

Interview with Rosario Goñi, Delegate of Economists Without Borders Euskadi

1.- Globally and also locally, in the Basque Country, what is the evolution of inequality and its consequences?

The evolution of inequality is increasing, that is a reality that cannot be refuted. All indicators show it, both globally and locally.

At the global level, if we consider the Human Development Index (HDI) published by the United Nations, which takes into account not only per capita income but also health, education, environmental and social factors, and which has been showing positive data up to now, it offers some worrying data. For the first time in recent years, it is possible that the population below the poverty line will increase as a result of Covid-19. Since 1991, when the calculation of this Index began, it is the first time that the global average HDI has decreased. On the other hand, it is unpredictable how the war in Ukraine will affect this. With the disaster of this war conflict we cannot quantify how it will affect inequality, but it will undoubtedly do so in a remarkable way. Displaced persons number in the hundreds, mostly children, women and the elderly, all of them very vulnerable people who suffer most cruelly from economic violence.

On a global level, the effects of uncertainty, insecurity and distrust are unpredictable in a Europe shaken by a war on its own soil, but as in the case of the consequences of Covid-19, while the effects on vulnerable people are severe, the richest people continue to get richer, including companies that have made extraordinary profits, such as the pharmaceutical companies and, foreseeably, in the near future the arms companies.

The different crises we are suffering are superimposed one on top of the other. The environmental crisis, Covid-19 and the monopoly of vaccines, war and its economic derivative. The most vulnerable suffer from this global crisis that has so many edges that few people emerge unscathed.

At a more local level in Spain, with data from the advance of the XI report: *The State of Poverty in Spain 2021*, we can see a serious increase in Severe Material Deprivation from 4.7% to 7% in one year, which indicates that in Spain there are 3.3 million people who suffer from this severe deprivation in their daily lives. Another worrying fact is that the percentage of people who find it very difficult to make ends meet has increased from 7.8% to 10% of the population, which means that 4.7 million people are living with difficulties. Other indicators such as the AROPE rate is also bad, going from 25.3% to 26.4%, as is the risk of poverty, which increases by three tenths of a percentage point, reaching 21% of the Spanish population. All this taking into account that in this crisis important measures have been implemented such as the Minimum Vital Income, the increase of the minimum wage and other social measures such as the suspension of evictions, the guarantee of supplies or the ERTes.

The Basque Country is no stranger to this global situation. Although the AROPE rate, for example, improves with respect to 2019 but without reaching the data of 2018, however, in terms of the risk of poverty that had been decreasing since 2015 increased in 2019 and is maintained in 2020, and highlights the data of the increase by one and a half points the severe material deprivation between 2019 and 2020.

I also find it interesting, looking at the Eustat data, that although people with severe material deprivation have been decreasing, people at risk of poverty after social transfers have been increasing since 2016. We are moving away from the targets with the Agenda 2030 indicators in terms of the proportion of people living below 50% of median income considering both the national and autonomous median.

It is clear that what is being done is on the right track, but it is not enough. There is no doubt that more work needs to be done.

2.- From Economists Without Borders, what are you doing and what do you ask to be done?

At EwF we focus our actions on Goal 10 of the SDGs, concentrating on the reduction of inequalities. We do this by contributing to the theoretical dissemination and implementation of other ways of doing and understanding the economy, promoting and supporting social responsibility and ethics of the different economic actors, promoting social and solidarity economy and generating a global, critical and committed citizenship.

Specifically, we work with young people, vocational training and university teachers, economic professionals and citizens interested in contributing to a fairer economy, from a collaborative relationship open to their proposals and concerns to promote an awareness of global citizenship. To this end, we organize activities such as conferences, lectures, training courses, tutoring of end-of-degree and master works, research, quarterly preparation of a monographic dossier or film forums, among others.

We also promote economic empowerment processes, especially for women and migrants, through counseling, training and personalized support for social entrepreneurship.

The work of political advocacy and citizen mobilization is done mainly through our active participation in various networks. Currently, these efforts are channeled through the Basque Network of Education in Ethical and Alternative Finance (Finantzaz Haratago) where we are one of the driving organizations; Saretuz, Network for Conscious and Transformative Consumption of Donostia, where we assume the presidency; the UKS Platform (Unibertsitate Kritikoa Sarea) whose objective is to involve the university community in a policy committed to social justice and sustainability; the Sustainable Economy Community of the Basque Association of Economists or the economic and energy transition plan promoted by the Basque Government within the framework of the Agenda 2030 strategy, among others.

Our team of volunteers in EUSKADI carries out a great work of support, coordination and internal reflection, in addition to the participation in many other networks and spaces in which we express our demands.

- Working groups of the NGDO Coordinating Committee of the Basque Country: Education for Social Transformation, Policy Coherence, Budgets, Political Advocacy and SDGs.
- Municipal Cooperation Councils
- Platform for Tax Justice in the Basque Country.
- Organization of Sustainable Coffees, with colloquiums between entities.
- Writing articles for various media.

For more information, we have a monthly [bulletin](#) in which we send relevant information for the Basque Country.

3.- How do you value from Economists without Borders the Popular Legislative Initiative for an Unconditional Basic Income in Euskadi -<https://rentabasica.eus/es/>?

From Economists without Borders, we value very positively the Popular Legislative Initiative. An Unconditional Basic Income seems to us to be a very solid tool to fight against poverty and inequality. It is an instrument that has a direct impact on the redistribution of wealth. Although in Euskadi we have a guaranteed income that is envied in other autonomous regions of Spain, it does not achieve its objectives and many problems have been detected and brought to the attention of those involved in its management. That is why it seems to us that it is necessary to take the step towards an UBI, we believe that it is a more effective instrument to eradicate poverty than the conditional income.

If we want to bet on a social protection system that encourages a cohesive, inclusive society and provides resources to live with dignity to all citizens, we must make a total transformation of the system we currently have with the UBI. It would require a very deep reform that is not being considered at the moment. The big problem is that there is no intention of reflecting on the individualization of benefits. There is talk of households and not of individuals.

Simplifying the procedures for access and the extension to groups that at the moment are not effectively receiving the guaranteed income or the Minimum Vital Income are problems that have no signs of being solved. The establishment of an UBI could be the key to providing a response to all the problems that have been identified and that neither the guaranteed income or the Minimum Vital Income have been able to solve.

We also take a positive view of the foreseeable changes that would occur in the labor market with the implementation of a UBI. Greater bargaining power for salaried workers will bring more democracy to the labor market, which is in such great need of it. We believe that it will facilitate entrepreneurship and training, and will make it possible to reconcile work and improve the distribution of work, both productive and reproductive, as well as care work.

Its effect on women's lives also seems to us to have more lights than shadows. As it is an individual income, it decisively empowers women within the household, enables their access to education and thus to the labor market.

Despite the difficulties of its implementation, we consider that it offers many more advantages than possible negative side effects. Whether it is implemented or not is a matter of political will.

The position of Economists without Borders Euskadi on the RBU can be downloaded [here](#)