

Interview with Ángel Elías, Senior Lecturer at the UPV/EHU

1. You are one of the promoters of the Popular Legislative Initiative for an Unconditional Basic Income in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, what is its scope and what is the relationship with the ToShare Observatory?

For several years now, the Unconditional Basic Income (UBI) has been put forward as an alternative economic proposal, capable of combating poverty and guaranteeing the universal right to decent living conditions, being particularly noteworthy the resolution of 23 January 2018 of the Assembly of the Council of Europe, where the 47 European States are asked to promote actions that allow us to know the consequences that the implementation of an IBI would have. However, it has been in this last period of the COVID-19 pandemic that social interest in this measure has increased exponentially, having highlighted the need for a guaranteed income regardless of macroeconomic instability or turbulence, as proposed by the UN, Pope Francis in his latest book *Dreaming Together. The way for a better future* or, among us, 35 prestigious Basque researchers in the *COVID-19 White Paper* and 764 researchers and lecturers from the academic, university and research centres of the Basque Country, joined by another 3213 people and 191 Basque organisations in the *Manifesto for an Ecological Economy in the Basque Country Post Covid19*. A European Citizens' Initiative is also underway to collect signatures for the implementation of an UBI in the member countries of the European Union.

With this Popular Legislative Initiative (PLI) we are demanding in the Basque Country an individual, universal and unconditional IBI as an individual benefit in an amount higher than the poverty threshold, which means that all people who have been living in the Basque Country for 3 months and have reached the age of 18 will receive 900 euros per month, while those aged 14 or over will receive 450 euros per month and those under that age 270 euros per month. This will be a great tool in the generation of opportunities for the development of people's life projects, as well as in the fulfilment of many human rights that are currently violated and in the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This legislative initiative to implement an UBI is very close to the people and entities that participate in the ToShare Observatory. Let us remember that in the last two years we have organised workshops on

UBI, which have allowed us to get to know and deepen our understanding of this important instrument. Also, in the "Interesting documents" tab of the Observatory's website, there are many publications related to this topic.

2. What are the immediate steps of this PLI?

The first and foremost step is to collect the 10,000 signatures needed before 7 January 2022. I think it is essential to get as many as possible, because this will give much more strength to this PLI at the time of defending it before the Basque Parliament, which would be the next step, after which it will be the parliamentary groups who will decide whether to support it and pass the corresponding law. Therefore, the priority now is to publicise and disseminate this PLI, which is why I invite you to go to the website www.rentabasica.eus and support it. To do so, all you have to do is click here on sign and fill in your personal details.

3. What would you highlight about this PLI?

First of all, it is the expression of a social demand at a time of uncertainty and difficulty, reflecting the commitment of many people and social agents. I would also like to stress that UBI requires profound cultural changes, one of which is to understand it precisely as an investment and not as an expense. When we invest in health or education, nobody questions the "expenditure" made (even less so when the pandemic has taught us the importance of these investments) and yet, when we talk about UBI, the first question that is asked is "and how much would that cost?". It is time to change the question and talk about investment. This investment would affect many facets of our lives, but if we focus on the economic side, UBI involves not an expense that evaporates, but a part of the wealth that is distributed and, in this way, enhances the role of each citizen and the community itself.

On the other hand, this PLI is key to advancing the SDGs, as it is an instrument that materially enables ending poverty (1st SDG), ending hunger (2nd SDG), generating health and well-being (3rd SDG), making time available for quality education (4th SDG), advancing gender equality (5th SDG), accessing affordable and clean energy (7th SDG), empowering people to obtain decent work and contributing to economic growth (8th SDG), sharing wealth and achieving reductions

in inequalities (10th SDG), promoting sustainable cities and communities (11th SDG), aligning with responsible production and consumption (12th SDG), joining an environmentally friendly lifestyle (13th SDG), creating material conditions for peace, justice and strong institutions (16th SDG), and building networks and partnerships to achieve this (17th SDG).

4. You are also the coordinator of the *Gaztebi* research project. What is this project about?

The *GAZTEBI* "Gazte Basic Income" project is part of the 18/10 Strategic Project of the University of the Basque Country/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (UPV/EHU) and is being researched by a multidisciplinary team of the UPV/EHU itself.

The main objective of the project is to analyse how the implementation of an UBI could affect UPV/EHU students from an economic, social, psychological, relational, etc. point of view. To do this, we want to know the views of UPV/EHU students about their current needs and future prospects, as well as their opinions about what an UBI could bring them and how they would face their life project if they had this tool.

The objectives will try to be answered through a theoretical and a practical part. In the theoretical part, we are carrying out a broad analysis of current Basque youth. In the practical part, we will examine, both through a quantitative survey and in-depth workshops, whether an UBI can provide young people with sufficient financial security so that, with a fixed monthly income that guarantees their basic needs, they can advance in their personal development freely, without depending on a salary from an employed job. We will also try to analyse how Basque youth believe that an UBI could help them to face the challenges we face as a society in the 21st century. To this end, we will study whether young people understand that UBI is correctly aligned with the objectives aimed at tackling, among others, the ecological crisis, the care crisis or the reduction of major inequalities.

5. Do you count on the collaboration of public bodies and organisations representing Basque society?

In this research, this collaboration is fundamental and, for this reason, several meetings have already been held with the director and technical staff of the 4 Employment Centres of the UPV/EHU, with the Novia Salcedo Foundation, with the Confederation of Cooperatives Konfekoop, with the LAB and UGT trade unions (we are awaiting meetings with ELA and CCOO), with the Basque employers' association Confebask, with the Bolunta volunteer agency, with the third sector network Sareen Sarea, with the Basque Youth Council, as well as with the Youth Directorate of the Basque Government. This is allowing us to observe what support can be offered from the public sphere for a use of time more in line with the needs of young people, what consequences the implementation of an UBI can have on the various aspects of employment (working conditions, reduction of working hours, increase in productivity and quality of service...) and to enrich the survey that we have proposed. But, undoubtedly, the most important thing is the participation of young people, for which the support we have been receiving from the UPV/EHU centres has been very important.

Finally, I believe that this *Gaztebi* project comes at an appropriate time, when the social interest in an UBI is on the rise and its viability and desirability is being debated assiduously in both academic and political spheres, as well as in those of social activism. Hence, the project has a strategic nature, in accordance with the mission and vision of the UPV/EHU, fully aligned with the progress in achieving the UN SDGs, which will allow the UPV/EHU's students to express their opinion and play a leading role.