

Interview with Isa Alvarez, from Gentes de Baladre Euskal Herria.

1.- On a global and local level, in the Basque Country, what is the evolution of inequality and its consequences?

What we see is that the evolution is clearly for the worse at all levels. These two years of the pandemic have aggravated some situations and have also made many cases of poverty visible that were not so visible before. The initial confinements made the hunger queues longer and the demand for aid of all kinds multiplied. Unlike in other crises, when some people stopped paying some bills, the fact of having to be confined meant that housing was a priority and the part that could be spent on food was greatly reduced, forcing many people to turn to places such as food banks and/or soup kitchens.

In addition, people living on the streets have been subjected to increasing violence. At the beginning of the pandemic, many were assaulted by the police for remaining on the streets and resources such as vaccines, masks and others have been unavailable to them.

In the face of the crisis, far from easing both locally and globally, we have seen how the system seeks to reassert itself, which leads to increasing polarity and inequalities, as these are important parts of its DNA. In addition, the overflow of social services, already deficient in the past, has made them even more limited as a valid resource. All this leads to many people being in increasingly extreme situations that are becoming more and more difficult to address with the support of networks. This pandemic has once again left those who already inhabited very peripheral spaces out of all levels of access to resources and rights.

2.- From Baladre, what are you doing and what do you ask to be done?

The different groups that participate in Baladre, from our local realities in the CAE, develop actions of accompaniment and social denunciation of the people who suffer: those who are evicted, those who live on the street, migrants in transit, those who cannot access the RGI or those who suffer suspensions, cuts and unilateral extinction of RGI.

Our main focus is on municipal social services as they are the gateway to rights for those who lack the resources to sustain life. Without losing sight of the abuses of Lanbide, but committing the social services to avoid situations of total lack of material means. In addition, we coordinate with social, trade union and third sector entities to avoid pressure and referrals from social services to private entities, so that they take charge of covering material needs that should be the responsibility of public services. One of our main demands in this regard is that Social Emergency Aid should be developed as a subjective right, as is the RGI, and that the supplementary housing benefit should be separated from the RGI, because many people and families are left out of the right, either because they do not meet the requirements or because of a lack of budget.

On the other hand, the social gap would surely be reduced if, as in the case of health services, the primary care of social services were to develop community care, pointing out collective problems such as unaffordable rents, supplies, job insecurity and lack of decent and quality jobs, poor nutrition, etc., instead of blaming people for their personal situations

when they are the result of social problems. In any case, we continue to work on the construction and demand for resources such as the Basic Income for Equal Opportunities.

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

We believe that it is not up to us to evaluate this initiative in which we are not actively involved. We can only hope that it does not collapse like the previous ILP and that it does not generate confusion between what is a Basic Income and what is not.

We think it is a pity that no energy has been put into avoiding the cut in rights that the reform of the RGI will entail, in terms of what it could mean for those who receive it and those who are going to leave the system because they do not meet the requirements that will be demanded of us with the reform.

We are committed to a horizon of implementation of the first phase of the Basic Income of Equals (BIE) that implies a questioning of capitalist accumulation and the guaranteeing role of institutions towards private property, labour exploitation and the feminisation of poverty, in order to put the emphasis on the CommunityBIE Fund. We understand it as a fundamental tool to guarantee fundamental and social rights in the face of the defencelessness of the most impoverished people, bearing in mind that the focus is on the accumulation of wealth, as this is the only way to put an end to impoverishment. And from an ecofeminist perspective, we must bear this in mind now, because the limits of the planet and the unsustainable situation of women are making it clear that the emergency cannot wait.