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# **UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME AS A TOOL OF EMPOWERMENT FOR MINORITIES**

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*Minority empowerment is a relatively new approach on research and policy-making in the field of minority studies. At its core lies the ideal to remove the marginalisation of minorities by providing room for them to take agency on their own behalf. One policy that has been identified as having the potential to rapidly affect marginalised communities is the implementation of a Universal Basic Income; a monthly amount paid equally to all residents of an area without any means-testing or conditions. This working paper explores how these two fields of research can connect and identifies the key areas of everyday life that could be affected. This includes focus on employment, education, relationships and family life, community work, and government intrusion and social stigma; core elements for any individual and society, including minority communities. The analysis section finds that UBI has the potential to alter all of these aspects, but only if it is used to increase the existing standard of welfare and government services and not as an opportunity to reduce government spending by cutting the vital existing programmes.*

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## **Introduction**

Minority empowerment is a relatively new approach in research and policy-making. It aims at breaking patterns and narratives of marginalisation<sup>1</sup> and disadvantage by providing perspectives of and avenues for minorities as active contributors to state and society. Typically, the relationship between minorities and the state is a hierarchical one, in which the state provides protection and social security and the minorities are meant to be passive recipients of these benefits (remarkable exceptions do of course exist)

(Malloy, 2014). However, this relationship often leads to a situation in which minorities and marginalised communities perceive themselves in this role and face difficulties taking agency through structural and psychological restraints, and in which social security systems do not meet the specific needs of such communities. This combination often increases marginalisation, rather than combatting or alleviating it.

Alongside this, the proposed policy of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) has been developed as a possible solution to the



difficulties with traditional welfare programmes. The popularity and coverage of proposed policies and trials of a UBI have rapidly intensified in the past few years, particularly in the wake of the global financial crisis. With political support in Europe moving from the fringes of parties into mainstream debate<sup>2</sup>, as well as a growing list of countries and provinces beginning trials<sup>3</sup>, such a policy needs to be scrutinised with a particular view to those it is supposed to benefit. This includes in the field of national minorities, where a policy such as UBI, with its radical potential to fundamentally change existing welfare arrangements as well as society more broadly, must be given consideration. To this end, existing UBI literature has explored / debated potential effects on a variety of different societal groups, including in contexts of feminism and racial justice<sup>4</sup>, as well as general effects on poverty and those most marginalised in society. However, specific focus on national minorities is missing from this debate. Moreover, UBI is often seen as a utopian policy, which whether achievable or not is often labelled as a tide to lift all boats, yet the possibilities for an alternative conservative vision of a UBI must be discussed for its potential to strip back welfare systems and erode previous progress.

This Working Paper therefore sets out to explore if UBI could be seen as a tool of minority empowerment by examining both theories for their potential meeting points and discussing them in the context of minority marginalisation. The first section discusses the ways and areas of life in which minorities tend to suffer from disadvantage and

marginalisation, followed by a short description of empowerment theory in relation to minorities. The third section introduces UBI theory along those areas of life in which UBI has the potential to impact the lives of individuals and groups, irrespective of their status in a given society. Finally, we will discuss how UBI can advance empowerment processes within minority communities and conclude the paper with a critical assessment of the potential of UBI in this context, as well as an outlook on future research avenues.

## **Minorities<sup>5</sup> and Marginalisation**

The European rights provisions aiming to protect minorities from oppression and violence, as well as disproportionate socio-economic hardship, make clear that belonging to a minority (or not) is a free choice that should not have implications for how a person is being treated by the state or how well they can do in their life (FCNM, Article 3). Nevertheless, the economic, social, and political marginalisation that minorities tend to be subjected to limits their freedom of choice by creating high costs on some of those choices. This can be related to a large variety of things, ranging from very fundamental issues such as the choice to identify as the member of a minority or not, to the choice of profession or whether or not to work at all, or to take up community or political work. In minority communities, such choices can come at the cost of loss of employment and livelihood, as well as social and communal support. While most of these are individual choices to make, they tend to



reflect patterns of marginalisation that affect the community at large and might have long-term effects on the community's standing and perception in society. If, for example, a large share of the young people in a minority community drop out of school early in order to support their families and this is repeated over several generations, this will very likely result in the minority being seen as uneducated or lazy and consequently, members of the community facing difficulties finding well-paying employment, which then will make it necessary for the next generation to repeat this pattern.

There are several areas of life that rights provisions and academic literature alike point out as especially salient for minority communities, as disadvantages in these areas have disproportionately negative effects on minorities. These areas of life include (but are not limited to) employment, education, participation, and relations with the state and public bodies. This is not to say that issues in these areas of life do not affect the majority population, however, for minority communities, disadvantages in these areas of life tend to overlap and add up to create or perpetuate patterns of exclusion, which ultimately lead to social problems and conflicts.

Concerning employment, despite anti-discrimination provisions being regarded as the bare minimum of human rights standards in most modern states (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 23), minorities tend to face a higher risk to be unemployed or have poorly paid employment than the majority population due to patterns of discrimination in the hiring processes of companies and

institutions, as well as due to low educational achievements (Nilsson and Wrench, 2009, p. 28; European Network Against Racism, 2017, p. 4; Gunn, Birkelund & Rostgad, 2017). With this background, members of minorities who are faced with discrimination or exploitation at their workplace might perceive such an undesirable workplace as their only way of providing for themselves and their family. Being stuck in such a situation has severe mental and physical health implications for the individual and adds to a narrative of marginalisation and victimisation for the community. In addition to causing misery and perpetuating patterns of exclusion, a population that is deprived of a purposeful and fulfilling work life is highly unlikely to contribute to the economic and social development of the state or region and might in the long run cause conflicts between the community and the state or majority population (Sen, 1997, p. 160-162).

Regarding education, a large amount of literature has been produced, analysing the specific ways in which minorities lack access to or face discrimination in mainstream education and how that affects them, as well as how this could be remedied (see e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999). Research shows that members of minority communities might face difficulties in accessing mainstream education both due to outright discrimination, language barriers, etc. and economic factors that discourage or prohibit attending school, university, or other forms of education and training (see e.g. Langenfeld, 2011; European Roma Rights Centre, 2004). Mainstream education might also be undesirable for members of a



minority community because it does not meet the community's linguistic or religious needs or disrespects their culture or historical narratives (see e.g. Hammine, 2016). In several states minorities therefore have the opportunity to establish their own schools or educational facilities, where these needs can be met and discrimination based on the minority identity is not an issue (Luciak, 2006). However, the diplomas issued by such institutions might not be accepted and valued in the same way as degrees from majority schools, thus making the minority educational system unattractive for their members with regards to employment prospects (see e.g. ECMI Kosovo). This combination of different elements often leads to high drop-out rates in minority communities, resulting in overall lower educational achievements than in the majority population and, eventually, perpetuating the exclusion from well-paying employment and certain state functions, including democratic processes.

Participation in public and social affairs of the state is often difficult for minority communities, due to their relatively small number and their lack of access to certain social and political institutions. While minority rights documents as well as researchers are adamant about the fact that effective participation in the decision-making processes of the state as well as inclusion in its social fabric are essential for minority communities to feel like they belong to the state they live in, this participation is often hindered through a multitude of factors even where the state does not actively prevent it (FCNM, Art. 15; Lund Recommendations;

Palermo, 2010; Verstichel, 2010a; Verstichel, 2010b; Weller, 2006). Several aspects play a role in the marginalisation of minorities in this respect. There might be a language barrier preventing minorities from accessing important services (such as health services, employment agencies, education, etc.) or the relevant participatory mechanisms; the norms and values guiding the work of state institutions and participatory bodies might be conflicting with the norms and values of a given minority; or members of minority communities might lack the economic and educational resources to take up community work or representative offices through which the community could be involved in state governance (Frowein & Bank, 2001; Verstichel, 2010b; Yash, 2003, p. 10-11). This lack of representation and communal activity in turn leads to a lack of channels through which minority members can participate in state politics as well as the social life.

The relations between minorities and the state or public institutions are highly complex and closely linked to the social and economic standing of the minority community overall, as well as the geopolitical interests of the state and the role of the minority in this respect (see e.g. Preece, 1997; Prina, 2013). Marginalisation thus affects how minorities perceive the state and its bodies and institutions and despite attempts of states to decrease barriers for minorities to interact with the state, this can be a difficult issue. From language barriers, through lacking knowledge of rights and structures that are available, to histories of suppression that live



on in the collective memory of minority communities, the obstacles for the individual member of a minority as well as for the community to interact with state bodies can be manifold and complex (Vasilevich, 2013; Gurr, 1993). Especially in the case of historically persecuted and oppressed communities, the traditional welfare systems in place to support economically disadvantaged people and communities might be perceived as highly intrusive and stigmatising, as they are usually tied to certain conditions and at the very least require individuals to register with the relevant state agency. As several minorities across Europe have traumatic memories related to registration and similar processes, such a requirement might prove too big an obstacle for a member of a minority to overcome. A lack of access to public services and facilities, including basic amenities such as health care, sanitation, electricity, and running water, as well as education, information about rights, and basic security, also tend to have detrimental effects on minority-state relations and perpetuate patterns of marginalisation, if continued over extended periods of time.

This short discussion of the ways in which marginalisation affects minorities, is by no means exhaustive or detailed enough to do justice to a highly complex issue. It is also not to suggest that all minorities across Europe face the same patterns of marginalisation or are affected by it to the same degree. As might be gathered from the sources provided, there is ample literature available discussing individual aspects of this marginalisation for various communities, while other aspects

remain grossly under-researched. The attempt to provide a wholesome debate about this issue would fill volumes and therefore has to be beyond the limits of this working paper. It might, however, serve to provide a (limited) insight into the patterns and structures that perpetuate minority marginalisation and in which ways an empowerment approach to minority policy, and possibly the implementation of a UBI, can be helpful in increasing the freedom of choice of minority communities and their individual members.

### **Minority Empowerment<sup>6</sup>**

To minimise the effects of marginalisation, many states and the international community have developed special rights and provisions for minority communities to protect them not only from persecution and oppression but also from disproportionate economic and social hardship. Additionally, most European states have social security systems in place to support persons in difficult economic situations. However, these welfare programmes, special provisions, and protection mechanisms tend to put the addressees in the role of passive beneficiaries of state benevolence rather than actively involving them in the political, social, or economic affairs of the state or enabling them to create their own development strategies that meet their needs. This has detrimental effects both on the self-perception of the communities and individuals in question, hampering their perceived control over their fates, and the general attitude of the state and the majority population, affecting their



effective control over their affairs. One way to address this spiral of marginalisation, lacking self-confidence, and negative attitudes is to apply an empowerment approach to minority issues (Rappaport, 1981, p. 13-15; Sadan, 1997, p. 223-224; Narayan, 2005).

Empowerment is an approach to social issues that consists of the basic assumptions that

- a. the power to decide over one's own life has major implications for how well one can do in their life and,
- b. people and communities are indeed willing and generally able to take control over their own lives and know what is good for them,

as well as a theory explaining how people and groups can gain increased control over their own lives and affairs. The empowerment approach understands individuals and communities in the context of the state and society they live in, that means within an environment of social interactions, economic, social, and political restrictions and freedoms, and power relations that decide how much power or freedom of choice they can exert over their own lives. According to empowerment theory, empowerment is a multidimensional process that aims to increase the individual's or community's control over her/its own affairs that is indefinite in nature.<sup>7</sup>

The empowerment process has three dimensions, which encompass highly complex matters and developments and involve closely related systems and structures. The *individual dimension* refers to

the person in question, who might be experiencing a process of becoming aware of an issue and realising that there are solutions to their problem. Usually, this process involves some kind of learning experience and social exchange, including the realisation that the issue at hand affects others as well. This dimension is closely linked to psychological developments of a person and their perception of the issue or situation at hand. The *community dimension* refers to the group of people within which a person exists and which shape their immediate surroundings, as well as social dynamics within groups. It is closely linked to the individual's process of becoming aware of a problem and its political and/or societal dimension and nature but goes beyond this process in that it includes different perspectives and experiences regarding the same issue. Within the community there are resources available for the solution of the problem at hand that can only be used in cooperation and are thus not available to the individual. The *environment dimension* refers to the social, legal, political, economic, and cultural frameworks that shape the life of each individual and community. It involves the limitations as well as opportunities people face through explicit rules or social interactions and power relations. Government actions that aim to improve life for specific communities fall into the external dimension. Empowerment processes might start in any of these dimensions individually or simultaneously and will always have effects on each of them (Sadan, 1997; Scheyvens, 2009, p. 464-470; Zimmerman, 2000).



Through the analysis of these dimensions, empowerment theory can be used as a tool to understand how and why minority communities move from positions of relative powerlessness, in which they are treated and perceive themselves as passive beneficiaries of the state, to a situation, in which they have relative control over their own affairs and actively contribute to the governance and development of the state they live in. The application of this theory and approach to the current standard in minority protection and welfare systems, quickly reveals that many of the strategies applied by states to address the effects of marginalisation miss their aim, because they perceive and treat the communities in question as passive beneficiaries, rather than as agents of change. An empowerment approach would put minorities at the centre of such strategies and involve them as actors, thus increasing their range of action and sense of self-efficacy. As the empowerment approach attempts to involve all the different aspects of a social problem, the strategies proposed under it are often extremely complex and therefore difficult to develop and to communicate. One strategy that falls under the empowerment approach that has been receiving increasing attention in recent years is the idea of a Universal Basic Income (UBI).

## **Universal Basic Income**

The concept of a UBI is a policy that has its roots pre-dating the Industrial Revolution and has been advocated for from a variety of angles, including as a solution for poverty.<sup>8</sup> Despite a surge of support and debate in the

decades following WWII, a fully implemented UBI has failed to emerge<sup>9</sup>. However, particularly in the post-2008 political and economic environment the salience of UBI has dramatically increased and renewed debate has seen the policy explored from a variety of standpoints. This again includes as a solution for poverty and economic inequality, but also in the narrative of increasing individual freedom. This latter aspect is developed below, where the areas of life which a UBI can meaningfully affect individual freedom of choice are elaborated on, yet it is first important to clarify the terminology of a UBI because the interpretation varies between scholars and in the empirical forms it has been trialled in.

In terms of a definition, this is not unanimous as a UBI has been proposed in many forms under different guises<sup>10</sup>. However, many key UBI scholars are quick to stress that the theoretical benefits are based on certain criteria being met. Thus, when using the term UBI, this paper assumes a universal and unconditional payment made monthly to all members of a given society / geographical area (usually manifested as a country or state). It would be universal in terms of applicability to everyone and unconditional in terms of no means-testing; millionaires, babies, unemployed persons, etc would all receive the UBI. Moreover, the amount paid should be high enough to meet basic needs and, importantly, a UBI is presumed to not be a standalone policy to eradicate all other forms of societal assistance / government spending<sup>11</sup>. There are of course economic arguments, both positive and negative, over the effects of such a radical redistributive



policy (for instance surrounding economic stimulus, inflation), yet it is beyond the scope of this working paper and these have been discussed in detail elsewhere in core UBI literature<sup>12</sup>.

As indicated above, one of the core reoccurring themes amongst the justifications provided by advocates of implementing a UBI surrounds the notion of individual freedom. A variety of literature including from the core UBI scholars such as Guy Standing (2017), Philippe Van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght (2015), and Karl Widerquist et al (2013), discusses the theoretical possibilities of UBI to be a tool of empowerment based on its potential to increase individual freedom and reduce occurrences of exploitation. This section of the working paper aims to explore these different elements in detail and show that the UBI debate stretches much further than just its proposed use as a tool for poverty alleviation aimed at society's most vulnerable.

UBI as a tool for individual freedom of choice is a common reason given for supporting such a policy,<sup>13</sup> yet this is an extremely broad notion. When discussing UBI, these theoretical positives are not always labelled under the guise of freedom or increasing choice, but upon reflection can be seen as such. To give a brief example, UBI in theory (and in some empirical trial cases) is linked to a decrease in high-school drop-out rates, but often this is not unpacked in terms of freedom. Yet, it is clear to see that if an individual is now choosing to stay in education rather than exit, in the context of UBI this is due to the facilitation of allowing

a choice; enabling the individual to have the freedom to choose education rather than an alternative, for instance entering the labour force due to financial pressures (Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2015, p. 26-27). This example is developed further below, but it serves to indicate that many of the often-cited positives UBI is suggested to bring need to be analysed a little further when considering what impact UBI can have on freedom. Accordingly, this section summarises a wide array of theoretical arguments for a UBI and demonstrates them in the context of freedom of choice and individual empowerment.

### *Employment*

One of the most prominent areas discussed with regards to the effects of UBI is in the field of work; indeed, the larger UBI debate is often linked to the idea of work, post-work and unemployment. In terms of elements of freedom relating to the workplace, the freedom of choosing employment is a common argument (Standing, 2017; Handler & Sheely Babcock, 2006; Van Parijs, 1992). On the one hand, having one's basic needs taken care of through a UBI would allow an individual the freedom to turn down or quit exploitative, discriminative or undesirable positions. This is described by Handler & Sheely Babcock as an 'exit option' from employment (Handler & Sheely Babcock, 2006, p. 19) and includes jobs which are underpaid, unsafe or even just positions that are boring (Standing, 2017, p. 60). Thus, by providing an unconditional safety-net, the individual always has the financial power to leave such unemployment. Similarly, the idea has been developed that trade unions could benefit from a UBI in that each member



would have a de facto individual strike-fund, allowing the financial pressure of striking to be reduced and thus improve the possibility for collective action against exploitive employers (Vanderborght, 2006). However, Vanderborght explains that this has led to some trade unions seeing UBI as an existential threat (due to individuals either exiting employment or perhaps no longer as reliant on a union if having a UBI) and thus creating consequent opposition. Yet, trade unions could greatly benefit from UBI if utilised e.g. as a strike fund (see above; Vanderborght, 2006).

The flip-side to having the freedom to exit bad employment is that an individual then has the freedom to choose attractive employers, including in industries which may not have been previously feasible. For instance, the desirable job may not pay as well, or offer full-time hours, but with a UBI taking care of basic needs, the individual can choose to work part-time for extra income or as a volunteer where that choice previously would not exist (Standing, 2017, p. 60). Similarly, this also relates to the impacts UBI would have on existing unemployed persons; under many current welfare / benefits systems, individuals can often face a financial barrier when moving into employment.<sup>14</sup> Despite policies such as working tax credits, it can be the case that an individual is no better off by taking a full-time job than they would be if maintaining their existing welfare arrangement. This is referred to as a welfare or benefit trap and has been identified empirically in a variety of economies, including the UK, US and Germany.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in this instance, a UBI would eradicate such

a trap and allow the individual to choose any form of employment without the accompanying financial anxiety. Indeed, this was one of the core reasons why free market economists such as Milton Friedman have previously advocated for a negative income tax (NIT) on the grounds that it would increase the incentive to work by reducing the benefit trap.<sup>16</sup>

Related to this point, a UBI could also allow individuals the choice of pursuing self-employment, given that an element of the financial risk has been reduced. This can take the form of a wide range of instances, but to give an example; take an individual who is trained in, for instance, graphic design but struggles to find a fixed position within a relevant company, thus ‘chooses’ to work full-time as, for instance, a waiter in a restaurant in order to survive financially. With a UBI taking the place of that restaurant position (in terms of financial income), the individual gains the freedom to use their time in setting up a small business or building a freelance career in their trained and desired field.

Another core aspect regarding employment is the factor of unpaid work; predominately, but not limited to, care. This is referred to by Offe and de Deken as UBI acting as a ‘sabbatical grant’,<sup>17</sup> allowing a break from conventional forms of work. For instance, if wishing to care for family members (both old and/or young), current financial frameworks limit such opportunities. Although many societies now offer paid maternity / paternity leave, this is always time-limited, and individuals often have to return to the workplace unless they have a spouse with a large enough



income to support the family. UBI would firstly enable the option to care for loved ones, as well as providing recognition / compensation of this form of otherwise unpaid work. The choice would be greatly increased if, for instance, an individual could choose to take a part-time job and then care part-time as well, without the financial burden of needing to work for a full-time wage. Similarly, they could choose to exit employment entirely and have the financial support to do so. This is of course relevant for raising children but also includes end of life care. In the case of an ill relative or spouse, having a UBI would allow the individual the choice of whether to spend their time with their sick (or in some cases dying) relative, rather than being forced to work to support oneself. Of course, an individual may wish to work rather than care (having care paid for through health insurance), but the point here is that UBI facilitates there being a choice.

Unpaid work is of course not limited to just care work. A wide variety of community-based volunteering could benefit from a larger pool of potential volunteers buoyed by financial security. Given the relevance of this to minority communities and their often reliance on the volunteer sector, a separate subsection below is dedicated to the topic of community and relevant volunteering.

### *Education*

Closely related to the section on employment, education is another core aspect in which financial burdens are all too often a factor in an individual's choice. There is firstly the initial decision to leave the education system after compulsory school years, but also

consequent decisions to re-enter education later in life. Firstly, concerning school-leavers, data from empirical trials in Manitoba, Canada showed that high-school drop-out rates decreased when a form of UBI was introduced (Forget, 2011). Consequent analysis of this empirical finding has suggested that this is due to the relieving of the financial pressure to secure an income – either to support oneself or one's family (Ibid). Thus, providing a financial security would increase the individual's choice over whether to stay in education; alleviating a degree of the financial aspect which could otherwise be a significant factor.

Furthermore, there is also the notion that UBI can facilitate the re-entering of the education system for individuals, which again fits with Offe & de Deken's notion of a sabbatical grant (Offe & de Deken, 2013). For instance, in the case of individuals who have left the conventional education system and are now relying on a full-time wage and thus cannot afford to study full-time, UBI could facilitate a change of direction and an exit or pause from the labour market in order to re-train and choose a different path. To provide an example; an individual who leaves school at 18, works an unqualified service-sector job, becomes reliant on a full-time wage in adult independence but after a few years tires of such a life. Re-entering the education system can feel like a heavy life choice and financial burden (particularly if one has financially dependent relations – children, spouse etc), in this instance a UBI offers the chance to fund one's basic needs during re-training and said individual can re-enter the labour market in a more educated position. These points relating



to education can also be applied to language learning, in a variety of instances. This could be relevant in the case of moving countries for work (particularly relevant in an EU context), both with learning a new language once moved or before moving. Yet it could also be the case in the context of minority languages; having a secure income could allow an individual to connect with a language relevant to their heritage, or indeed deploy one's time in teaching others (developed further below). Moreover, a secure income and the knowledge of one in the future may grant individuals (both parents and, in the future, children) the freedom to consider alternative forms of education, without the concern over the immediate or long-term monetary effects. For instance, choosing options such as Waldorf schools or Montessori schools, which are outside of the standard education system, may become more appealing if parents are not concerned about the immediate future employability of their children. Similarly, minority parents might be more motivated to send their children to minority schools, where the instruction is in a language other than the state language, if they did not have to fear disadvantages from that for their children.

### *Relationships and family-life*

Family life was touched upon in the above section on employment and unpaid care work, yet there are further elements which must be discussed. Looking firstly at relationships, current systems can provide hurdles or incentives to push individuals towards certain positions. Similar to the situation mentioned above with the employment benefits trap, this is also

relevant in the situation of relationships. For instance, with cohabiting, take the example of a new couple who both receive a form of government welfare (for instance working tax credits, child allowance, housing benefits etc), if or when the relationship comes to a point where there is a decision to make over whether to move in together, the situation can be complicated significantly by means-tested welfare systems (Torry, 2013, p. 142; Standing, 2017, p. 60-61). One of the individuals may be faced with giving up certain benefits and thus instantly moves into a position of reliance on the partner, decreasing the individual's personal freedom / autonomy. Although this can affect both sexes, quite often this burden is placed on women due to the continuing imbalance of the male breadwinner society. Thus, it is a big choice (and arguably risk) for the early stage of a relationship. In this sense, Torry suggests that a UBI would "make it easier to enter a new personal relationship" (Torry, 2013, p. 142). Similarly, in cases of marriage or long-term relationships where the couple live together, often one individual can be reliant on the income of another (again still exponentially affecting women<sup>18</sup>). Thus, if the relationship breaks down, the reliant individual faces a financial burden when attempting to exit the household. It is often the case that new claimants will be turned down for benefits based on the fact that their existing household income is too high and thus, if having a limited income of their own, the individual is financially trapped.<sup>19</sup> Thus, a UBI paid to all individuals would ensure that persons always have the financial freedom to exit a relationship or household which they do not wish to be a part of.



### *Community work*

Alongside the reoccurring theme of UBI facilitating a greater self-control over an individual's time, this can also include the freedom to spend time within one's local community to a greater extent than currently feasible. Closely linked to the points above relating to voluntary / unpaid work, individuals could choose to reduce their existing employment and take up an unpaid / lesser paid position in a local community organisation (Offe & de Deken, 2013, p. 452). Examples include but are not limited to; sports and other leisure clubs, special interest groups, political affiliations, NGOs. Spending more time in an area such as this could be relevant at any point of one's life but could also be an option for those wishing to retire early and still be engaged and active yet with further choice of what this entails. Take the example of an individual who has been in a long-term position but finds their job tedious and unfulfilling and prefers spending their time in the local community, yet is trying to stick with their current job until retirement age, aware that finding another job could be very difficult; UBI would allow this individual the choice of exiting this employment and therefore use their time in a different way. This notion of community work could of course be great for the individual who has the choice to spend their time in a more fulfilling way, but it could also have an enormous impact on the local community. Furthermore, given the universal aspect of UBI, individuals would also know that others have the possibility to join such efforts, offering the opportunity for communal agency (this element also relates

to the above discussion on trade unions). In relation to this point, it is worth noting that some advocates of a UBI or a similar type policy have suggested that payments could be conditional on participation in some of community-based work.<sup>20</sup> Whilst this would fit with some of the theoretical benefits outlined above, in the opinion of the authors, this would violate the unconditional element of a UBI and move the policy closer to a Jobs Guarantee Program. Further, it would also give further possibility for a less benevolent government to take advantage of citizens through cheap or 'free' labour<sup>21</sup> and thus eliminate the freedom of choice element of UBI to a large extent.

### *Government Intrusion and Social Stigma*

A final aspect of note, which ties into many of the areas mentioned above, is the notion that UBI, by reducing the amount of means-tested welfare, could reduce government intrusion and social stigma. Several authors pick up on this point of means-tested systems being intrusive and discriminatory, suggesting that existing systems create unnecessary intrusion. This is argued from the perspective of government efficiency (Torry, 2013, p. 81), but also from an angle of liberty and a right to personal privacy (Zwolinski (2011); Friedman, 1968). Standing explains these two perspectives and demonstrates the theoretical standpoints from both left and right libertarians.<sup>22</sup> These suggestions include that a UBI could reduce the need for such extensive means-testing and intrusion and lead to a less discriminative system given the often-discretionary competences retained by those administering such government programmes, whereby UBI



would by its very nature treat everyone the same in terms of (un)conditionality. In this sense, individuals affected by institutional discrimination, intentional or otherwise, would face less barriers and be received on a more equal footing.

Moreover, this ties in greatly with social stigma. Torry makes the argument that existing systems lead to stigmatisation of recipients as well as self-stigmatisation, pitting those who ‘take from the system’ against those who do not, in an argument framed as the parasitical behaviour of a perceived ‘benefit-class’ (Torry, 2013, p. 127-129; Standing, 2017, p. 62). Whereas, UBI would eradicate to a large extent such phenomena because every individual would receive this payment, potentially leading to greater societal cohesion.

## Discussion

After outlining the theoretical backgrounds of both minority empowerment and the policy proposal of UBI, it becomes apparent that there are many areas which overlap. This section of the working paper aims to unpack these in detail, to ascertain what potential effects a UBI could have on minorities – both as individual members of minorities and on a community level. Generally speaking, the effect of UBI on the personal autonomy of individuals is to be evaluated as significant in any case, while having a particularly big influence on personal autonomy in minority communities, as it allows people to choose or opt out of a minority identity, without facing the economic consequences that such a

choice might otherwise have due to discriminatory practices.

The potential benefits of UBI regarding employment are specifically relevant for minority communities facing marginalisation. As they face discrimination and exploitation in the workplace at disproportionate levels, the freedom to leave such an employer or to engage in collective action against such employers is of particular relevance. Seeing that such discrimination does not only affect individuals, but sometimes large shares of a community and negatively influences the perception of the community in society at large as well as the community’s self-perception, being able to break out of such employment without the consequence of losing one’s livelihood can have large-scale effects on a community. Additionally, collective action in employment, such as unionisation, is prohibitive for individuals who have to fear for their employment due to their marginalised position in society. However, unionising as a form of self-organisation is often the beginning of a larger empowerment process, in which individuals and communities realise paths to solutions to a shared problem and start to take agency on their own behalf. This can easily have spill-over effects into other aspects of life<sup>23</sup> and set off a process of emancipation and empowerment.

Simultaneously, a UBI can motivate members of minorities to pursue not only better paid or non-discriminatory work but to take up employment after receiving unemployment or social benefits in the first place. The welfare trap, in which persons in



long-time unemployment might find themselves, is highly relevant for members of minorities who receive social welfare, especially in cases where part of the welfare payments might be tied to affiliation with a specific ethnic community. Being able to earn in addition to the basic support of a UBI rather than instead of social welfare, provides motivation for people in such situations.

Apart from enabling individuals to choose education over employment or in addition to employment, UBI can also provide incentives for members of minorities to seek alternative forms of education from the standard that is applied in the current system, including education in minority schools. Alternative educational models, especially minority education systems, are sometimes associated with economic disadvantages in the future due to a lack of appreciation of the skills being taught in those schools and concern that people educated in minority languages might not have the required proficiency in the state language. In this regard, UBI could also provide opportunities for members of a minority to deploy their skills (linguistic and cultural) as part-time or volunteer staff for the benefit of children from a minority background. This could be the case in state schools which are lacking minority language specialists but do not have the demand or resources for a full-time or paid position, but also with minority language schools – particularly those in the private, non-State sphere.

Relationship and family life within minorities might benefit from the introduction of UBI, through an increased (financial) equity between partners and family members. As

women and marginalised minorities, and especially women in marginalised minorities, are disproportionately affected by financial dependencies on their partners or families,<sup>24</sup> this aspect of UBI is of particular relevance for groups within these communities facing such vulnerabilities. In this sense, if UBI would be paid to every individual (rather than many existing household-assessed benefits), it would provide at least the financial means of an exit from such a situation.

UBI can also improve community life by providing the possibility to provide care for children or the elderly in the minority language. Public care facilities might not provide services in minority languages, forcing families to make the choice to either place their children and elderly in facilities in which they cannot communicate, or to forgo part of the income when one person stays at home to provide care. A UBI, by adding to the family income can make this choice easier and less burdensome. It might even enable people to become entrepreneurs and provide employment opportunities in the community by setting up care facilities in minority languages by alleviating some of the risks typically associated with entrepreneurship. Receiving an income that does not require individuals to work, can open up resources for volunteer work and community engagement. Specifically in minorities that face difficulties finding work, while at the same time being in a financially precarious situation, a UBI can have significant effects on community organisations and representation. With more time and resources to devote to community work or even to take up political offices or



other representative positions, minority participation in public affairs might become a much more feasible option than it currently is for many members of minority communities. In turn, improved representation and increased community work has the potential to improve the self-efficacy of the community and its perception by the majority community as well as public officials. Increased community work can enable minority organisations to provide social services and support based on the needs of the community, which might otherwise not be available through public bodies.

Finally, a UBI might improve state-minority relations by removing channels of intrusion and stigmatisation by the state that are often perceived as being part and parcel of means tested welfare systems. Especially communities with a history of oppression and persecution often do not trust state-agencies and might be reluctant to sign up for welfare benefits that they would be eligible for, as they might fear that the state will use them as a way to gain information about them and persecute or discriminate them. Furthermore, communities in which unemployment is particularly high might feel less singled out and stigmatised for receiving welfare money.

## Conclusions

As this paper has outlined, the areas in which UBI is theorised to provide the financial security to increase individual freedom and choice, are broad. The core elements of any individual's life would undoubtedly be

affected by UBI, taking away much of the risk of making certain life choices, which is particularly relevant for members of minority communities and vulnerable groups. This can enable individuals to make different choices than those dictated by considerations of pure day to day survival. Clearly, given that most individuals, including members of minorities, secure an income through employment (or other forms of labour), this will be one of the most impactful areas in which UBI can increase choices. However, as the text has depicted, other core elements of life such as education and family as well as community relationships could also be positively affected by a UBI. Furthermore, substantial effects are to be expected not just on the individual level, as aspects like collective action in the workplace through unions or unpaid activities at the community level, stand to be given a collective boost when a basic income is provided on a universal and unconditional scale. The freedom to engage in such voluntary community work is of particular importance with regards to the representation and participation of minorities in the public affairs of their states.

There are of course some existing individual programmes and funding opportunities for certain aspects raised in this discussion, such as funds for re-entering education, running minority schools and other minority organisations, or looking after a sick relative etc. Further, there are many other proposals which could bring an increased level of freedom in some areas; the concept of a government facilitated jobs guarantee programme could of course increase some



employment-related freedoms, for instance. However, the point of a UBI is that it would vastly increase the variation of possible opportunities of expressing individual choice and identity and stop the reliance on certain programmes or means-tested systems, where one can often be just above or just below a certain requirement and which are often time-limited, or that might seem intrusive. Moreover, given the universal aspect of UBI, this increased freedom would not only empower people on an individual level, it would also enable groups of people and particularly minority communities to advance their level of community empowerment. Therefore, UBI can be viewed as a potential policy which attempts to maximise freedom in the broadest sense, as opposed to targeted conditional policies and welfare payments.

That said, one must also be acutely aware of the limitations and even potential danger of such a radical policy as UBI. Firstly, to tackle the limitations; UBI should not be viewed as a silver bullet that will fix all of society's problems or magically remove the marginalisation of minorities. It is clear that other existing forms of welfare and state expenditure are necessary and will remain necessary with a UBI. Of course, certain general welfare payments – for instance unemployment benefits, child allowance, state pensions, would be able to be replaced by a UBI – if the payment was adequate enough. However, UBI should not be seen as a replacement for all welfare and a chance to rapidly reduce government spending – as some advocates favour (Murray, 2006). In this regard, the political danger of UBI being

utilised as a tool to dispose government responsibilities must be considered and any government introducing a UBI today must be aware of this potential and take the respective measures to safeguard those welfare systems that cannot be replaced by a UBI. This is related to the idea of a UBI+ which would be implemented in addition to many government services and welfare payments and can be considered a more progressive form of UBI with significant potential for an improvement of the status quo.<sup>25</sup> With a view to minorities, it is vital that any UBI scheme must safeguard existing targeted funding for minorities or provide a strong guarantee that funding for minorities will not be reduced in the instance of a UBI. Despite these stark warnings, the positives of a UBI should not be overlooked as the potential for increasing individual freedom and advancing the empowerment of individuals and communities could make it a very powerful tool, particularly for those minorities that are most marginalised.

This working paper has taken a general look at UBI and minority empowerment at a theoretical level and should be understood as a thinking piece on the potential of the implementation of UBI as a policy in the realm of minority empowerment. Future research in this area should aim to expand upon this, by providing increased scrutiny on the specific areas of life potentially affected by UBI as well as by moving towards a more empirical approach of specific minorities and how their communities could be affected by such a policy. The biggest challenge of such research endeavours would likely be the lack of comprehensive data on the socio-economic position and participation of



minorities in their states. However, as there is an increased interest in UBI and its effects, and several trials have been and are being conducted at the time of writing, this might be an interesting avenue for minority researchers; many of the trials are being closely watched by scholars of various disciplines and might offer opportunities for minority researchers to collect data and

observe developments with regards to minority communities. Additionally, a number of empirical studies regarding the social and psychological effects of UBI can be expected as a result of the current activities, which might provide further insights from which minority-specific effects can be deducted.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, marginalization refers to the partial or complete exclusion of communities from core functions of state and society, including but not limited to access to education, health services, the labour market, social security mechanisms, and decision-making processes in the state.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of major European Political parties that have expressed an interest in trialling UBI include:

- Shadow Chancellor for Labour UK – John McDonnell. See further: Cowburn (2018)
- Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, regional coalition. See further: Baethge (2017)
- The German left-wing political party Die Linke have expressed explicit support for a UBI. See further: Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Grundeinkommen in und bei der Partei DIE LINKE (2016)
- French Socialist party leader Benoit Hamon proposed a form of UBI for France in the run up to the 2017 national elections, which although the Socialists performed poorly the UBI proposal was well-covered in mainstream press. See further; Williamson (2017)

Further, political parties which have included UBI in their most recent General Election manifesto include:

- The Green Party in the UK: Green Party UK (2017)
- Five Star Movement in Italy: Bertelli (2018)

<sup>3</sup> Recent, ongoing and future planned UBI trials / pilot schemes include:

- *Finland*: a 2-year pilot scheme, ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018; which although not being extended, was not cancelled as some media portrayed. Further info: Kela (2018).
- *Kenya*: A US non-profit organisation is funding a saturation experiment on basic income, which is seeing all residents of a series of Kenyan villages receive a basic income for up to 12 years. Further info: GiveDirectly (2018).
- *Stockton, California*: An 18-month trial is scheduled to begin in February 2019, privately funded. It is set to provide 100 individuals with \$500 USD a month, unconditionally. Further info: Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration (2018).
- *Scotland*: The Scottish Government have committed £250,000 towards basic income experiments across four local authorities in Scotland. It is currently in the design phase. Further info: Basic Income Scotland (2018).

<sup>4</sup> For literature on Feminism and UBI, see Part IV (pp. 141-188) of Widerquist et al (2013). UBI as a tool for racial justice (in terms of historical compensation as well as having exponential effects on marginalised black communities) has been explored by Warren, D. (2017); and included as part of the Black Lives Matter campaign in the US: Black Lives Matter (2018).

<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of this working paper, the ECMI's working definition of minority applies: All national cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities whose minority status has been recognized by national legislation or by internationally binding declarations as well as minorities that define and organize themselves as such.

<sup>6</sup> A more elaborate version of this section has been published as Wolf, S. (2018) 'Minority empowerment'. In Malloy, T. & Boulter, C. (Eds). *Minority Issues in Europe. New Ideas and Approaches*. Frank & Timme: Berlin.

<sup>7</sup> Some empowerment scholars understand empowerment as the result or outcome of a process of gaining power, rather than as a process in and of itself, however, it is consensus that empowerment is multidimensional and fluid and that the process is a core element in the outcome as well (e.g. Rappaport, 2000; Sadan, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Analysis of the origins of UBI suggests its modern roots can be found in the writings of Thomas More, Johannes Ludovicus Vives, and Thomas Paine in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. For a detailed timeline of this discussion, see BIEN (2018).

<sup>9</sup> The debate increased in the 1970s, particularly in the US and Canada where trials were undertaken and a bill under the Nixon Administration attempted to bring in what was touted as a UBI, but amounted to a Negative Income Tax (NIT) – as advocated for by Milton Friedman. For an overview of this, see BIEN, 2018. See footnote 40 below for a clarification on an NIT vs UBI.

<sup>10</sup> UBI has also been referred to as: an Unconditional Basic Income, a Citizen's Income, a Universal Basic Dividend, a Guaranteed Minimum Income, and multiple others. Often these have slightly different intentions, funding mechanisms or criteria.

<sup>11</sup> Definition developed by the authors of this paper, based largely on the work of core UBI scholars, including the sources in the following three footnotes.

<sup>12</sup> Economic arguments form a core element of UBI debate. See appropriate sections of Standing, 2017, Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2015, or Widerquist et al, 2013 for an overview.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance, Standing, 2017, p. 61; Chapter 1 of Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2015, pp. 4-28



<sup>14</sup> For a detailed discussion on tax and benefits systems, see pp. 80-148 of Torry (2013)

<sup>15</sup> In the case of the UK, see Torry, 2013; for the USA, see Murray (1984); and for Germany, see Gilroy, Heimann & Schopf (2013).

<sup>16</sup> Influential economist Milton Friedman (a renowned free-market advocate), also saw the need for a government to provide a level of social security and proposed a Negative Income Tax as a solution. Although often mentioned in the same debate as UBI, an NIT differs in that it is not unconditional and is linked to labour income and consequent taxation. Friedman suggested that if an individual's income was below a certain amount, then it should be subject to a negative income taxation which would then obviously top up an individual's income. However, whilst this may eradicate a benefit trap, it would erode many of the theoretical benefits of a true universal scheme – for instance the reduction of stigmatisation. It is also likely that an NIT would be linked to annual income and thus the exit option from work / relationships would be more difficult. For a debate on UBI v NIT see, Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2015, p.32. See Friedman's original works for further clarification of the NIT: Friedman (1962) and Friedman (1968).

<sup>17</sup> Although the authors mostly discuss the sabbatical grant as time limited, it is also explored in the context of a UBI. See further; Offe & de Deken (2013).

<sup>18</sup> See further a discussion on UBI and feminism for the theory that UBI will aid women in escaping oppressive personal relationships and “reduce the need for intrusive inquiries that are often likely to affect female claimants in the case of means-tested benefits”. See further: Vanderborght & Widerquist (2013).

<sup>19</sup> Lister, R. (1990). “Women, Economic Dependency and Citizenship”. *Journal of Social Policy*, 19(04), 445-467; Heather Joshi and Hugh Davies (1996) “Financial dependency on men: Have women born in 1958 broken free?”, *Policy Studies*, 17(1), 35-54. Specifically relating to UBI, see also, Standing p. 61.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance the discussion in Widerquist et al, p. 56-57. Or; Atkinson (1996).

<sup>21</sup> Cheap in the sense that a Jobs Guarantee Programme could be made to be at a low-level minimum wage, or free in the sense that citizens were participating in exchange for a conditional basic income.

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of right and left libertarian standpoints relating to UBI and the role of government, see the opening pages of Chapter 3 in Standing, 2017, pp. 47-55.

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Albert Rees, “The Effects of Unions on Resource Allocation,” *The Journal of Law and Economics* 6, (1963): 69-78; Bernhard Ebbinghaus. (2002). “Trade unions’ changing role: membership erosion, organisational reform, and social partnership in Europe” *Industrial Relations Journal*, 33(5), 465–483.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. Andrea Peinhopf, “Ethnic Minority Women in Georgia – Facing a Double Burden?” EMCI Working Paper #74, February 2014, <https://www.ecmi.de/publications/detail/74-ethnic-minority-women-in-georgia-facing-a-double-burden-288/> (accessed 9 November 2018); E. Nakano Glenn (1985). “Racial Ethnic Women’s Labor: The Intersection of Race, Gender and Class Oppression”. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 17(3), 86–108.

<sup>25</sup> The term UBU+ has been specifically used by UBI advocates within the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, to stress that a UBI which replaces labour regulation and other security-enhancing government programmes would be a negative move and increase precarity, whereas a so-called UBI+ would entail a basic income plus existing and strengthened government policies. See Boston Review (2017) No Racial Justice Without Basic Income (Online). Available at: <http://bostonreview.net/class-inequality-race/undercommons-no-racial-justice-without-basic-income>. Other left / democratic socialist leaning UBI advocates call for a similar process of UBI as well as existing security as opposed to UBI instead of, sometimes posed as a ‘generous UBI’. For a detailed discussion on the political achievability of UBI, see Chapter 7 of Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2015, p. 170-215. See also Standing, 2017, p. 54.



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