

International Public Policy Forum
Written Debates – Round of 16

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Affirmative Constructive on the topic:
Resolved: Governments should provide a universal basic income.

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On our honor, we pledge that we have received no unauthorized assistance on this work.

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INTRODUCTION

The world is changing rapidly and facing unprecedented challenges. As global poverty persists, new advancements in artificial intelligence threaten traditional jobs and economic security. In this context, we've seen heightened interest in progressive policies that would support people in this new economic order. One policy that has gained attention is a "universal basic income" (UBI). News pundits, politicians, and renowned economists have all touted the benefits of this policy. However, these advocacies often lack an investigation of the broader social dynamics operating behind the scenes, namely gender inequality and masculine power structures. This affirmative essay will fill that void by offering a feminist analysis of the political economy, illuminating the historically gendered conceptions of work and wealth, and exposing problems affecting women in these economic conditions. In this framework, we advocate for a universal basic income informed through an ethic of care. Like other advocates, we believe government provided UBIs are affordable, effective, and can lead to economic growth. However, our case focuses on the traditionally ignored benefits of a UBI: its ability to reduce domestic violence, reverse stigmatizing welfare programs, and promote a just concept of work that not only promotes gender equality but alleviates economic burdens affecting everyone.

DEFINING TERMS AND BURDENS

To discuss the resolution properly, the affirmative will define key terms and make three observations. First, the resolution asks what "governments" *should* do, which depends on what governments *can* do. There are many levels of government, including local, provincial, and national entities that could provide a UBI, each with its own mechanisms. For example, cities in California have provided a limited basic income and Alaska has a permanent program that provides citizens with a regular dividend (Kuang; Coren). Norway, known for its welfare

provisions, has also experimented with universal cash payments. John Crowley and Iulia Sevciuc, in their report to UNESCO, highlight the way UBI pilot programs have been adopted by both industrialized countries (e.g., Canada, Finland, Germany, and the US) as well as developing countries (e.g., Kenya, India, Mongolia, and Namibia). In each situation, the UBI is implemented based on the needs and capabilities of that government. In this context, the affirmative defends tailored, culturally specific, and development-adjusted programs.

Second, while all “universal basic income” programs aim to reduce poverty and increase the quality of life among citizens, models differ in their sources of funding, amounts distributed, and other dimensions (World Bank). In most contexts, a basic income would be progressive and non-inflationary because it would be financed by a variety of taxation schemes appropriate for each government’s goals. For example, according to Dr. Fouksman, a professor in public policy, a “data tax” could finance a UBI by taxing the revenue large tech companies generate by collecting and selling personal data. Another method to fund the UBI could be a “carbon tax,” a tax levied on carbon emissions, which could reduce the Gini coefficient by six percent and slash poverty while reducing global carbon emissions (Paul). Basic incomes stabilize and complement existing assistance programs, provide transitional relief, and eliminate unnecessary stigma surrounding existing welfare. A properly implemented UBI would avoid trading off with other social services and would be inclusive toward all of society.

Next, the “universal” nature of the program is the most efficient and effective method of implementing basic income schemes. Traditional “means-tested” programs are mired with issues. Firstly, targeting can quickly cause resentment and stigma, thus fracturing communities and detracting from overall prosperity (Kidd and Wylde 29-30). Furthermore, means-testing may reduce the political viability and longevity of policies (Banjree et. al). Targeting systems would

also reproduce existing domestic disparities. Programs that target impoverished households may fail to account for “unequal distribution of resources within households and redistribution of resources across them” (Banerjee et. al).

Finally, a UBI can also take distinct forms in different historical and ideological contexts (Bidadanure 482). This essay’s specific ideology prioritizes feminism and is grounded in an “ethic of care.” A *feminist* basic income guarantees support for all people, not just adults, and is “derived from a feminist theory of justice” (Zelleke 28). Thus, the affirmative defends a basic income that does not require ending other social services and would be large enough to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. A basic income under a feminist lens frames an individual’s role as a caretaker and citizen, not as an economic unit. A feminist UBI empowers everyone, especially those who have been traditionally marginalized by society.

GENDER AS A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

Status quo debates on a UBI’s desirability primarily occur within limited parameters, using traditional economic theories that focus only on growth and macroeconomics. Numerical concepts like GDP, unemployment, inflation, stimulus, debt, and consumer spending tend to dominate economic analysis. However, these notions ignore how the economy is inextricably tied to gender relations and status quo neoliberal economic models, including welfare systems that perpetuate gendered violence. Marco Cedro found that gender-biased political influences exist at all levels of the economic system and that current government fiscal policies actively disadvantage and ignore women (393). These results illustrate that purely economic rationality strengthens and perpetuates patriarchal structures, especially in the context of inequality. Claims that the economy is neutral concerning gender act as a method to secure privilege and avoid responsibility for this gendered violence. Others focus on the role of “value” in economic

evaluations, noting that the domestic and reproductive work that is socially expected from women is not considered productive by current economic systems, demonstrated by the fact that most women aren't paid for their labor (Goldblatt; Zelleke). This sexist labor valuation paradigm leads to women being undervalued as economic units (Westra et. al. 208). In the context of policy decisions, this research reveals how purely economic frames of analysis preclude the consideration of well-being for women, resulting in harmful practices in both the workplace and domestic sphere.

To further quantify gendered insecurity, it's important to understand the concept of *structural* violence. Mainstream understandings of violence are easily reduced to statistics, risks, and concerns of those in power. Instead, it is important to account for the systemic forces of suffering and exploitation. Gendered violence is intertwined with nearly all aspects of society including "power, inequalities, health, economy, crime and security" (Hearn 569).

Overshadowing structural violence adds to systemic patriarchy which only intensifies gendered issues and recreates large-scale violence in the first place. We need to deprioritize nebulous and uncertain threats in the future (like economic decline and global conflict) and prioritize everyday gendered violence.

Thus, a focus on gendered violence must come first when researching and discussing economic policy. Not only do our research practices resolve the pressing need to focus on gender in the otherwise ignorant space of economic discourse, but our specific advocacy for a UBI is the best policy implementation of this epistemology because it uniquely improves current conditions for women. In his book *Critical Perspectives on the Crisis of Global Governance*, Stephen Gill proposes a new political and economic paradigm in which traditionally unpaid labor is valued as highly as paid labor, and where impacts on women are considered at the forefront of economic

governmental policy: “policy makers would include social reproduction (including the ‘care economy’) in considerations of labour market, social, monetary and fiscal decisions” (147). Our advocacy also makes pragmatic advances toward gender equality. Beth Goldblatt identifies a UBI as a powerful implementation of this new system of political and economic thought, arguing that it would correct for the lack of payment for domestic and reproductive labor, the gender wage gap, and the increasing burden placed on the domestic sphere as the neoliberal economy consumes state programs (68-71). Each example is an independent reason why our proposal creates material change for women, especially those most affected by income inequality.

ARGUMENT CONTENTIONS

As discussed above, economic and gender inequality are linked. It is therefore important to recognize and highlight different manifestations of gendered violence in economic contexts. In the following sections, the affirmative will highlight how a UBI can address three different manifestations of gendered violence within the economy: the devaluation of care-based labor, gender discrimination and wealth disparity, and the persistent threat of intimate partner violence.

CONTENTION 1 – LABOR

Subpoint A: Unpaid Work and Gendered Norms

Current frames of work and labor subordinate women because they are founded on notions that place women as dependent on male breadwinners for support. These norms place women’s entitlements as dependent on their private status to male figures, rather than on their independent citizenship. The notion that only paid work is productive is inherently dismissive of the work that stereotypes confine women to, like caring for infants, the elderly, and those with illnesses. “The caring tasks,” states Carole Pateman, “most of which are not paid and are undertaken by women—have been seen as irrelevant to citizenship” (94). A UBI would shift

perceptions of what would constitute paid labor, rewarding this socially valuable labor that remains unacknowledged today.

Subpoint B: Solvency through Valuing Care

The UBI would reduce gendered division in the labor market and deconstruct normative labor arrangements. Currently, women are “chief ‘victims’ of the bureaucracy of the traditional welfare system” because of stereotypes of “welfare queens,” which cause the welfare state to invade the privacy of women with personal questions to determine their eligibility for benefits (Danaher). A universal basic income problematizes the traditional “breadwinner model” and prevents the punishment of women who challenge this model. As Zelleke explains, “by socializing the cost of supporting care... a basic income promotes reciprocity not only within families but also between those with care responsibilities and those without” (37). A universal basic income thus empowers all caregivers by preventing them from being trapped in an abusive position and enables caretakers to support those under their care. It helps children and teens in abusive or neglected situations while also reducing gender disparities, allowing individuals to be self-sufficient and escape abusive relationships.

Subpoint C: Trust and Justice

In affirming the value of care work and challenging gendered norms relating to economic independence, a UBI is a critical first step. The payments would empower women to challenge their current working conditions and pursue employment opportunities that address economic feasibility or overwork. Jessica Flanigan explains that “trusting women and all people with the right to spend their money how they see fit, as UBI allows, would push back against decades of paternalistic social policy.” Adopting a feminist lens is particularly important when considering the different types of basic income programs and prioritizing distributive justice. This feminist

approach acknowledges the significance of caregivers, granting them the autonomy to spend their money as they see fit. To cater to the needs of all individuals, we must ensure a guaranteed minimum income to meet necessities. Additionally, progressive redistribution addresses imbalances by giving vulnerable families economic agency. An unconditional and universal government payment can effectively combat poverty and facilitate equitable distribution of resources. A feminist UBI approach opens the opportunity for society to break free from persisting gender disparities and accept those who deviate from traditional gender norms, administering a more inclusive socio-economic landscape.

CONTENTION 2 – THE WORKPLACE

Subpoint A: Discrimination and Wealth Disparity

Women continually face discrimination politically, socially, and in the workplace. Although gender equality is correlated with improved economic growth, women are routinely excluded from education, work, and opportunities for advancement. Worldwide, economic labor systems and distribution of wealth exemplify structural violence against women. Women earn only 10% of the world's income and own only 1% of the world's property, despite doing 66% of the world's work. The systemic erasure of the work women perform is embedded in the government; UNSNA only counts labor that has currency-generating capacity, discounting the unpaid labor of "reproducing and nurturing human life" (Mazurana and McKay 134). This erasure implicates welfare programs that receive support and how people's needs are met, which influences the assistance and benefits that women can receive. Thus, "governments are often reluctant to challenge patriarchal structures of violence against women because economic and political systems rely on them" (Mazurana and McKay 132). This fact is reinforced by the

observation that traditional welfare programs either don't exist in countries or are being reduced by fiscal conservative politicians and populist leaders.

Subpoint B: Solvency through Empowerment

A UBI would be a driver of economic justice for women. Given the legacies of “glass ceilings” and lower wages for women compared to male counterparts, this policy would work towards remedying these injustices. Unconditional government payments to everyone would push back against a history of mistrust by signaling that all people have the right to spend their money how they see fit. Furthermore, the payments would enable women to leave toxic workforces by improving their bargaining power and allowing them to push for better working conditions. A UBI would alleviate the need for women to resort to often exploitative labor by providing a living income. As Clark explains, a “UBI would reduce gendered exploitation in the market for intimate labour... such as sex work or commercial surrogacy.” Hence, a basic income would provide a source of empowerment and financial backing for women to champion better working hours and rights.

Subpoint C: Global Goals

A feminist UBI would also be beneficial on a global scale. The United Nations has chosen its fifth sustainable development goal as, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” an initiative that they have found to be of incredible international importance (UN). Many of the key issues that the UN identifies as harmful to women across the globe are economic ones. Fortunately, leaders like the current UN Assistant Secretary-General have endorsed a UBI on a worldwide scale to help address structural inequality (Wignaraja). A small-scale UBI carried out in India confirms positive outcomes for gender equality. The pilot program found that a UBI generated “statistically significant increases in food sufficiency...school

attendance increased for teenage girls ... [and] increased decision-making abilities for women” (Williams). Governments worldwide could implement UBIs not only to dramatically reduce global poverty but also to improve the legitimacy of global development norms, creating important momentum for broader social change. Feminism is a global movement that demands justice for women worldwide, and a UBI is an appropriate global policy.

CONTENTION 3 – THE HOME

Subpoint A: Intimate Partner Violence

While intimate partner violence has always pervaded patriarchal societies, it often remains unaddressed. Today, ubiquitous social media has reinforced masculine norms about sexuality that hamper efforts to mitigate sexual violence in modern society. Andrew Wright, writing for the *People’s World*, interviewed different psychologists who commented on the development of dangerous “sexual scripts” that encourage men to be aggressive and for women to play coy in relationships. These scripts are symptomatic of the flawed mindset about gender.

Worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced abusive relationships because of quarantine and a breakdown of traditional options for resilience and care. The Council on Criminal Justice clarifies that “the pandemic separated potential victims from the network of friends, neighbors, teachers, and other individuals capable of reporting signs of abuse and helping those at risk escape a dangerous environment.” Challenges to liberal democracy and a rollback of reproductive rights have also compounded the problem. For example, in the United States, the recent reversal of *Roe v Wade* triggered an increase in domestic violence, with reports nearly doubling in some states (Santhanam). Abortion restrictions cause an increase in maternal mortality among pregnant people connected with domestic violence because there are limited alternatives or options for care. Laura Santhanum, a health reporter for PBS NewsHour, states

that “because of ... the Dobbs decision, [abusive partners] have even more power and control, because survivors have even less options and increased barriers to obtain that care.” This follows a troubling long-term trend in the US where hospital visits related to sexual violence have increased by more than 15 times over 14 years (Wright).

Subpoint B: Solvency through Economic Empowerment

Many times, survivors do not leave abusive relationships because of their “economic dependency on an abusive partner” (Hallett). Abusive partners cause financial exploitation, leaving women unable to manage their own money. Half of all homeless women are homeless because of domestic violence and a lack of access to funds to escape (Taft). Addressing the problem has been slow and challenging because of failed institutional policies. In fact, governments throughout the world inadvertently support patriarchal violence through inattention, leaving “private” matters to individuals (Mazurana and McKay 135). A feminist UBI would serve as a source of empowerment and a step towards mitigating abusive relationships, while also signaling governmental commitment towards addressing overt forms of violence in the home. It would enable women to leave abusers and gain a level of economic independence as it would be allocated based on individuals themselves rather than collective households. As an “exit option,” a basic income would also reorient the power dynamic in marriage (Bidadanure, 492). In many relationships, there is a power imbalance between members due to a lack of economic independence. Hence, even if the UBI is not used to leave unequal relationships, it sets a necessary precedence for financial autonomy for women.

CONCLUSION

A universal basic income makes symbolic, tactical, and pragmatic advances toward gender equality and poverty reduction. It would correct for disparities such as the undervaluation

and lack of payment for domestic and reproductive labor, the gender pay gap, and the increasing burden placed on the domestic sphere as the neoliberal economy consumes state programs. Additionally, a UBI would bolster several freedoms for women, including reducing their dependence on male spouses and making it easier to leave abusive domestic situations. Each of these examples are independent reasons why governments have an imperative to act. Providing this unconditional payment creates material change for women, especially those most affected by income inequality. In a world where women have been discredited at every turn in the history of political economy, both rhetoric and real-world action that supports them are paramount to future prosperity. A UBI would spur a radical transformation in gender relations that reduces violence and empowers women in both the social and economic spheres.

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