

# A socio-cultural revolution

## The case for basic income

- Basic income makes little sense to neoliberal thinkers, though solid arguments exist for providing all citizens with a regular, unconditional sum of money.
- Economist Dr Jan HM Stroeken is one of the advocates of basic income.
- He challenges the narrow neoliberal definition of work and explains the economic feasibility of basic income.
- He points out that it encourages active citizenship, where citizens bring something in return for getting something. An active citizen takes the initiative, gets involved, and is also politically active.
- The outcome is a necessary socio-cultural revolution.



Few phrases ruffle neoliberal feathers more than 'basic income'. This simple yet revolutionary idea – providing all citizens with a regular, unconditional sum of money – challenges the core tenets of neoliberalism, which prioritises free markets, individual responsibility, and minimal state intervention. Neoliberals would argue that basic income is a naive utopian dream that devalues hard work, stifles economic innovation, and expands government bureaucracy. And yet, there are solid arguments for why such a revolutionary redistribution of income is needed.

Among the academic advocates of basic income is economist Dr Jan HM Stroeken. His work delves into the potential of basic income to address systemic inequalities and promote a broader understanding of work, wealth distribution, and social security. His arguments are set against a backdrop of growing economic disparity and social unrest, exacerbated by Western-championed neoliberal policies that have, for decades, prioritised market efficiency over social equity. Stroeken suggests that basic income could serve as a powerful tool to reconfigure our socio-economic systems, fostering a more inclusive and just society. Our current level of prosperity, as initially reflected in people's primary income, is the result of many years of productivity growth to which many generations have contributed.

### Challenging the narrow definition of work

The core of neoliberal opposition to basic income lies in the belief that it undermines the work ethic by providing people with money without

requiring them to work. Neoliberalism is built on the notion that individuals should be responsible for their economic wellbeing, with work as a crucial component of personal identity and societal contribution. From this perspective, basic income is seen as a disincentive to work, potentially leading to a less productive and more dependent population.

However, this critique often overlooks the reality of the current economic system, where many forms of valuable work – such as caregiving, volunteering, and creative pursuits – are undervalued or uncompensated. Stroeken argues that basic income challenges the narrow neoliberal definition of work by recognising and rewarding these contributions. This broader definition of work recognises the value of all contributions to society. It challenges the traditional notion that only paid employment is valuable, promoting a more inclusive understanding of productivity and meritocracy. Furthermore, with the financial security provided by basic income, individuals can engage more fully in civic activities, volunteer work, and other forms of community involvement. The outcome is active citizenship, where citizens bring something in return for getting something. An active citizen takes the initiative, gets involved, and is also politically active.

Moreover, the concern that basic income would discourage work assumes that people are primarily motivated by financial necessity.



While this may be true for some, it is overly simplistic to assume that removing the compulsion to work for survival would result in widespread idleness. Studies and pilot projects have shown that basic income can provide the financial stability needed for individuals to pursue more fulfilling and creative careers, start businesses, or engage in community activities – all of which contribute to society's overall wellbeing.

### Economic feasibility of basic income

Stroeken addresses the economic feasibility of basic income as a significant point of contention among its critics. Neoliberal policies typically advocate for reduced government spending and lower taxes, arguing that these measures stimulate economic growth by increasing private sector investment and consumption. However, this approach encourages income inequality when the benefits of growth are disproportionately enjoyed by the wealthy.



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In contrast, says Stroeken, basic income can be funded through progressive taxation and reallocating existing social welfare budgets, simplifying the often bureaucratic and stigmatising welfare systems. By providing a universal safety net, basic income could reduce poverty and inequality, leading to a more stable and cohesive society. Furthermore, money in the hands of consumers stimulates demand for goods and services, thereby supporting economic growth.

Implementing basic income also challenges the neoliberal emphasis on individualism and self-reliance. Neoliberalism often frames poverty as a result of personal failure rather than structural inequality, promoting the idea that success is solely a matter of individual effort. Basic income, however, acknowledges that systemic factors such as automation, globalisation, and economic recessions can limit individual opportunities and exacerbate inequality. Basic income promotes a sense of collective responsibility and social solidarity by providing a financial foundation for all, recognising that everyone deserves a basic standard of living.

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### The necessary socio-cultural revolution

Stroeken's work goes beyond economic arguments to explore basic income's cultural and social dimensions. He suggests that basic income could foster a socio-cultural revolution by shifting societal values from materialism and competition to sustainability and cooperation. In a world facing ecological crises, economic instability, and social fragmentation, basic income offers a way to rethink priorities and build societies that value wellbeing over wealth accumulation.

This socio-cultural revolution, as Stroeken envisions, is not merely about redistributing wealth but also about redistributing opportunity and dignity. By ensuring everyone has the resources to meet their basic needs, basic income empowers individuals to make choices that align with their values and aspirations rather than being driven solely by economic necessity. This could lead to a more innovative and dynamic society where people are free to pursue education, artistic endeavours, and entrepreneurial ventures without the constant pressure of financial insecurity.

### Active citizenship

Stroeken refers to the concept 'active citizenship', where citizens take the initiative, get involved and are also politically active. The first steps are observable. Active citizenship through the now many local citizens' initiatives is proof of this. Care cooperatives, food cooperatives and energy cooperatives are also examples. Direct involvement can remove a lot of mistrust in society and even may have a positive effect on health and wellbeing.

Basic income fundamentally challenges the neoliberal worldview, prioritising market forces and individual responsibility. While critics argue that basic income could discourage work and be economically unsustainable, proponents like Stroeken offer a different vision – one where basic income serves as a foundation for a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable society. As we grapple with the challenges of the 21st century, from automation to climate change, the need for a new socio-economic model becomes increasingly apparent. Basic income, with its potential to promote social justice and economic stability, could be a vital component of this new model, fostering a society where every individual's contribution is valued, and every person's dignity is upheld.

## Personal response

### Which countries are case studies for the successful rollout of basic income?

Perhaps the biggest limitation we have in studying the effects of a universal basic income (UBI) is that it has not been fully implemented anywhere, only partially in many experiments and simulations, and measures that have some similarity to UBI. The objective of this partial research is often to determine if the implementation of a UBI would lead to a significant reduction in the working age population labour supply. The results of the many experiments in developed as well as undeveloped countries are quite clear. There is no evidence of a significant reduction in labour supply. Instead, there is evidence that labour supply increases globally among adults, men and women, young and old, and the existence of some insignificant and functional reductions to the system such as a decrease in workers from the following categories: children, the elderly, the sick, those with disabilities, women with young children to look after, or young people who continued studying. These reductions do not reduce the overall supply since it is largely offset by increased supply from other members of the community. Entrepreneurship significantly increases.

### Where has its implementation failed, and what valuable lessons can be learned?

The problem of all existing experiments is that they don't fit the definition of a basic income being a modest amount paid regularly to all usual residents, paid individually, without means-tests or behavioural conditions, regardless of income, gender, marital status or work status. It would be an equal amount paid to each adult and be non-withdrawable. In the practice of the experiments, there are often means-tested benefits, participants as volunteers, payments per household, oversampling of individuals from minority groups, etc. Most of the projects provide cash to people here and there, spread across a large geographic area. Local projects where everyone in an area gets money are scarce but indispensable. When basic income is provided to people here and there, local economies aren't stimulated by the spending of the money and new jobs aren't created by employers needing to hire more employees to meet higher demand.

### What are the primary challenges other governments present as arguments against basic income?

Besides the topic of readiness to work opponents of basic income put also the topic of financing. It is generally assumed that the largest part is financed by the complete or partial elimination of benefits. Another part will come from income or other taxes. Very recent studies in various countries (Canada, Switzerland, Australia, the US, Portugal and UK) even show that basic income is affordable

without raising taxes. They assessed the complex array of revenue sources that can make universal basic income feasible, from the underestimated value of public program redundancies to new and so far, unaccounted publicly owned assets.

### What event or events – social, political, economic or other – could overturn such inertia and galvanise large-scale action?

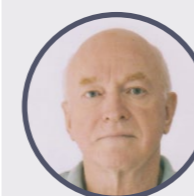
Inertia is certainly there, especially in politics. On the other side, interest in basic income is growing rapidly. In many countries the majority of the population is in favour. For the near future it is important that governments stimulate to continue with the experiments, mainly on a local level. It will deliver more detailed information, but most of all it will help the international discussion about basic income. More publicity and more information are necessary to eliminate prejudices about the lack of readiness to work and the impossibility of payment. It will make people aware that negative consequences of the current neoliberal capitalist system are increasingly coming to the fore. Problems such as increasing income inequality, insufficient means tested social security, growing bureaucracy, lack of (starting) opportunities in society all have their own specific partial solutions. The alternative of introducing a basic income offers an overarching solution to many socio-economic sub-problems. At the same time, a basic income is an important pillar for a socio-cultural revolution. It creates, among other things, the peace and security necessary for three important elements of a revolution which leads to a fundamentally way of different thinking, acting and organising:

- **Austerity:** Basic income ensures that dependence on growth-oriented labour is reduced and space can be created for alternative economic activities that contribute to social and environmental resilience.
- **Active citizenship:** Basic income offers financial security which allows citizens to take more risks and new activities while diminishing many indirect and bureaucratic tasks in society.
- **Solidarity:** Basic income creates income security for everyone, more income equality, a broader view of work, more education possibilities and greater social equality.

### Given the seismic global political shifts of the past couple of years, do you see the socio-cultural revolution basic income will help bring closer or further away, and why?

The global political shifts of the past couple of years won't hinder the introduction of basic income. It will not be implemented globally all at once. It will start at a local level when, eg, not only individuals from minority groups but all citizens are involved.

## Details



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### Bio

Dr Jan HM Stroeken is an economist. He obtained his gymnasium degree at Venlo, Limburg, The Netherlands.

Stroeken completed a MSc in Econometrics and a PhD at Tilburg University. He worked at Radboud University Nijmegen in work, income, and social security, at Eindhoven University of Technology in innovation and technology policy, and at Research Institute TNO. Stroeken is currently based

in Argentina, at Universidad De Concepción Del Uruguay.

### Further reading

Stroeken, JHM, (2024) [The introduction of basic income is a pillar of a socio-cultural revolution](#), *Basic Income Studies*, 19(1), 1–14.

