

Universal basic income is becoming an urgent necessity

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

1 Warmer

- Write five words that you would expect to read in an article about universal basic income.
- Scan the article to see how many of your words appear.

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then, find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

feasible
unconditional

fundamental
recipients

justifications
stress

pilots
surge

randomly
withdrawn

- a sudden increase in something _____ (para 1)
- projects that test an idea in one place or with only a few people to find out if it will be successful or popular _____ (para 2)
- emphasize _____ (para 3)
- relating to the basic nature or character of something _____ (para 3)
- reasons why something is correct and morally right _____ (para 3)
- people who receive something _____ (para 4)
- possible or likely to succeed _____ (para 5)
- chosen without any particular method or pattern _____ (para 6)
- If something is _____, you receive it without limits and a certain situation does not need to exist before you receive it. (para 6)
- taken away _____ (para 7)

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12 January, 2017

- 1 There has recently been a surge of interest in basic income. The idea is that a monthly income should be paid, unconditionally, to either every resident citizen or legal resident. Legal migrants would perhaps have to wait before receiving the income. It has, for a long time, been criticized as unaffordable and creating laziness but basic income is now attracting support from many places.
- 2 This interest has led to several basic income pilots around the world. One started on 1 January, 2017 in Finland and others are planned in Ontario, Canada, Oakland, California, Aquitaine, France and Catalonia, Spain. There are also discussions in Fife and Glasgow, Scotland. A US NGO, GiveDirectly, is raising \$30m for a 12-year experiment in Kenya.
- 3 It is important to stress that pilots can only test certain behavioural aspects of paying a basic income and seeing what people do differently. People in favour of a basic income say there are even more fundamental justifications – social justice, freedom and economic security. None of these can be tested by pilots, which are short term and involve small numbers of people.
- 4 Most pilots do not fully test a universal basic income system, in which everyone in a community receives it. And if, in the pilots, only a few people are given a basic income, recipients may soon be under pressure from relatives and neighbours to share it.
- 5 For these reasons, some see pilots simply as a way of avoiding other important decisions. But once we start to see some results, they may show that basic income is both feasible and does not have the negative behavioural effects people often think it has.
- 6 At the moment, Finland's pilot is receiving global attention. Two thousand randomly selected unemployed people aged between 25 and 58 have started to receive €560 as a tax-free monthly unconditional benefit, paid for two years. It will not be reduced if they earn income and they will not be made to search for jobs.
- 7 The reasoning behind the experiment is that the Finnish social security system, designed for an industrial society, doesn't work anymore. As in the UK, it is too complex and has created severe poverty. A basic income removes benefit conditions that say people must look for and take employment, and increases the incentive to take low-wage jobs because it is not withdrawn as income increases. So the pilot's designers ask the question: could a basic income simplify the social security system and increase employment?
- 8 A well-known experiment in the Canadian town of Dauphin in the 1970s showed that recipients of the basic income suffered less from ill health and mental stress.
- 9 And in an "accidental" basic income pilot in North Carolina, where a study of child development coincided with the decision of a Cherokee community to distribute casino profits to all tribal members, children in recipient families had fewer behavioural disorders, performed better in school and were less likely to commit crimes. The reasons for this were more economic security and better family relations, partly because parents spent less time arguing about money and more time with their children. Alcohol and drug abuse also fell.
- 10 In developing countries, experiments coming closest to a test of basic income have taken place in Namibia and, on a larger scale, in India. In the largest Indian pilot, about 6,000 people in eight villages received a small basic income for 18 months and their experience was compared with what happened in 12 similar villages where nobody received the basic income.
- 11 Four positive effects were observed. Firstly, there were benefits to welfare – better nutrition, health and schooling. Secondly, it supported equality because the basic income helped the disabled more than others and women more than men. Thirdly, there were positive economic effects: a basic income led to more work and reduced inequality. And lastly, there was a growth in self-employed work.
- 12 The Indian government is due to publish its annual economic report, which will include a chapter on the feasibility of introducing a basic income across India. The fact that a major country is even considering the introduction of a basic income shows that it is now taken seriously.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 12/01/17

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3 Find the information

Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Where has a universal basic income pilot already started?
2. Where is it planned?
3. Where is its introduction being discussed?
4. For which country is money being raised for a 12-year experiment?
5. Where has a pilot already taken place by accident?
6. In which developing countries have similar tests already happened?

4 Comprehension check

Look at the sentence beginnings below. Talk about what information you need to complete the sentences. Now, complete them using your own words.

1. Current social security systems aren't working because ...
2. A basic income removes benefit conditions that say, for example, that ...
3. A basic income would increase the incentive to take low-wage jobs because ...
4. In Finland, 2,000 randomly chosen unemployed people have started to ...
5. The pilots cannot really reflect the introduction of a universal basic income system because ...
6. Positive effects were seen in four areas in the pilot that took place in India. These were ...

5 For and against

1. What arguments are given in the article for and against the introduction of a universal basic income? Make notes in the table and add any further arguments that you can think of or questions you still have.

for	against

2. Use the information to answer the question from the article:

Could a basic income simplify the social security system and increase employment?

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6 Discussion

- In your country, do people without work have access to social security and/or other benefits?
- How much money can a single unemployed person receive?
- Can people who receive these benefits work part time or in temporary jobs at the same time?
- Do people who receive benefits have to search for jobs, go to regular appointments or follow any other rules?

7 Research and further reading

- Basic universal income also has other names. What are they?
- Can you find any current news or updated information on the pilots in the places mentioned in the article?