

## **BIEN General Assembly 2020**

### **Vote on the frequency of BIEN congresses**

#### **Paper to accompany the ballot paper**

##### Introduction

At the 2019 General Assembly notice was given that a consultation would take place on the frequency of BIEN congresses, and that a vote would be taken at the 2020 General Assembly. At its meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2019, the Executive Committee agreed a) that a questionnaire would be circulated to all members of BIEN to elicit arguments for and against different options, with a view to constructing a paper containing the arguments to be sent with the ballot paper, and b) that a paper that an Executive Committee meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019 had asked Tyler Prochazka to write would be the basis of that paper.

This paper is constructed in the same way as the questionnaire, and every argument submitted during the consultation period has been included in the paper. The content of Tyler's paper, which was a series of questions about the benefits and costs of annual congresses, is included under option 1. In order properly to represent every submission fairly, no attempt has been made to conflate or order the arguments.

#### **Option 1: BIEN congresses should continue to be held annually**

##### **Question 1a: Please list what you regard as good reasons for holding BIEN congresses annually.**

###### *From Tyler's paper*

#### **The benefits of an annual congress**

##### **Personal and professional connection across geographical space**

Are connections more useful on a regional rather than global basis?

Would a congress on a biennial or four-year basis fulfil this goal at lower cost?

Are there diminishing marginal returns in knowledge accumulation/connection maintenance for repeat conference attendees?

Could regional congresses supplant the need for an annual global congress?

To what extent are regional congresses more useful in building support for UBI in their host regions and countries?

To what extent does a focus on global rather than regional conferences make the conferences exclusive to people of limited means, and what are the financial implications of robust travel scholarships?

On the whole, do the participation costs and nature of the conference select for attendees that are already capable and convinced advocates of UBI (ie. are we singing to the choir?)

##### **Outlet to sustain existing relationships, with potential for collaboration**

What unique successes have resulted from the congresses and could these successes have occurred from another method?

If the transmission of knowledge is a key goal, would it be less costly to invite particular influencers to regional conferences?

Could regional congresses present an environment that is more culturally sensitive, comfortable, or relevant to developing basic income scholarship and activities than conferences with many different cultures and visions of political economy?

Does in-person academic conversation meaningfully influence real-world policy?

How can we improve connections between academia and policymakers through annual congresses?

### **Clear avenue to conduct BIEN affairs and set goals**

Is there an alternative method for accomplishing the required annual in-person meeting of the General Assembly?

Does the opportunity cost of an annual congress trade off with achieving the BIEN goals set forth at the congresses?

Could a combination of remote engagement, teleconferencing, and regional congresses supplant the need for an annual global congress for organizational purposes?

Would there be more media coverage or influence overall if there were two to three regional congresses every year?

### ***Arguments submitted during the consultation***

It gives more affiliates a chance to host.

It gives more people a chance to go to a full BIEN Congress in their region.

It keeps up the momentum of a movement that's much larger than it was 10 years ago.

Because the charter requires yearly General Assembly meetings, it would be unfair to hold the GA at a regional meeting, privileging people from that region to have greater influence over BIEN's decisions.

The coronavirus has propelled Basic Income up the political and public agendas in multiple countries. This makes scholars' and activists' ability to share best practice with each other frequently more essential than ever, and there is no better way to do that than at an annual BIEN congress.

There is a legal requirement to hold an annual General Assembly, and this obligation can be more easily fulfilled if there is an annual congress.

There is much more interest globally in basic income than there was in the past, resulting in, inter alia, a much greater number of researchers looking for opportunities to present their work, and a much greater number of activists wishing to inform themselves and to talk with other activists from other countries. Annual congresses provide more such opportunities and maintain momentum in the movement.

Since many people find it too difficult or too costly to attend congresses far from home, having congresses annually probably reduces the gap between congresses that they can attend.

Once a year is an acceptable length of time to keep the BIEN community informed.

It maintains momentum, and gives more places an opportunity to be a centre for debate.

I think that the best option to spend a BIEN World Congress once a year.

There is sufficient interest in hosting congresses among BIEN's national affiliates. Less frequent congresses might result in a growing list of countries that want to host a congress and could benefit from hosting a congress in their national efforts.

Enabling a very small number of people from all over the world who can afford the time and the cost to meet frequently.

Visibility and continuity of debate – but a physical congress is not the only way of doing this

**Question 1b: Please list what you regard as good reasons for *not* holding BIEN congresses annually.**

**The costs of an annual congress**

**The personal effort, fundraising, and personal travel expenses for the annual congress could be allocated to regional projects or congresses**

Are there substantial economies of scale to having a single global congress, rather than regional congresses in terms of fixed costs?

Approximately how much did participants spend on airfare to each congress over the last four years, and would it have been possible to motivate this spending toward another aim?

What percentage of annual congress attendees are repeat attendees, since these attendees likely experience diminishing marginal returns to knowledge transmission and connection building?

**Burnout and focus tradeoff for BIEN coordinators, who dedicate substantial time and energy to prepare the logistics and presentations for annual congresses**

Do we have metrics or data to quantify how impactful annual and global congresses are on the basis of knowledge transmission and political action?

Do the annual congress contribute to a sense of excitement that motivates efforts beyond what alternatives could harness?

Could this energy be used to train sustainable congress leaders on a regional basis, or is a concentrated effort more conducive to congress success?

**Tradeoff with other priorities, including money spent to build social media presence**

To what extent have the conferences successfully cultivated traditional or social media presence to raise awareness and recruit advocates for UBI?

Could funds from the Congress be allocated to help fund staff who create original content for social media?

To what extent do the congresses engage influencers who are skeptical of or opponents of UBI with in-person conversations?

**Tradeoff with other priorities, including grants for affiliate and individual activism**

Could a BIEN committee be organized to grant funds to applicants experimenting with nonpartisan political, artistic, or other action-oriented projects?

Could existing models - including the Economic Security Project, Soros Foundation projects, VegFund, and the Pollination Project -- be used to create an international activism fund for BIEN?

***Arguments submitted during the consultation***

If none of the affiliates was able to host one particular year, we could skip a year.

For ‘core’ BIEN members, particularly officers and members of the Executive, annual congresses impose higher costs in terms of time involved in planning and liaising, time away from home and travel/accommodation costs.

It seems somewhat more likely that annual congresses lead to a more selective attendance at each congress, because ordinary members may feel that there is no need to travel a long way one year if

they are able to attend near home the following year. (Though there was surely already some evidence this pattern with biennial congresses?)

Attendance at international congresses contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, and more frequent congresses = more emissions.

If it is not affordable, BIEN can make use of technology among other means, to reduce organisational costs of annual meetings.

The cost and administrative effort are considerable, and make big demands on a small number of people. Moreover, it is costly for BIEN members to go to BIEN conferences.

One year between congresses is very challenging to get everything organized. For the BIEN leadership, all efforts presumably would need to be focused on the congress, to the neglect of other things they can do.

For participants, it is often not feasible to attend an international congress every year. At my university such funds are available only every other year.

For those who participate in conferences in other fields, it is necessary to either forego those conferences or miss some BIEN congresses.

International travel also adds to everyone's carbon footprint.

Reducing the financial and environmental cost (and now even the epidemiological risk) of BIEN's worldwide operation

Improving the cohesion of the movement: given that many people could not afford to attend a congress every year, people from across the globe will meet each other less frequently with annual congresses (each of which will be attended by only some of them) than with congresses held less frequently (which more of them will attend)

Less work for the EC to prepare a high-quality, innovative congress

Easier to find each time several good candidates for hosting and organizing the congress

I am skeptical about the need for annual congresses. This seems to be mostly motivated by policy/lobbying purposes, less so by the more research-oriented/academic purposes.

More planning and energy and relevant follow up in respect to every congress will be easier to manage. With yearly congresses there is a need to be in constant planning mode, and not enough time is spent on follow-ups like collating papers. It is costly for individual to travel every year, participation of core members is thinned out. Even whilst there is an argument that more congresses will attract more new members, in reality an enterprise like BIEN runs on dedicated volunteers and personal networks that can endure. It is practically easier for most people to commit every two years to what is often long-distance travel. There is also a green case for limiting physical travel.

BIEN could experiment with other online formats in between, and concentrate the physical meeting every two years, whilst also holding local-or regional congresses in between the global ones.

The reality people get tired out with every year events in this busy world, and there is even the risk that people will fall off the carriage because it is too fast.

We do see this tendency with some of the hardest working volunteers, who get burnt out after a while. Attendance of many regulars has dropped in recent congresses. In fact participation becomes a luxury for those with larger means and no children to look after.

It will be easier and more affordable for BIEN to support regular volunteers and EC members if the congress is every two years

More time can be dedicated to BIEN-level fundraising efforts when EC is not continually planning another event

**Option 2: BIEN congresses should be held once every two years**

**Question 2a: Please list what you regard as good reasons for holding BIEN congresses once every two years.**

*Arguments submitted during the consultation*

If none of the affiliates was able to host one particular year, we could skip a year. Otherwise, I think it's just motivated by fear.

For 'core' BIEN members, particularly officers and members of the Executive, biennial congresses impose lower costs in terms of time involved in planning and liaising, time away from home and travel/accommodation costs.

It seems somewhat more likely that biennial congresses lead to a less selective attendance at each congress, because ordinary members may feel that there is a stronger reason to travel a long way one year if they are not going to be able to attend near home until two years later.

Attendance at international congresses contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, and less frequent congresses = less emissions.

I cannot see the point.

It would give longer time for planning and fund mobilization, and facilitate participation by more members because of financing attendance.

This is the flip side of the reasons against annual congresses: carbon footprint will be smaller; members can better afford biennial congresses; congress planning has a more realistic time frame.

Rather than less frequently: enabling a sufficient number of people to meet with sufficient frequency.

As BIEN congresses are truly global events, I think we should be concerned about their environmental footprint. That advocates for two yearly congresses. Moreover, I would also suggest to look into making better use of videoconferencing. One option might be to have some kind of virtual videoconference every other year. I think that would really be in the spirit of BIEN.

with a little more space in between energies will be raised, better papers will be prepared. In recent congresses there is a sense of reacting to events whereas a little more time to study, reflect, write and organize locally is a good thing.

Time and resources are finite

[Two responses said: see reasons against annual congresses]

**Question 2b: Please list what you regard as good reasons for *not* holding BIEN congresses once every two years.**

*Arguments submitted during the consultation*

Congresses once every two years gives fewer affiliates a chance to host.

It gives fewer people a chance to go to a full BIEN Congress in their region.

It reduces the momentum of a movement that has been growing steadily.

Because the charter requires yearly General Assembly meetings, it would be unfair to hold the GA at something less than a full international Congress. It would privilege people from the region that hosts the extra assemblies, giving them greater influence over BIEN's decisions.

There is much more interest globally in basic income than there was in the past, resulting in, inter alia, a much greater number of researchers looking for opportunities to present their work, and a much greater number of activists wishing to inform themselves and to talk with other activists from other countries. Biennial congresses reduce the opportunities for both groups and may reduce momentum in the movement.

Since many people find it too difficult or too costly to attend congresses far from home, having congresses biennially can generate a four-year gap between congresses that they can attend.

Basic income matters should be discussed in shorter period of times. Some projects or papers may be obsolete after two years.

Financial and environmental reasons may plead for holding a congress every 3 years (as some international associations do)

None really – the need for keeping things alive can be done in so many other ways that does not require everyone globe-trotting and polluting the environment. We need to be ahead of that curve anyway.

[Two submissions said: see reasons for annual congresses]

### **Option 3: BIEN congresses should be held once every two years, with regional congresses during the intervening years**

#### **Question 3a: Please list what you regard as good reasons for holding BIEN congresses once every two years, with regional congresses during the intervening years.**

##### *Arguments submitted during the consultation*

It sounds ambitious. Unfortunately, it is more likely to be unrealistically ambitious.

There is much more interest globally in basic income than there was in the past, resulting in, inter alia, a much greater number of researchers looking for opportunities to present their work, and a much greater number of activists wishing to inform themselves and to talk with other activists from other countries. Holding biennial global congresses interspersed with regional congresses would help to provide such opportunities and maintain momentum in the movement.

Since many people find it too difficult or too costly to attend congresses far from home, having biennial global congresses interspersed with regional congresses would somewhat reduce the gap between congresses that they can attend, compared with Option 2, but might generate a bigger gap than in Option 1.

Regional BIEN communities can be more interconnected and gather good ideas/projects.

The main arguments are that those required to travel across the world to BIEN conferences would be able to avoid doing so as often as now.

This would accommodate the desire of affiliate national organizations to host a BIEN-sponsored congress.

This would allow more focus on the local/national issues.

Those more interested in a more general focus could attend all of those without taxing their budgets and expanding their carbon footprints.

BIEN could do no more than encouraging the holding of regional conferences in those years without a worldwide congress, and one cannot expect all “regions” of the world to be appropriately organized. But this seems to me an intelligent combination. Regional congresses enable people interested in basic income (including those who could not afford to travel long distances) to meet regularly with other such people from countries on average more similar to theirs.

This could incentivize a different focus in some BIEN-sponsored congresses, which is more empirical, policy and activism orientated. Regional groups have held excellent conferences that offer something different – e.g. the Nordic and NABIG, a model that could be followed elsewhere

**Question 3b: Please list what you regard as good reasons for *not* holding BIEN congresses once every two years with regional congresses during the intervening years.**

*Arguments submitted during the consultation*

It's unrealistic to think affiliates from all the different regions will be available to host congresses. One or two regions will have Congresses, others won't. We are very unlikely to get a year where 5 different regions all host regional conferences.

It's a request for our affiliates to greatly increase the amount of work they're doing. The affiliates are doing fine with one conference per year.

It will ghettoize congresses in the less powerful regions. Many of the world leaders of BIEN are from the more powerful regions. They will usually go to congresses in their own regions. The congresses in the powerful regions will continue to have the feel of a world congress while the congresses in the less powerful region will have the feel of a backwater.

It's too much work for the BIEN EC, which now is busy enough overseeing once conference a year (along with all its other duties). Regional conferences would mean BIEN would have to oversee 4, 5, or 6 Congresses on odd years. It's unrealistic to think the EC will be able to do a good job overseeing all those Congresses.

For 'core' BIEN members, particularly officers and members of the Executive, biennial global congresses and intervening regional congresses are likely to impose high costs in terms of time involved in planning and liaising, time away from home and travel/accommodation costs, unless they feel free not to attend most regional congresses.

It seems somewhat more likely that biennial global congresses with intervening regional congresses would lead to a more selective attendance at global congresses, because ordinary members may feel that there is less reason to travel a long way to a global congress one year if they may be able to attend a regional congress near home a year later.

Attendance at international congresses contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, and more frequent congresses = more emissions.

It can be time and resourcing consuming.

Less international visibility.

The potential drawback is that more BIEN members would go to the regional conferences closer to where they live and work, and not go to the full BIEN Conferences.

The regional congresses might become annual congresses by another name. If these are chosen, care should be taken to differentiate the goals and definitions of BIEN versus regional congresses.

Whether anything will happen in each "region" of the world will depend on the existence of some regional coordinating body and its organizational capacity.

A challenge is what is the status and role of BIEN itself, but this could be dealt with by having designated panel or online participation dedicated to the global wing. This might all be quite positive in terms of experimenting with other formats whilst keeping that carbon energy saving initiative going

**Further options: Please list any further options for the frequency of BIEN congresses that you think would be viable, and list arguments for and against these options.**

*Arguments submitted during the consultation*

Seriously considering effective forms of virtual participation, including not just streaming but allowing interaction and providing opportunities for networking, would help to alleviate problems relating to travel costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

I think a flexible rule could work, i.e., that if at the General Assembly a strong case could be presented for having a conference and Congress in the following year at a specific place, then BIEN could opt for that. If there is no strong reason for having one 12 months after the GA, then the bids could be for the following year.

I would like to see more focus on participation through electronic media, perhaps experimenting with a conference organized entirely online. A subcommittee could do some research on whether and how this has been done successfully

Even if not fully online, better options for distance participation through electronic media would 1. Help reduce the carbon footprints of the participants and the congress, and 2. Help to increase the participation of people with limited travel budgets. And 3. Widen the audience of the congress, if more events could be live-streamed and later archived.