

Basic income and homelessness: improving the situation of the least advantaged?

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Definition of basic income

Basic income (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017)

- universal
- obligation-free
- individual

Field of interest

Basic income \Rightarrow homelessness (Fischer 2023; Bregman 2018; Westbrook 2023)

Research question

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How does a basic income introduction affect the living situation of homeless individuals?

- case analysis for Germany

Maximin distribution rule

Difference principle

“(T)he social order is not to establish and secure the more attractive prospects of those better off unless doing so is **to the advantage of those less fortunate** (Rawls 1999, p. 65).”

⇒ identify the least advantaged person to make ordinal judgments between different states of society (Rawls 1999, p. 79)

Real libertarianism

Opportunities

“(A)ccess to the means for doing what one might want to do”
(Van Parijs 1997, p. 5).

⇒ neutrality

- opportunity = **income** iff monetary society (Van Parijs 1997, pp. 41-42)

Liberal egalitarianism

Index of social goods (Rawls 1999, pp. 79-83, 155–156)

- income
- wealth
- **self-respect**

Self-respect (Birnbaum 2012; Festl 2013; Fukuma 2017; McKinnon 2003; Neuhäuser 2018)

- individual success
 - communal recognition
- ⇒ perceiving oneself as an equal human being

Republicanism

Non-domination

“(B)eing empowered against [...] control on the part of others”
(Pettit 2007, p. 4) = free from arbitrary interference (Casassas &
De Wispelaere 2016, p. 285; Raventós 2007, pp. 68-69)

- vertically: by the state
- horizontally: by fellow citizens

⇒ maximin distribution of **power**

Homelessness

Definition

“(H)omelessness should be understood as relating to living in severely inadequate housing *due* to a lack of access to minimally adequate housing” (Amore 2013, p. 228).

- 1 people without accommodation
- 2 people living in temporary or crisis accommodation
- 3 people living in severely inadequate and/or insecure accommodation

Homelessness in Germany (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales 2022, pp. 9, 12; Brüchmann et al. 2022, p. 11; Bösing 2021)

- 262600 homeless individuals in 2022 (category 1 and 2)
- most prevalent in metropolitan regions
- physical and mental problems, but 38 percent without health insurance

Homelessness in Germany II (Sonnenberg 2021, pp. 40-48; Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales 2022, pp. 9-10)

- two third male, one third female, two percent diverse
- more families and minors in shelters, more men than women on the streets, more women than men with acquaintances
- more non-German residents in shelters, more German citizens on the streets, and with acquaintances

Risk factors (Szczepanek 2021, pp. 81-84; Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales 2022)

- 1 rental arrears
- 2 bureaucracy
- 3 housing market
- 4 moving or migrating
- 5 psychological problems
- 6 missing social net

Exit barriers (Sonnenberg 2021, pp. 54-71)

- 1 social welfare structure
- 2 bureaucracy
- 3 behavioral adaption

Current social assistance (Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2023a,b; Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales 2023)

- current system: *Bürgergeld* = 502 euros/month
 - legal requirements: at least 15 years old, living legally in Germany, fit for employment, income below minimum subsistence level
 - administrative requirements: **personal identification**, registered address, bank account
 - sanctions up to 30 percent
- ⇒ basic income as replacement for *Bürgergeld*

The least advantaged

Rawls (1999, p. 83): “To fix ideas, let us single out the least advantaged [...] with the relevant measures based on **social primary goods.**”

- 1 income
- 2 self-respect
- 3 power

Effects of basic income on opportunity I

35 percent of homeless individuals without income (Brüchmann et al. 2022, pp. 47-51)

- salient \Rightarrow reduce income loss due to missing information
- no means-test \Rightarrow reduce income loss due to complexity
- unconditional \Rightarrow foreclose income reduction due to sanctions
- individual \Rightarrow less financial dependence resulting from cohabiting

Effects of basic income on opportunity II

- **but** 502 euros not enough to prevent eviction due to rental arrears in metropolitan areas
- alternative: 60 percent of median income (1250 euros/month) (Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) 2023)
- but identification necessary to prevent double payments
- monthly amount at once is risky if it cannot be secured by a bank account
- what about homeless individuals without ID and illegal non-German residents?

Effects of basic income on self-respect

No feeling of community, perceived as financial burden, and subject to prejudice (Hövermann et al. 2015; Davidov et al. 2011, p. 488)

- no means-test \Rightarrow stigma relieving
- less financial dependency \Rightarrow enabling choice of self-respect enhancing community (Fischer 2023)
- eligibility: residence-based, citizenship-based (Löffler 2021)
- residence-based: coverage problem in case of missing identification
- citizenship-based: dual tier society among homelessness

Effects of basic income on power

Horizontal: experience of violence (60 percent), and sexual violence (on third of women), vertical: one third has asked for support unsuccessfully (Szczepanek 2021, pp. 55-57; Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales 2022, pp. 10, 40–42)

- does not affect prejudice, possible increase
- emancipates women \Rightarrow enables separation without loss of accommodation
- unconditional \Rightarrow decreases power inequality between homeless and public institutions
- what about minors?

Effects on opportunity, self-respect, and power

Homeless individuals wish for access to housing, a simplified bureaucracy, and the reestablishment of their human dignity (Szczepanek 2021, pp. 86-87).

- opportunity increases if basic income amount is sufficient
- autonomy increases, enabling choice of self-respect enhancing community, stigma relieving (Fischer 2023)
- more power facing state bureaucracy, but violence by fellow residents might persist or even increase

Conclusion

Relevance of discussing basic income effects on the least advantaged apart from the labor market!

- preventing and exiting homelessness depends on basic income amount
- administrative obstacles to improving situation of homeless individuals in terms of income
- illegal non-German residents and minors still vulnerable
- basic income relieves stigma and promotes autonomy, enhancing self-respect

Future research

Necessity of empirical research

- interview study with homeless individuals with different socio-demographic backgrounds
- interview study with bureaucrats and social workers discussing administrative issues
- experimental study introducing a basic income for homeless individuals like Bregman (2018) and Westbrook (2023)

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Thank you for your attention!
I am happy to hear your questions and
comments

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