

Ep. 10 | UBI and social protection systems

Jo Sharpe: Hello and welcome to the Social Protection Podcast. I'm your host, Jo Sharpe. This month, we continue our discussion on the universal basic income, a radical idea to extend regular unconditional cash benefits to everyone. The UBI challenges certain social protection orthodoxies. For example, by providing an equal amount of support all independent of needs, and by removing obligations on the part of recipients, in order to receive benefits. There are different views on how generous a UBI should be, whether it's in addition to or replaces other forms of social spending and the literal multi-billion-dollar question is:

How to pay for it?

My guest for this episode are Francesca Bastagli from ODI and Dr. Juergen De Wispelaere from the University of Riga, who is also co-founder of the journal of basic income studies. This is the second part of my interview with Francesca and Juergen. In last month's episode, we explored the UBI and the world of work.

Francesca Bastagli: We don't see mass reductions in participation in paid work, whether linked to UBI or indeed other types of UBI, minimum income schemes.

Jurgen De Wispelaere: One of the really, really interesting features of basic income is that it's meant to support you in work. And it's meant to support you out of work.

Francesca Bastagli: The fact that it's universal unconditional paid on a regular basis, does hold potential for addressing some of the persistent gender inequalities in the world of work.

Jurgen De Wispelaere: We think that in many cases the sort of exit, there's a bit of a hole of threat. Even under a basic income workers, can't really easily leave their jobs.

Jo Sharpe: So if you missed part one, please do go back and start there. In this episode, we'll explore some of the other key considerations in the UBI debate.

Are UBIs affordable? Are they equitable? How should they fit in with existing social policies and bottom line, should countries take the UBI seriously and will one ever be achieved? For all the considerable hype and interest in the UBI, no country actually has one in place, despite many pilots and trials in countries as diverse as Kenya and Brazil, Canada, and Finland.

So let's pick the interview up where I ask about what might be the number one objection to the UBI, namely cost.

We started to talk about money, which is pretty key to this whole conversation. Francesca, we're talking about major investments here. It's several too many percentage points of GDP, depending on whether UBI has provided at levels to eliminate poverty or perhaps some lower fraction of the poverty line, the money, as they say, has to come from somewhere.

What are some of the ways that people propose to pay for UBIs?

Francesca Bastagli: Where we've seen UBI is actually implemented governments have relied on different ways of financing. One way of financing a UBI is through the reallocation of resources away from other services or benefits. And so if you take the example of Iran, Iran rolled out a national unconditional cash transfer scheme, essentially universal basic income, 2010, 2011.

This was financed through phasing out of food and fuel subsidies. But if you take the case of Alaska, their UBI is an annual dividend paid through an investment fund that is financed by oil revenues. In other contexts, if you take the example of what are not full UBIs, but say the universal child benefits, which are not full UBIs, but are paid universally to children in a country and existed in a high number of particularly high-income countries.

These are generally funded out of general taxation. When we think of proposals on the table, because there are a number of very concrete proposals across countries, worldwide on launching a UBI. There are again, a range of proposed mechanisms for financing these schemes, and they commonly rely on a combination of instruments.

You take some of the cases in the U S but even some of the proposals in South Korea as well where revenue would be raised by government by tapping into resources that are currently undertaxed. Importantly, of course, increasing taxes on wealth, on high earners or net wealth individuals and companies, green taxes and pollution taxes.

But also there are proposals around introducing new value, added taxes and so on. There are also examples of UBI type schemes. And I use that word to refer to what are often pilots or even experiments, so that, that are financed through either nonprofit organizations or, increasingly also philanthropies.

Give direct this project in Kenya that funds a UBI there, might a non-for-profit organization, but also examples of philanthropy. And I'm thinking of some of the U S pilots that are funded essentially by silicon valley entrepreneurs. I think here it's actually quite interesting. And these examples raised a number of questions.

Many of these schemes are set up to really compensate for job losses or associated with some of the developments in technology and automation. They also raise questions about more broadly what schemes of this kind really mean in terms of broader social and fiscal policy and their sustainability.

Jurgen De Wispelaere: One thing about this is like, whatever, the gimmicky stuff with the pilots, this is just not a sustainable way to fund a social protection scheme in a country.

Francesca Bastagli: Exactly. It's not social protection. I mean, it's not, it's not. So I think, it raises questions about what are we talking about, but many call it a UBI. And some of these experiments that they're doing at the city level, with these mayors across the U S but then there's the question of, what is it, how does this fit into the wider country?

Jurgen De Wispelaere: A lot of the thing though, which I think people often underestimate the difference between running a pilot and running a policy. Right. So yeah, you have all sorts of special funding for two-year types of pilots and stuff, but thinking the sustainability of financing as a full loan policy, not just expand it, but also run over time.

Jo Sharpe: Juergen, we've been talking about financing. Does it ultimately come down to cost? Are UBIs considered just too expensive to be seriously considered?

Jurgen De Wispelaere: People was asking this question, right? And I think that's slightly the wrong questions. I prefer the version that one of my colleagues back at University of Bath, Luke Martinelli, he phrased it as is there a basic income that we can afford that is still worth having?

Because you can imagine at some point, a basic income can be made very inexpensive and it can be made very expensive and it can be made in a way that fits with existing budget, or it can be proposed in a way that really requires a lot of extra financial capacity, so to speak. But the more inexpensive you make it, the less, this basic income will be able to do.

And at some point, these are just two kinds of conflicting constraints if you like. When it comes to cost, for me, I also find a sort of two big misunderstandings in that debate. There's sort of an accounting misunderstanding. My former collaborator, Carl Whiter Christie calls this the difference between the net cost and the gross cost of basic income.

The gross cost basically is just, you take the amount of people in a country and the level of basic income, and you do a little some, and that's the cost of basic income. And, you can discount it with some of the programs that it might be absorbed by it.

And then we have a slightly revised number, but it's still going to be a massive, massive number. What that misses is the fact that at the end of the day, yes, everyone gets a basic income. But the idea within the basic income community is that people on the high-income sites they in a way pay back their own basic income.

Yes. Basic income is universal, but it is implicitly targeted towards the lower end of the income distribution because that's where you have the net beneficiaries. The net cost of a basic income is only the cost of basic income of the people who receive it and are not able to pay it back so to speak.

Your question was, does it all come down to cost? Well, for me, it all comes down to politics, but unfortunately the cost is a huge part of politics. The two objections that are often raised and always raised against basic income is on the one hand is the lace in this objection, which we already discussed. And the second one is the objection of cost.

It is something that no matter what we have to deal with and we have to deal with sensitive. Definitely.

Jo Sharpe: While we're talking about resources, Francesca, doesn't this come down to the difference between equality and equity? Is it really right to spread out benefits through the entire population so that everybody receives something equally, rather than concentrating resources more on those with greater needs and addressing some of those equity deficits?

Francesca Bastagli: Jo, we live in societies that are highly unequal and in fact, income and wealth inequalities are on the rise in many countries. And so in these contexts, the idea of concentrating resources to those that are most in need is intuitively appealing. Especially if we assume that there's a fixed budget.

However, this picture changes a bit. When you start to take into account the realities of people's lives and into the life course. So essentially when you want to concentrate resources on a particular population, and that means targeting resources, they come at a cost. And by that, I mean, both sort of financial costs, but other types of costs as well, the financial administrative costs arise from having to identify who would receive a transfer or an income scheme against those that don't.

And that alone can be administratively quite demanding, particularly the more narrow and complex the means-testing or targeting mechanism is, but there are other types of costs as well. So in regards to, for instance, the world of work, there are costs around potential disincentive effects or behavioural effects that might be triggered as a result of means-testing.

And again, the more narrow the means testing, the more you might find that kind of distortion generated by a targeted transfer. There are social costs that arise from the tension, social tensions and divisions that are created when you start to essentially divide societies and split those that identified as being somehow deserving of an income support scheme. And those that aren't, that are not.

And then there, of course they're all the political economy type costs. So in particular narrow means testing can be and has been associated with weaker public support for policies. So compared with policies that have higher population coverage, these generally enjoy higher support, public support and political support. And this translates typically into also higher budgets. For the schemes and this come back to the financing and sustainability of policy in some essentially when you start to factor in the realities of the dynamics of people's lives, changing circumstances.

And what that means in terms of administering means-tested or conditional transfers. Vis-a-vis universal or universalistic type schemes that are unconditional. Once you start to factor in the potential political economy, dynamics of public policy, some of the potential benefits or what are intuitively appealing aspects of targeting, frankly, are weak and actually, the arrow would point towards the potential benefits of a fully universal or indeed more universalistic and unconditional approaches.

Jurgen De Wispelaere: I fully agree with Francesca and to my mind this, it was a good question, but it's a fake opposition if you like. Because of this idea that we're giving Elon Musk a basic income, no, we are not, not really.

Yes. He gets a check in the thing, but we're also sending him a tax bill in state. So I mean, Philly Pumper has written this thing, which I think is really, really spot on, which he is saying "look we give basic income to the rich because it benefits the poor", right? And the reasons it does that is all the reasons that Francesca was saying.

Jo Sharpe: Jurgen, in your writing, you've pointed out that social policies, in general, are path-dependent. It takes a lot for countries to deviate from historic approaches. We are living through an enormous rolling series of health and economic shocks right now. Has the COVID shock disrupted, or at least affected political thinking about the UBI?

Jurgen De Wispelaere: That's a really, really interesting question. So I think we're still trying to figure out what is really explaining this recent interest in basic income. How does that interact with the financial crisis, with concerns about AI and technological unemployment, which you could view as a sort of a crisis in the making as well now with the pandemic, COVID-19, so that's a lot of crisis. Then in some sense, crisis is sort of a window of opportunity.

And I think we need to be careful thinking about that for various reasons. One, there's actually some research showing that at the end of the day crisis, they sort of cause interesting blips. And sort of policy attention and media attention, but they don't necessarily lead to full long kind of institutional and program reforms as much as we like to think.

When we think about basic income and path dependencies is to really appreciate that it's a lot easier to introduce a basic income in a country that does not have a huge machine, real welfare state institutions already in place. Because why? Well, because of the moment the basic income goes in there. It has to interact in all sorts of complicated ways with these programs or it has to replace programs.

And that raises all sorts of issues with people being resistant against that and so on and so forth and things can go wrong very fast. The basic income discussion in says a country like South Africa or Namibia is going to be a very different discussion from Chile or Argentina or the United States or Canada or Finland and Norway or the UK.

You name it. One of the reasons why I like basic income experiments because they actually allow us to test out this machinery. Really kind of think we basically should just have basic income experiments in every single country and see what happens. Not just what happens in terms of whether people are getting more lazy or not.

I think that's a lot of rubbish, right? I think the really, really interesting thing is what happens when basic income as a policy interacts with all sorts of all our other policies and how can we make that fit?

Jo Sharpe: Francesca, do you think the COVID experience, perhaps the experience countries have had with having to rapidly expand programs... many of them have been entirely unconditional. How has all of that practical experience impacted the way countries are thinking about the UBI?

Francesca Bastagli: I think the COVID crisis has seen a resurgence in momentum around, around the UBI for a number of reasons, if there's new and renewed attention to the role of cash transfers.

And more specifically, what we've seen is the waving of conditionalities, all of this in order to enable the rapid expansion of cash and income support as part of the COVID response. And in this sense, it's really a sort of a proof of concept of how effective cash transfers can be. Even if they're not conditional, even if they're not narrowly means-tested or following complex targeting procedures.

But there are other ways in which the crisis and is influencing the discussion and indeed some form of experimentation around a basic income. And that's building on a increase in the short-term a renewed sense of solidarity and of potential for collective action. And the shift towards collective responsibility.

I think if we look at some countries where the crisis response has triggered broader conversations around the basic income, and I'm thinking of Brazil, I'm thinking of South Africa. There are no questions that the adjustments made since the onset of the crisis in order to expand income support provision to two population groups that were previously excluded have contributed to conversations and debates on the basic income.

On the other hand, we need to not lose sight of the wider picture. And this comes back to some other points Jurgen has been making and longer-term trends. You take a country like Brazil, where in terms of cash transfer response, yes, it was quite phenomenal in terms of both the population coverage. We saw an expansion up to a third of the population was receiving a minimum income scheme as a response to the crisis.

But this comes against a background of systematic, ongoing dismantling of welfare provision, including social protection in the lead up to the crisis. Yes. All very well. There's renewed emphasis on cash and on the potential of particular features of cash, unconditional universal. But then there's a question of where does that all fit in given the wider picture and this, of course, all in a context where we are now moving in many countries to a situation where the pressure on revenues and on the fiscal side of things is being felt. And we're seeing in all around cuts in social spending and the potentially a gradual move towards austerity.

Jo Sharpe: As I engage with this debate, I sometimes wonder if the UBI is acting a little bit as a strong man, or is representing an extreme negotiating position that allows us to bring attention to the limits of current welfare systems, to their problems, things that we need to fix.

Hopefully, build some momentum around key policy choices like universality and conditionality. But in many cases, a full UBI is a bit too far. And is in fact, no one really thinks it's can be achieved.

What do you think about that? Would it be enough to see incremental change towards UBIs without achieving the UBI itself?

Or is there something about the real deal, the whole complete fundamental UBI that really ultimately should be what we are working towards.

Jurgen De Wispelaere: So, I'm sort of with Voltaire on this, right? Don't let the perfect be the enemy of good. So there is a lot to be said for basic income positively impacting social protection without necessarily getting to full basic income.

Think about things like having less sanctions and having less monitoring is a good thing. That's a good thing for the system. It's good, I think. And it's definitely a good thing for the people who are trapped into the system if you like. Increasing coverage is a good thing. Reducing complexity is a good thing. More generous payments is a good thing, more, more individualism as opposed to household-based calculation. So those are all good things. I have been seeing some of the all of that happening and they're all part of the basic income discussion itself, right?

If that is happening, why do we still need a basic income? Well, one of the reasons is that all these individual items. They're all very interesting, but in a way, it's hard to fully anchored them into social protection, unless they're all tied in together. A basic income puts all these things together and that means it mutually reinforces the effects, but also very importantly, going back to the politics, it's also more likely to be more robustly instituted than protected.

Then it'd be less, it'd be less likely to be decreased by the next government so to speak.

Jo Sharpe: Francesca, there are other pathways to expanding social protections. And I guess, arguably for addressing some of these disrupting forces, we've been talking about like the changing nature of work. We were talking about social protection floors in a recent episode that combined social assistance and insurance, these are the more kind of classic views of how protections can be achieved.

Given the alternatives, investment, and other kinds of social protection or reform of the welfare state investment in services, which you haven't really talked about here, but can often be seen as a trade-off for those various sorts of right-wing views around minimizing the role of the state in providing services, things like minimum wage policy.

We can't go into all of these alternatives, but they do exist. Bottom line for you. Do you think the UBI is where governments should be putting their attention or are this something that really does need to be considered seriously at this point in time?

Francesca Bastagli: The answer is yes. I think that governments should be putting their attention to UBI and there are number of reasons for this.

The UBI has a huge contribution to make. First of all, around the question of how we understand work. There's no question that it is now absolutely critical and central and COVID has emphasizes even more clearly that we need to reconsider and think about what we mean by work. And that equating work with paid work or paid employment is simply not working.

We need to carefully consider unpaid work, but also wider tasks and activities that may have limited or no monetary value, but that are a value to individuals and society. Because until we do that, some of the shortcomings and gaps in existing social protection schemes will not be addressed because essentially they are based on assumptions and the conceptualization or about work and the valuation of work that then leads to the replication or perpetration of certain inequalities. And the role of UBI here is essential.

There's a second potential contribution, which is around a policy design and implementation option. The UBI presents potential advantages and benefits over other types of income support schemes. In contrast with schemes that focus on narrow means testing or targeting and on narrow conditionalities sometimes which can be very punitive and that ultimately work against poverty and inequality reduction objectives, UBI showcases what the options in terms of design and implementation are. And I think indicates an important way forward.

The third important contribution that UBI makes. And the reason why governments should be putting attention here is that it emphasizes the role of wider labour policies, but also basic services.

And this, again comes back to the point that Jurgen has repeatedly made. A UBI doesn't operate in a vacuum. Now this is true for cash transfers more broadly, but the whole UBI debate and implementation in very practical terms necessitates a wider conversation around the system as a whole. And this is absolutely crucial. And this is why governments need to be talking about and putting their attention on UBI.

Would a UBI help tackle existing gaps and inconsistencies of social protection systems, and in wait wider sort of labour regulation and so on? Well, it really depends. It's not by chance that there are advocates of UBI across the political spectrum.

I think we need to be very clear about what are we talking about here. Some see UBI is part of a wider plan to shift risk and responsibilities increasingly towards individuals away from the collective. Under this approach, or UBI will contribute to an increasingly residualist, minimalist social protection system.

But on the other end of spectrum, the UBI is actually viewed as an element or component to the wider reconfiguration of the social contract. And as part of huge efforts to define responsibilities across the state, individuals, employers, or the private sectors. In this scenario, the UBI or UBI type scheme would be part of a wider package, as you were just saying that would include yes minimum wage scheme labour regulation, provision of good quality basic services. And it is in this scenario that a UBI would contribute to a fairer and more productive in a wider sense world of work.

Jo Sharpe: Jurgen, do you think we'll ever see a true UBI implemented and what do you think it would take to get there?

Jurgen De Wispelaere: Yes. Will we ever see a UBI. If I knew the answer to that, I probably could make a lot of money on the betting markets. So let me point at actually an example of

where basic income already exist or something that gets us probably the closest to basic income that we've seen. And that's a little municipality called Maricá in Brazil, near Rio de Janeiro.

So they set up Renda Básica de Cidadania in 2013 and expanded it and 2019, and at the moment, I think it covers 25% of the population there. So that's like 44,000 people or something thereabouts. And the idea is to expand it. It's also found that it's true oil revenues so that Maricá finds itself in a particularly nice situation in that regard.

Very very interestingly it's actually paid out in a local currency called Mumbuca, which is actually fully backed by a special bank there. So you do not just have a basic income. You also have a whole sort of local currency type of networks set out, and there's a whole bunch of other policies, but that is a place where effectively something like basic income as a policy. This is not a pilot. This is not an experiment. This is an actual policy that effectively already exists and will be expanded to do the like full long first. So at the moment it's unconditional it's individual, but it's not fully universal yet.

This is near Rio de Janeiro. Cities around there are now taking the real interest. So to my mind, Brazil very much is the country to watch at the moment. At the same time. There really just are a huge amount of challenges. To my mind, a lot of these challenges really kind of boiled down to politics in the broadest sense.

In order to have something like a basic income implemented, we need a sort of a broad coalition of actors. For example, the people who are interested in gender equality and the carriage and the need to sit together with trade unionists, who worry about basic income, but nevertheless, somehow be convinced that basic income is good for their constituency as well.

And potentially then have to sit back with the self-employed and with small businesses and so on, so forth. Bringing all these things together it's not always that straightforward. And I'll make one final point. I think one of the biggest sorts of philosophical issues around basic income is that ultimately basic income is a policy that is about trusting people.

You give people income support, and then you let them do with that, what they want effectively. So that just means that we don't have a policy that controls people. We have a policy that trusts people, and that actually is a very fundamental mind shift for many, many people. I'm not quite sure whether we ready for that, but I think that's a fundamental thing that has to happen before we can build this constituency, which then puts pressure on coalitions. And that is the thing that will kind of get us basic income.

Jo Sharpe: Thank you. This is such an enormous topic. We could keep talking for hours, but we'll end it there. Thank you very much, Francesca and Jurgen for being our guides to the universal basic income today.

Francesca Bastagli: Thank you, Jo.

Jurgen De Wispelaere: Thanks Jo for me as well.

Jo Sharpe: Before we go, we'll end with some quick wins. Each month we ask a guest for recommendations, news, and stories that have sparked their interest. And that we think you should know more about.

With me is Dr. Jim Pugh, co-founder of the US-based Universal Income Project. Welcome Jim.

Jim Pugh: Thank you for having me.

Jim, just before we turn to your recommendations today, we've just heard an interview with Francesca Bastagli and Jurgen De Wispelaere on various debates relating to the universal basic income. You're an advocate of the universal basic income in the US.

And as a concept, it has gained some momentum over recent years. So what is driving interest in universal programs and the UBI in the US?

I got involved with work around universal basic income about seven years ago. And at that point, the driver very much was fears of automation and how that could alter in some really transformative way the job situation within the US.

Therefore having a society where the idea of full employment just wouldn't make sense anymore. And so UBI was brought forward as a possible counter to this so that even if people didn't have jobs, it would still be getting an unconditional income. That very much drove that early interest in those days over time, though, that really shifted in a pretty fundamental way as we dug into and started to better understand the situation with the social safety net within the United States realize that UBI, wasn't just something that we may need down the road to deal with automation.

It really was something that we needed today. That already, we had a society where people just had nowhere near the degree of financial security that was necessary to be fully functioning and productive.

Jo Sharpe: Very briefly on pilots. And in the discussion, we just heard, our guests also talked a little bit about high profile UBI or quasi UBI pilots that have been trialled in the US in recent years in places like Oakland and Stockton.

These have been relatively small compared to trials in other countries, I'm thinking of the give directly pilot in Kenya, in Finland, and of course others. In the US context what is the value of pilots like these and how do they influence or advance the debate?

Jim Pugh: It has certainly been true that today US pilots have been on the smaller side.

We do have a few that are currently launching that are considerably larger with several thousand people, as there's been more interest in basic income. And you have cities that are actually putting public tax dollars into it, but most of the pilots are in the hundreds rather than

thousands. The main value that I see coming from pilots, it's less actually about rigorous data outcomes. And it's more about how this affects the narrative.

Because the main concerns about UBI, aren't data-driven concerns, are really cultural concerns. What is going to make the most difference as far as can we advance this politically is can we chip away at those narratives and provide a counter-narrative?

And if we can be providing compelling stories about how this is actually making a huge difference, how it's not looking people to be lazy, how it's something that is really achievable, that doesn't seem too far off, that makes all of our political fights on scaling this up that much easier and allows us to really create the snowball effect building momentum that eventually hopefully allows us to establish a full national UBI.

Jo Sharpe: The audience for this podcast and for socialprotection.org is largely looking at social protection in the global south. And of course, there is already a lively debate around UBIs and universal approaches to social protection in many countries.

There's also a wealth of experience in evidence from decades of research into cash transfers, precisely on some of these issues that are really crucial to this debate around whether welfare creates dependence or whether welfare is an unacceptable cost or whether it's an essential investment in a nation's development.

Can you give us a sense, of how does evidence and experience from other countries influence debates in the US?

Jim Pugh: Well, I'll start with the bad news, which is, I think for our political debates, it matters far less than it ought to that. I think there's some very important lessons that arise there, but when it comes, frankly, from any other country, there's often almost immediately the pushback that oh, that doesn't apply here, we are in a different situation.

The good news is that amongst people who are working more behind the scenes, on policy, I think there are often times when we have lessons and discoveries per international contexts that really motivates a desire to explore and replicate that in a domestic context within the US and so that there has been a number of the findings internationally around cash transfers that have certainly influenced planning around what sort of pilot programs we run, what sort of political analysis and policy analysis that we encourage people to do within the US that can then hopefully be able to yield and aligned finding that then does have a much larger influence in our political debates here.

Jo Sharpe: Turning now to your quick wins for the month. What have you brought for us today?

Jim Pugh: I would really recommend her folks who have access to it. There is a show on Netflix called, Maid, which came out last year, I believe. And it's based on the true story of a young woman and her child who are trying to get out of an abusive relationship and having to navigate demeaning and inaccessible social services to really get the absolute bare, minimal

support in the U.S. And it really highlights in my opinion, how UBI can be so transformative for these many Americans who are trapped or just being beaten down by our current systems.

Jo Sharpe: It is extraordinary how that highlights the way that these systems, which ostensibly are designed to support people, even where that support is being offered can be so difficult to access.

And I understand that the way that they've dramatized that is very true to life. Perhaps on a more positive note, you also wanted to talk about the upswing with Robert Putnam and Shaylyn Romney Garrett.

Jim Pugh: I do. And for folks who have the time, I would really recommend reading this book, but there's also an interview you can watch that they did talking about the contents. And the book, the Upswing, it looks at American history over the last about 130 years and the American sense of being part of a collective "we". A "we" that looks out for one another. That feels a sense of connection and really has a sense of responsibility for how we all do in life.

And that really has shifted over time. And those shifts have really affected every single aspect of society. I believe that looking and understanding, and how does this change, it both speaks to how UBI could help to bring the country together in a way that sorely needs right now. But also recognizing the importance of culture, not just economics in what goes into having a healthy and successful society.

Jo Sharpe: Thank you for bringing this recommendation. I was really interested in this idea that it is going back 150 years looking at a period of American history, which also is marked by great inequality and the shift it narrates in terms of how America moved from a position of inequality to a position of much greater solidarity.

What is it about the UBI? That you think would really help to address some of the social challenges that the U.S. I guess is facing today around partisanship and inequality. And some of those issues.

Jim Pugh: For me, the universal aspect of the program is really key there because when we see this with existing programs, those that are more broad-based versus those that are more targeted, but when you have a more universal program, it creates a much broader sense of connection across them. Then you have that touchpoint across people in many, many different situations then you can then feel a sense of connection that stems from that.

And so just like in the US we have our universal dividend program in the state of Alaska and up there, we can see very clearly that does create that sense of solidarity and connection. I would expect a full UBI could do a similar thing across the entire United States.

Jo Sharpe: Thank you, Dr. Jim Pugh for spending time with us on the Social Protection Podcast today.

Jim Pugh: It's been a pleasure.



Jo Sharpe: And thank you for joining us for this episode of the Social Protection Podcast. We are a production of socialprotection.org from the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth. Follow us on Twitter at [SP_gateway](#) and find us on [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), and [LinkedIn](#). Subscribe to this podcast via your favourite podcast provider and leave a review.

Back next month.

See you then.