Jo Sharpe: Hello, and welcome to the social protection podcast. I'm your host, Joe Sharp.

Today, we're excited to present an interview with an eminence and long-term proponent of the UBI, Eduardo Suplicy. The Universal Basic Income is of course, the idea that states provide a basic income to all citizens, regardless of how much they earn, or whether they work. And Mr. Suplicy has been a leading voice on a UBI in Brazil for several decades, previously as a senator and now as State Congressman and in this interview, he reflects on his long term advocacy, and the prospects now for the UBI in Brazil and other countries.

Then stay tuned for my conversation with Juergen De Wispelaere talking about some of the most recent developments in the UBI field, including the impact of COVID and the proliferation of emergency basic income schemes on the UBI debate. Mr. Suplicy, welcome to the Social Protection Podcast.

Eduardo Suplicy: Good morning. I'm very glad to have the opportunity to speak with you and about how to build a civilized and just society, how to provide real freedom and dignity to every citizen in our nation. Thank you.

Jo Sharpe: Mr. Suplicy, you've been a proponent of UBI in Brazil for several decades, since the early 90s. Can you tell us about the journey you've been on with this issue and why it's been so important to you personally?

Eduardo Suplicy: I had always the interest in studying how to build a just and civilized society, if we really want to build a civilized society, we should take into account those values that what is important is not only to think about our personal progress, but we must think in the progress of society and, looking at the socioeconomic disparities. When I became a senator in Brazil for the first time, elected in 1990, I decided to present a
program to guarantee an income through a negative income tax. And this was, well received in the Brazilian Senate, then it went to the chamber of deputies and got a favorable report.

However, It was in August 1991 when I presented the proposal to several economists of the Workers Party, and one of them, José Márcio Camargo, told us ‘Well, Eduardo, to guarantee an income is a good thing, but we should start first, providing a guaranteed minimum income to those poor families who have children in school age’ because one of the main problems of Brazil at that time was that so many poor families having no enough money to provide food for their children, ask them Since 7, 8, 9, 10 years of age to start working and since they start working at the very early age, they don't have enough formation to have a good remuneration.

And in 1995, both, Governor Cristóvão Buarque elected by the Workers Party as well as, the mayor of Campinas, José Roberto Magalhães Teixeira, both started Guaranteed Minimum Income programs related to educational opportunities, and a little bit later we got also the Bolsa Alimentação food program.

And when president Lula was elected in 2002, in 2003 he started the Zero Hunger program, providing a food stamp of 50 reais only to buy food. But in October 2003, President Lula, take into account the recommendation of his team, decided to rationalize and unify, four programs that existed, income transfer programs, and created the Bolsa Família program that started to have a real success.

We had 3.5 million families, and this was growing until 2014. 2015 when more than 14 million and 200,000 families were getting the Bolsa Família, and during those years from 2003 to 2014, 15, the Gini Coefficient of Inequality diminished year after year, as well as the proportion of poor families in Brazil.

**Jo Sharpe:** It is a fascinating history. We actually made an episode a few years ago about the origins of Bolsa Família, speaking with some of the policymakers who were involved in those early days, which is also worth a listen. But for you, you say Bolsa Família didn't go quite far enough.

**Eduardo Suplicy:** Well, from 2016 to 2022, there was not such an attention to the problems of income disparities and poverty. And so I more
and more studying the about the basic income, the universal basic income and interacting with professors like Philippe van Parijs, Guy Standing, Claus Offe, and so many others that had created the Basic Income Earth Network. I became persuaded that even better than the Bolsa Familia program, a guaranteed minimum income related to education and health opportunities, would be to have an unconditional universal basic income.

And then I presented this proposal in December 2001, and the rapporteur said to me ‘Eduardo it's a good idea, but you need to, use it in a way, to conform to the law of fiscal responsibility for each expense, you need to have the necessary receipt. How about accepting a paragraph that says that the universal basic income unconditional will be, achieved step by step taking into account the executive criteria and starting with those mostly needs, such as the Bolsa Família program was doing. And I accepted, I consider this to be a commonsense proposal and, thanks to that paragraph the Brazilian Senate and then the Chamber of Deputies approved by all parties and in it January President Lula, in a very nice ceremony, sanctioned the law to instituting the universal basic income.

This was 20 years ago, but more and more, in all continents, so many nations, are debating, studying, and experiencing, the universe of basic income, and, well, recently I made a suggestion to President Lula for him to organize a working group to study with the best economists, philosophers, sociologists, the steps from the Bolsa Familia toward the universal basic income. So this working group, has been formed and, we are on the way to probably in a matter of a year or so, we'll be ready to present this proposal.

Jo Sharpe: Thank you. And as I say, really interesting to understand how the history and discourse around well-known Brazilian programs like Bolsa Família are linked with this history of the UBI. The key features of a universal basic income are of course that it's universal, all citizens or sometimes working age adults would receive it, whether they're rich or poor, whether they're working or not working.

But as you've just explained with the Brazil case, it's often seen as more feasible to target particular groups like children or poor and vulnerable households, or often a combination of both. Why should we instead provide universal benefits to rich and poor alike?
**Eduardo Suplicy:** Well, what are the main advantages of the universal basic income. First, we will eliminate any bureaucracy involved in having to know how much each person is earning in the formal market and in the informal market, for example, if a mother, takes care of the children of her neighbor and on the following day receives a certain amount of money, you don't need to declare that you will also eliminate any stigma or, or sense of shame of having to say, I receive only that amount and that's why I need this compliment of income.

You will also, eliminate the dependency phenomena that occurs when you do have a program that says, if you don't receive such an amount per month or per year, then you will have the right to receive this much. And the person is thinking about, will I accept or not a work that will give me this amount of money.

If I accept this and receive this amount and then the government, will take part of what I was receiving in that social program, then I may quit and enter in the dependency or unemployment trap. But if everyone is starting from the basic income on, we will always have the incentive for progress.

**Jo Sharpe:** So in Brazil, the small municipality of Maricá, which is located within the state of Rio de Janeiro has been at the forefront of a number of social experiments, including by establishing a Citizen’s Basic Income, which reaches a large part of the population.

This is all part of what’s called a solidarity economy approach. Marica also has a community bank, which provides zero interest loans to citizens. It has its own local digital currency, the Mumbuca. Could you tell us a little bit more about this experience and whether you think it has succeeded?

**Eduardo Suplicy:** It was December 2015, I gave a lecture here in São Paulo, and the mayor of Maricá, Washington Quaquá, today a federal deputy, once I explained the universal basic income, he said, I want to put the Universal Basic into practice in Maricá and he started step by step in January 2016, each family that was receiving the Bolsa Família got ten mumbucas, or reais, more per month, in January 2017, in addition to the Bolsa Familia program, they also got 20 mumbucas or reais per month. And in 2019, all families that were registered in the so called *Cadastro Único*, all families that got until three minimum wages, each person started to receive a basic income of 130 mumbucas or reais per month.
Last election a new Workers Party mayor came in, and he was reelected, with 88 percent of the votes in 2018, and it so happened that last November 2023, 93,000 people, almost half of the population of Maricá, started to receive 130 reais per month. So today, in Maricá, about half of the inhabitants, are receiving a basic income of 230 mumbucas or rea per month, with very positive results in terms of having a situation of almost full employment and no more persons living in the streets, so it's a very important experience.

**Jo Sharpe:** Maricá is a really interesting case, this citizen's basic income and a range of other social programs financed by a sovereign wealth fund from oil revenues. And as you were just saying, is provided to households earning less than three times Brazil's minimum monthly income. What do you think we can learn from other UBI trials and experiments in other countries?

**Eduardo Suplicy:** Well, the most successful experience is that of Alaska. In the early 60s, the mayor of a fisherman village, such as we do have so many in Brazil, observed that a huge amount of wealth was coming out from that village in the form of fish, but many people were still poor. So he mentioned to his citizens ‘Let us have a 3 percent tax on the value of fish to build a fund that will pertain to all’. Another tax, I'm against it. He had, many barriers it took, five years for him to persuade the community. Once it was approved did so well that ten years later, he became the governor of the state of Alaska, Jay Hammond, that I happen to know personally.

And Alaska in the 70s had discovered a huge amount of oil in the north, in the Prudhoe Bay, and that Governor Jay Hammond told ‘we need to think not only in our generation, but in the future generation because oil is a nonrenewable resource. So let us separate at least twenty five percent of the royalties coming out from the exploitation of oil to build a fund that will pertain to all’. And he wanted everyone to debate and discuss it.

And 76,000 people said yes, 38,000 people said no. Two to one, it won. And then 25 percent of the royalties coming out from the exploitation of oil in North Alaska, started to be invested in the Alaska Permanent Fund, contributing to diversify the economy, US stocks, international stocks, including 200 companies from Brazil and real estate investments. And value of the Alaska Permanent Fund evolved from, $1 billion in 1982 to
today around $80 billion, and each person living in Alaska for a year or more, in the early eighties, you would be receiving each year 300, 400,500. And so more and more in 2022 was $3,284 per capita, which were the consequence. In 1980, Alaska the most qual of the 50 American states. Today, Alaska, together with Utah, both with an efficient of point 43 are the most equal of the 50 American states. And it is considered to be political suicide to propose the end of the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend System. So, it's a very successful experience.

**Jo Sharpe:** Earlier this year, we featured an episode on social protection in two small Pacific Island countries, Fiji and Kiribati. During that episode, I was really struck by the parallels between Kiribati and Maricá and Alaska, two examples you’ve just spoken about. Kiribati also has a sovereign wealth fund from phosphate mining in this case. And a few years ago, introduced new social protection programs that cover a lot of the population, including an unemployment benefit that reaches a substantial part of the working age population – given that unemployment is high in Kiribati, the formal sector economy is small. Also for senior citizens, it's a disability benefit. So going from very little social protection to much more in only a few years.

And similarly fueled by this idea of the mining revenues being a public good and the programs representing a social dividend rather than a welfare payment as we might think about it in some other context. So of course, it helps if you have a natural resource to draw on, and the political will to use it in this particular way.

Where else have you looked at UBI's or quasi UBI's in the world?

**Eduardo Suplicy:** Well, I have also visited, the rural villages of Kenya to see the experience of paying a modest Universal basic income for all adults, men and women in the rural areas of Kenya.

And I was very impressed, for example, one of the main results was the diminishing in the violence against women, 51 percent less after the application of the universal basic income. Also the sexual violence against women diminished 66 percent after the two year experience there.
So, in the United States there are about 100 cities where they are, doing experiences of basic income. Also in India, in Madhya Pradesh, there was some successful experiences conducted by Professor Guy Standing.

Also, there were a two year experience of a basic income in Finland that, uh, was considered to be positive. Also in Barcelona, and some places in Germany and, in Canada, in the United States. And I believe, there is a recent report from South Africa, perhaps you have seen this week, after the recent elections that happened there, the main political parties have agreed to propose, universal basic income for South Africa that might happen in the next two years.

**Jo Sharpe:** Yes, I understand that the ANC party made an election commitment to turn what was a COVID era social distress relief grant into a payment for all South Africans aged between 18 and 59. I think I saw that the ANC has formed a coalition government, so this will be one to watch. And of course, South Africa is a country that takes a rights-based approach to social protection, already has quite a broad-based system. South Korea is another country that has also had a UBI feature in recent elections, as I understand it.

**Eduardo Suplicy:** So, last August, I was in South Korea in the International Congress of BIEN. And there, at the conclusion of the BIEN Congress, there was a conversation about which will be the country, the nation in the world, that will be the first one to have a universal basic income. And South Korea might be one because, in the last presidential election, the candidate was the second place, he had a compromise to institute a universal basic income in South Korea. And he told us that he will continue to struggle for it in the next election.

So, I am trying to persuade President Lula, our president today again, that he might introduce gradually the citizens basic income. As I told you, he accepted my proposal to create a working group to study which we are going to be the steps to realize this objective to introduce a universal basic income so as to provide real freedom and dignity to all human beings.

**Jo Sharpe:** So maybe Brazil will end up being the first country to have a universal basic income.
Eduardo Suplicy: Yes. And now South Africa and, more and more persons in the world are talking about the universal basic income. The advantages of the basic income. Let me tell you a few, personalities, for example, when in South Africa, they had the commemoration of the 100 years of President Nelson Mandela. In the stadium of Johannesburg, President Barack Obama gave a beautiful talk, and at a certain time he said, more and more with the advance of of the artificial intelligence and so on, more and more, we will need to introduce new concepts such as the universal basic income.

Jo Sharpe: Mr. Suplicy, you’re now a state congressman. And as you explained earlier, you’re still working towards the dream of the UBI, including by establishing a new working group to progress the idea. How are you planning to approach this challenge now?

Eduardo Suplicy: I feel engaged in this purpose, in general, I am invited two, three, four, five times a week to give lectures everywhere, about a citizen's basic income. More and more, the idea is being accepted by all kinds of groups in, labor unions or in the universities, in the faculties, in all kinds of auditoriums that I have been. And I believe that, it's an idea that is getting, more success, approval. I want to see the application of the universal basic income during my life. That's my appeal to God.

Jo Sharpe: Eduardo Suplicy, it has been such a pleasure to hear all about your long history and deep engagement with the UBI. So, thank you very much for joining me on the social protection podcast today.

Eduardo Suplicy: Well, thank you very much, Joanne Sharpe. It has been a pleasure to talk with you.

Jo Sharpe: Before we go, we like to end each episode with some quick wins. We ask a guest to bring in some recommendations for research news or events that have sparked their interest and that we think you should know more about.

Joining us for quick wins today is Jurgen De Wispelaere, who is IPR policy fellow at the university of Bath and research coordinator for the Basic Income Earth Network. Welcome back to the podcast, Jurgen.
Jurgen De Wispelaere: Thanks Jo. Thanks very much for having me. It's great to see you again after two years.

Jo Sharpe: That's right. So we had you on the show a couple of years back with Francesca Bastagli, and we explored the universal basic income, UBIs.

So just before we get to your quick wins, in the main interview, we've just heard from Eduardo Suplicy, who is of course a bit of an eminence in the UBI field. And I think someone that you know as well.

Jurgen De Wispelaere: I do indeed. I think I've known Eduardo for about 25 years. He's an absolute phenomenon. So, in Brazil, in terms of popularity, the Brazilian basic income debate, this is like Taylor Swift, right? You've just interviewed. He's the one who turned what used to be the Basic Income European Network into the Basic Income Earth Network. So, he effectively turned the European network into a global network. So yeah, this is a big name in the field.

Jo Sharpe: That's fantastic. And he told us that he sometimes listens to our podcast. So, we were particularly thrilled about that. He raised a couple of points in his interview that I thought I would also ask you about as we go along

You're the editor of a special edition of the international social security review, on the emergency basic income titled ‘EBI: opportunity or distraction’. So, we've just been talking all about UBIs, what are EBIs and how do they relate to that more familiar universal basic income concept today.

Jurgen De Wispelaere: So, EBI is a sort of a, it's an idea that's been around for quite a while but became really big during the pandemic. Right. So, we know universal basic incomes, UBI's as individual, unconditional, universal, but also permanent. They're in a sense all-purpose cash schemes, right? There's no specific objective to them. EBI's are different in two ways. One, they are temporary. They're really linked to the crisis. And two, because of that, they have a very strict objective. So, they're not all-purpose cash. They're sort of, partly compensation for people being locked out of income opportunities, and to some extent also incentive schemes for people to abide by lockdown Restrictions, if you like, right?
So, the background to this special issue in the sense was that within the basic income community, there's two very, very different views and quite a bit of tension. So, there's the people who think that EBIs are a bit of a con game. They look like basic income, but they're not really precisely because they miss out on this permanent feature.

And so, these are the people who basically think we shouldn't waste any time on them. That's a different kind of beast, let's just focus on UBIs. And then there's the people who basically think, hold on, we have this opportunity during the pandemic, governments are interested, policy actors are interested, let's look at them as steppingstones and we embrace them, and then we build on from that.

**Jo Sharpe:** As you say, during the pandemic, we saw a lot of new and expanding social protection programs, including those that you describe as EBIs in this edition. You mentioned a number of regions, you've got papers from Latin America and East Asia, as well as advanced economies like the US, UK, and Australia. Was there a link between how well established existing systems were and the establishment of some of these basic income schemes?

**Jurgen De Wispelaere:** Yes, absolutely. So, there's a lot of research out there now basically thinking of the pandemic as effectively stress testing or social security systems, right? And one of the arguments that keeps popping up in several of the papers in our special issue is that EBI itself actually operates best when it's combined with sort of universal social protection mechanisms. And it's very easy to understand this if you think about it. During a pandemic, the government suddenly needs to find a way to distribute cash as widely as possible, as fast as possible.

But it is very much dependent on there being implementation mechanisms already in place, that also have very broad coverage. So, you would expect that an emergency basic income functions best, when there is something like universal social protection system that's already operating and the two linked together.

But then we have a bit of a paradox because of the countries that we cover, in our special issue, they're the countries precisely that don't necessarily have these universal social protection systems in place. So the countries that are mostly been operating with EBI type of schemes, are the ones that
have much more residual social protection, much more fragmented, or very little of it really, very ungenerous, right?

So on the one hand, emergency risk income needs universal social protection to really, really do its thing. On the other hand, it's actually where there are the biggest gaps that people are immediately jumping to it. So that's very much a puzzle that we need to start looking into a lot more.

Jo Sharpe: One of the papers in your special edition talks about the experience of the Brazilian municipality of Maricá. And we've also just talked about that with, Mr. Suplicy in the first interview. In your paper or in the paper that's in the special edition, you give it as an interesting example of how UBI's and EBI's can be mutually reinforcing. What was different or interesting about the Maricá case and especially through the period of the pandemic?

Jurgen De Wispelaere: So, during the pandemic, what was fascinating about the Maricá case was the fact that it already had a basic income in place when the pandemic hit. That was the key feature. And then because of that, it was able to very, very fast, as in a matter of two, three days, they were able to upgrade the level. So what we call in the paper dial up dial down model. So, what you have is you have a scheme like a basic income. If a crisis hit you dial it up very, very fast because there's no sort of administrative blockages and political blockages. And then as the crisis sort of turns back to normal, if you like, you can dial it down.

Very interestingly in Maricá, they actually dialed it down, but not to the same level as before. So that actually means they used the crisis momentum also to consolidate the program and expand the program and so on so forth. And that's really going on right now. Now, the key insight here for us is that It's very different to trying to introduce a basic income in the middle of crisis, as opposed to a basic income that already exists and then the crisis really helps consolidate it. To us, that's the really key feature here. And Maricá seems to be an excellent example.

So what did you conclude? What does the flowering of these kinds of EBI policies and programs during the pandemic mean for the future of UBIs and what did you come down on?

Jo Sharpe: Was it, are they opportunities or distractions after all?
**Jurgen De Wispelaere:** That is the core question we started out with. And, you know, as any proper researcher, the answer, of course, is going to be maybe, it's somewhere in the middle. Ultimately, this really comes down to politics, right?

So one of the really interesting things we found in our special issues, so to speak is the fact that there's a lot of political premiums for governments and political actors to instituting emergency basic income.

So, one of the interesting papers we have in our special issue is by Young Jun Choi of Yonsei University and Ugo Gentilini of the World Bank, and two coauthors, and they look at five East Asia countries, right? So, they look at the different types of EBI type of schemes. They look at three sort of democratic competitive countries, right, where you have competitive elections. So, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. And then they have two more sort of autocratic countries, Singapore and Hong Kong.

And interestingly, what they basically find is that both of these, in both very different electoral political system, you get a political premium from basic income, whether it's in term of the governing party winning its electoral favor, or whether it's in the more autocratic side, whether it's about political legitimacy, avoiding protests, right? At the same time, when you look at other cases, it's very clear that On the political side, governments are very reluctant to fully embrace this basic income idea. A lot of the EBI's, they're either one off or they repeat, but each time they need to be sort of confirmed, each of these repetitions.

Sometimes each of the next payments are less generous. There's attempts to introduce conditionality as soon as possible, even before the end of the pandemic, these programs were discontinued. And actually, these programs were often blamed after the fact for labor shortage and inflation and cost of living crisis.

So the big lesson here is that the sort of traditional politics of, we need to sort of restrict payments, make them conditional, be very targeted, etc. it's very, very hard to overcome. And to the extent that a pandemic, a crisis opens an opportunity, it's very temporary. So the moment the crisis finishes, so does the window of opportunity. And the big lesson there for basic income is that we need to be very careful of thinking that crisis is going to be the thing that pushes forward our policy, so to speak.
Jo Sharpe: If crisis or, you know, something like the COVID crisis isn't necessarily a reliable driver of lasting change, what do you think it would take to achieve a true UBI? What might be the kind of drivers or societal issues that, that perhaps shift us in that direction?

Jurgen De Wispelaere: I think one of the really, really interesting things here is to distinguish between push factors and pull factors. People often sort of, focus on the pull factor. So, they think, Oh, there's crisis. So that's going to create its own demand, and that immediately going to sort of suck in the goodwill to implement the basic income.

And My problem is that I think all the evidence shows that that's not necessarily going to happen. So, then you have to focus on the push factors. So, the push factors are your box standard political constituency building, coalition building. This is all the groundwork that has to be done. This is about making sure that the general public is aware of what a basic income is that we sort of already create a firm basis of support. We need to make sure that the stakeholders are sort of already aligned. We need to do a lot of work on, you know, what a basic income scheme actually looks like, how that is funded, how will that be implemented, and those are not easy questions. So, one of the good things about the experiments, for example, is that they teach us a lot of how you implement this. And this is groundwork that needs to be done.

So, once we have all this push work done, so to speak, we can then wait for a pull to come up and open a window of opportunity. And so the way I see this is sort of a fairly complicated mix of, yes, crisis at some point will be handy, but basically when a lot of the groundwork is already done and we're not there yet.

Jo Sharpe: Something I'm really interested in is how these pilots are feeding also into social protection debates. You know, the pilots are looking at things like conditionality, do these schemes disincentivize work and so on. And all of this should of course be informing the way we think about social protection more broadly.

Jurgen De Wispelaere: I mean, interesting thing about that is that no one seems to care that say, for example, a lot of these workfare proposals that have been around for 20 years, that they don't work. Like as in, people just ignore the evidence that we have on a lot of these highly conditional
targeted policies, politicians literally basically say, look, no matter what we have to have conditionality and the fact that it pushes people into poverty that pushes people into homelessness and so on and so forth, social exclusion. That doesn't seem to matter, the fact that it's really expensive to implement these programs, that doesn't seem to matter, but basic income is the one that has to have all the evidence up front. One of the eternal frustrations within the basic income community is that we're the ones who always have to do the pilots and the experiments. Any other policy can just be done.

And I think that really speaks to the fact of how threatening something like a basic income is to the standard idea of the welfare state, you know? Which kind of goes back to the point I made which is that, as soon as the crisis was finished, everything went back to normal and, politics really, really does not want to move beyond that, right.

**Jo Sharpe:** So in the first interview we've heard in this episode, we did have some fun speculating about which country might be the first to implement a broad based UBI policy. Mr. Suplicy mentioned South Africa, South Korea, and Brazil as possible contenders. I'm interested in how you see that. Where do you see the most progress being made or maybe even the kind of the bright spots for UBI implementation globally.

**Jurgen De Wispelaere:** Yes, so that is a fun question, of course. I mean, to me, sort of guessing which country will be the first is like a game of whack a mole, right?

So it's literally, you go back to, say, the past 25 years of the debate. At some point, it was the Netherlands. Then it was Finland. Then it was Catalonia. We've actually had South Africa before. We've had Brazil before. Brazil was going to be the first to implement. We've had Korea before. Now the United States, a lot of experiments happening, at various levels. So, everyone, as soon as something happens, people go quite heavy into it thinking that this will be the first country to go. My take on that is that we'll see when it happens. I mean, I've seen it happen too many times going up and down to make any key predictions.

Brazil, I think, is still a very, very interesting case. And mainly because, as I mentioned in one of the previous responses, you have these municipalities that are actually implementing something that is close to a basic income.
And that is actual policy. This is not pilots. This is policy. This is not going anywhere. Maricá is consolidating, it's expanding to other municipalities, and there are actual genuine conversation and a lot of interest to upscale this to the federal level. That's still a long game, right? We need to be very, very careful, but what we have there is a solid foundation. So, if I'm forced to put my money on a country, I put it on Brazil.

**Jo Sharpe:** The UBI concept has of course been around for a long time, and it's interesting, isn't it, to see how it gets invoked to respond to a range of problems. Perhaps the most recent iteration has been around the changing nature of work, that work is becoming more precarious. AI and robots are coming for our jobs.

And so, you see people like Elon Musk and those in the tech community pitching UBIs as a response. What's your view of the way this argument gets made?

**Jurgen De Wispelaere:** So I think the AI automation angle is complicated and controversial within the basic income debate. For example, before AI came about, we were actually talking about the care agenda. There was quite a few years where we were really taking very seriously problems around social care, gender inequality, and all that, and basic income became a big part of that. Suddenly, AI comes up, and we stop talking about the care agenda. So AI, in some sense, has literally sucked the air out of the room of many other interesting debates. So that's one thing I will say, which I find very, very unfortunate.

Of course, AI is a reality. I think it's still very, very much an open question where that effectively will lead us. We still really do not know where that will take us, how society will adapt, how labor markets will adapt, how social protection systems will adapt. And basic income of course is mooted there because the key issue is technological unemployment, and basic income of course is money that you get outside of work and in work. And so it seems to bypass that whole problem.

My worry about that, I would still like to see a very clear model of how this is supposed to look. And my big, big concern within the AI debate is that a lot of the people proposing this seem to be perfectly okay with sort of having like a bottom layer of society that somehow survives on the basic incomes. While we're sort of dismantling a lot of the other social protection
systems, and AI is somehow giving the rest of the people freedom. And of course it's going to earn, massive chunk of money for the people at the top. The sort of model that's emerging out of that is certainly not the model that myself and other progressive people interested in the sort of the power of basic income, the transformational power of basic income.

So, if basic income is supposed to be a solution to AI, it's going to be part of a bigger set of policies and measures. And we're not talking about those yet, right? So, there's AI as the problem, basic income as the solution, but that in itself doesn't match up. And we need to have a clear sense that yes, basic income will possibly and hopefully seriously do some good work there. But we need to be very, very careful we're not sort of falling off the cliff of a society of even more inequality and more uncertainty and people kind of left out there with the scraps.

Because that's the other slightly weird assumption, which is that AI is freeing us up from work. So, we have the basic income and then we can do whatever we want to do. The only problem is whatever we want to do for most people is have a proper job. And that's the one thing that we're not going to have. And it's not clear to me that that vision is such a bright future. You know what I mean?

Jo Sharpe: Yeah, it's a, it's a good question. And for those who are interested in how the UBI debates, um, intersect with a range of questions around work, the interview that you took part in a few years back with Francesca Bastagli really goes into some of that. Particularly I recall that interesting discussion we had about how UBIs could be considered to value other forms of work and remunerated work like care work, volunteer work, and some of those things.

So that's also worth a listen. Jurgen, thank you so much again for joining me on the social protection podcast today.

Jurgen De Wispelaere: And thanks very much, Jo. It was an absolute pleasure

Jo Sharpe: And thank you for listening to the Social Protection Podcast brought to you by socialprotection.org. You can find all of our episodes on the socialprotection.org website and on your favorite podcast platforms. And be sure to subscribe and leave a review.