

## **Interview with Leire Rincón, former president of the Unconditional Basic Income Europe (UBIE) network**

### **1.- On a global and European level, what is the evolution of inequality and its consequences?**

As the most recent data tell us, as [Oxfam's latest report](#) shows, inequality is on the rise, especially after Covid. This latest health crisis was not the only cause, inequality was already on the rise before it, but the Covid crisis has been the trigger to exacerbate the trends we were already seeing. Current levels of inequality are unprecedented, and the patterns of income and wealth distribution are surreal: according to this Oxfam report, the wealth Jeff Bezos generated during the pandemic could cover the cost of vaccinating the entire population. This is profoundly at odds with the democratic and human rights values we are supposed to be moving towards as a species.

The consequences of this inequality are many and profound. From the violation of human rights, to poverty, to the consequences at the political level: it has been shown that economic inequality translates into significant inequalities at the political level, which generates a vicious circle, and is a major obstacle to implementing public policies aimed at reducing and eradicating inequality.

There are still many myths surrounding which policies might be more or less effective in reducing these inequalities, and the consequences of these policies. A not so far-fetched belief among many political forces is that wealth taxes are harmful to economic growth (something that has been disproved, and with empirical evidence, as in the latest book by Banjeree and Duflo). We know that inequality is harmful to economic growth, and that such taxes need not have negative consequences for economic growth (without entering into the debate on whether more economic growth is desirable or not). Even so, despite the widespread rejection of inequality, little progress has been made in terms of demand and implementation of public policies aimed at reducing it.

### **2.- What are you doing at UBIE and what are you asking to be done?**

For professional and personal reasons, I have not been able to dedicate as much time to UBIE as I would like for some time, so right now I am quite disconnected from its activity (although you can find all the information [here](#)). Even so, what we have always done from UBIE are activities of pedagogy, dissemination and activism in various formats, all with the aim of raising awareness of the proposal for universal basic income, promoting its debate and dissemination.

It is a diverse network, both geographically and in terms of activities, and therefore there is a wide range of projects within the field of universal basic income that have had a place in this organisation. To mention a few projects, UBIE has collected signatures for the [European Citizens' Initiative in 2014](#) and also [last year](#); we have organised several conferences and workshops (some examples are the conference in [Ljubljana](#) and [Barcelona](#)), we have organised the

participation and attendance of a group of young people in the bi-annual [European Youth Event](#) of the European Parliament. We participated in [2018](#) and [2021](#).

Each of these activities, while sharing the same general purpose, had a different specific objective. For example, the signature campaign aims to generate a public debate at street level through all the concrete activities carried out for the collection of signatures. In addition, it also aims to bring this issue to the European Parliament. The conferences and workshops we organise are intended to generate networks between different activists, to share knowledge and to refine the strategies we can carry out. I would like to take this opportunity to say that if anyone wants to participate in any way, and from any perspective (from research to artistic), UBIE is an open organisation and always welcomes anyone who wants to contribute. You can write to us at the following e-mail address: [contact@ubie.org](mailto:contact@ubie.org) .

### **3.- What is UBIE's assessment of the Popular Legislative Initiative for an Unconditional Basic Income (UBI) in the Basque Country - <https://rentabasica.eus/es/> -?**

I cannot speak on behalf of UBIE, but personally I value it very positively. In recent years we have witnessed a boom in experiments on the idea of universal basic income, with very important limitations in terms of generating scientific knowledge, but also public debate. By this I mean that one of the main tools at the political level for the debate and knowledge of basic income has been experiments which, for a number of reasons, have a limited impact both at the level of generating knowledge about the potential effects of a UBI and at the level of promoting a quality public debate. Therefore, the use of other tools to encourage discussion and awareness of the UBI proposal seems to me to be excellent. Moreover, this Popular Legislative Initiative has not only allowed a debate on the street, so that citizens are aware of the proposal (through the collection of signatures), but it has also promoted a debate at the political level which has made the political parties take a stand on the issue. This is not only useful for citizens to know what the position is for each of them, but also has the added value that the parties are in the situation of having to interact with the idea of the UBI, take it into consideration, study it and elaborate a (more or less informed) opinion on it. I would therefore like to end by congratulating the people behind this initiative for their efforts and dedication.