

2018 BIEN Congress in Finland

Basic Income and the New Universalism: Rethinking the Welfare State in the 21st Century

A joint proposal by BIEN Finland (Perustuloverkosto) and the University of Tampere (UTA) to hold the next BIEN Congress in Finland.

More information and contact info:

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BACKGROUND

In the 20th century the welfare states were successful in reducing poverty, building trust between different socio-economic groups and providing more equal opportunities for all. Today, welfare state structures reflect the societies of the past rather than those of the future. Welfare state institutions have not been able to regenerate in line with changed labour market conditions and lifestyles, and are tightly intertwined with unsustainable economic structures at local and global levels. The basic income proposal offers a way out of the current conundrum with a prospect of rethinking and reinvigorating the ambitions of the welfare state.

Societal reforms such as a basic income require social vision and political will, but also a sober evaluation of the expected effects and challenges to be overcome. Recent years have seen an exponential increase in media and policy around the basic income idea, followed by concrete initiatives to study basic income design and implementation across the world.

The congress plans to build on this growing interest in basic income by inviting activists, stakeholders, policymakers, students and researchers to discuss the promises of the basic income against the background of the need for a “new universalism”. The proposed theme for our conference is: *Basic Income and the New Universalism: Rethinking the Welfare State in the 21st Century*.

The congress will focus on three main streams.

- 1) Knowledge and evidence: what do we know about how basic income really works, and how do we advance our understanding of the basic income model?

- 2) Policy design and implementation: how does basic income interact with existing (welfare state) policies and institutions, and which social and policy changes are needed to make basic income work in practice?
- 3) Politics: what are the challenges for pushing basic income onto the policy agenda, and how can these be overcome?

These three streams encompass a large variety of specific topics to be covered in presentations and discussions. Examples include: How does an unconditional basic income change the nature and form of current welfare state institutions and regimes? How will a well-functioning basic income scheme interact with existing policies? What are the most promising avenues to institute a basic income? What can we learn from planned and ongoing pilot schemes about basic income? How can universalism be extended to larger regional and global areas, and what challenges does this pose for the basic income idea?

Throughout the congress, we aim to accommodate a wide range of perspectives and approaches and we will employ different presentation formats to further genuine debate and discussion. As the basic income idea is gaining popularity in Finland and elsewhere, we expect strong contributions from academic researchers, citizen activists, policy experts and decision-makers as well as significant public attention and media interest in our event.

PRACTICALITIES

Venue:

The congress will be held at the University of Tampere (UTA) and several venues within walking distance.

Tampere is a city of about 225 000 inhabitants located in Southern Finland, 172 kilometres from the capital Helsinki. There are regular train and bus connections from Helsinki-Vantaa airport and from Helsinki city centre. Tampere also has its own airport with many international connections.

UTA is the leading university in social sciences and has a long experience and good reputation in organising international conferences. The university has confirmed its willingness to supply us with the required conference facilities. We are aiming for 200-300 participants in total, which is easily accommodated by the university facilities.

Possible Dates:

We have two dates in mind: 18-19 or 25-26 August 2018

Organising committee:

The lead organisers are BIEN Finland (Basic Income Network) and the School of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Tampere. In addition we will cooperate with the Research Department of KELA (The Social Insurance Institution) and the Basic

Income Experiment Consortium. The lead organisers have a track record of collaborating in projects and putting together public events.

Other possible partners include: Finnish Centre for Pensions, Social Policy Association in Finland, Finnish Society for Political Economy Research, LabourNet (The Finnish Doctoral Program on Labour and Welfare Studies).

The organising team include:

- BIEN Finland: Simo Ruottinen, Markku Ikkala, Jukka Peltokoski, Petri Flander.
- Academics: Pertti Koistinen, Johanna Perkiö, Jurgen De Wispelaere, Jorma Kalela, Jan Otto Andersson, Jouko Kajanoja.
- Basic Income Experiment Consortium: Olli Kangas and others
- Board of advisors from civil society, policy and academia TBA

Resources and funding support:

In addition to supplying conference facilities, the School of Social Sciences and Humanities has made a promise to contribute to the BIEN2018 Congress financially and offer further conference assistance. The university will also be able to supply cheap accommodation facilities.

We have also been in touch with various interest groups and funders, and received a principled green light for cooperation. If it is agreed BIEN2018 Congress will be held in Finland, we will immediately start negotiating with relevant actors and interest groups on financing, conference organisation, conference venue, accommodation, etc.

BIEN Finland has many local contacts in Tampere and will organise activist/political sessions attracting broader audiences and journalists, as well as an enjoyable evening program. We can easily find volunteers among the university students and activists of BIEN Finland's network to ensure that the conference runs well.

WHY FINLAND AS THE NEXT CONGRESS VENUE?

Finland is an interesting site for the BIEN 2018 congress for several reasons.

- 4) Finland belongs to the family of Nordic countries, which have a long tradition and commitment to universalistic ideas in social and welfare policies. The Nordic countries are often considered the birthplace of the universal welfare state. This would be the first time a BIEN Congress is held in one of the Nordic countries and we look forward to collaborating with our colleagues in Denmark, Sweden and Norway to make this a very successful event. As has become tradition for BIEN congresses, we propose to host a “local day” focused on basic income in the Nordic welfare state before the official congress, offering a forum for activists and policy makers in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland to exchange their experiences.
- 5) The idea of basic income has featured in Finnish academic and political discussion at regular intervals already since the 1970’s, and in 2012 Finnish basic income activists launched Initiative which didn’t gather sufficient votes but produced a lot of media

attention. In recent years the basic income idea is regularly discussed in public opinion and policy discussions, often promoted by BIEN Finland.

- 6) Basic income is also a significant subject of academic interest in Finland, and especially at the University of Tampere (UTA). UTA hosted the first basic income course for social policy students and several PhD on basic income are ongoing or have been completed within the same department. UTA is also a partner in the Basic Income Experiment Consortium. The School of Social Sciences and Humanities plans to organise a special expert workshop focused on basic income research challenges as part of the BIEN Congress.
- 7) Most importantly, Finland occupies a unique place of being the first country to plan a nation-wide basic income experiment. The Finnish government has committed to a large field experiment that will start in January 2017 and run for two years. The congress would happen at a time when we are already expecting preliminary results and this makes for a particularly timely event. While other experiments are also being prepared, none are as advanced as Finland.