active labour market policy* in many EU countries. Workfare makes benefits conditional on the performance of labour. The popular argument that everyone has rights only if they meet certain responsibilities has been used to argue that a person should only have entitlement to a minimum income from the state if he or she 'works'. But the idea of *reciprocity* is unfair, since it is not applied to all groups in society. The rich who inherit their wealth do not have to labour to retain their income security. Workfare is also paternalistic, telling people what they should do and assuming that they need to be socially integrated. It compromises real freedom. It is also based on a false premise, which is that the performance of labour is the ultimate value, neglecting the many forms of work that go financially and socially unrewarded. A universal basic income would help legitimise those forms of work, such as care and voluntary community work.

