

Interim Report of the BIEN working group on the Clarification of Basic Income Definition

July 2024

Table of Contents:

- 1) Recommendation by Annie Miller and Toru Yamamori
- 2) Behind the recommendation: by Toru Yamamori
- 3) Personal thought 1: by Annie Miller
- 4) Personal thought 2: by Toru Yamamori
- 5) Chronological overview related to the matter: by Toru Yamamori
- 6) Papers presented at open forums: Télémaque Masson-Récipon, Annie Miller, Malcolm Torry, Karl Widerquist, Toru Yamamori

1) Recommendation by Annie Miller and Toru Yamamori

As almost all of us know, there have been diverse understandings of what ‘basic’ in the term ‘basic income’ means. (See the section 4 of this report). Also, BIEN has experienced internal debates on BIEN’s definition of basic income since 2014 onwards. (See section 5 of the report). The setting up of a working group on Clarification for Basic Income Definition (CBID) was decided at the GA, in August 2019, and Annie Miller and Toru Yamamori were asked to co-chair CBID. We immediately started to discuss how to proceed, communicating with EC on the one hand, and with keen volunteers (notably Ali Mutlu Köylüoğlu and Télémaque Masson-Récipon) on the other. We have had 15 online open forums both within and outside of BIEN Congresses, since 2021.

We have agreed through our discussions that:

- Some historical materials, which originally appeared on the BIEN homepage, but which have since disappeared, should be returned to the homepage.
- Confusion has arisen through diverse usage of the term ‘basic income’.
- BIEN could help to avoid future confusion by hosting further academic discussion on its website, (as academic as we possibly can, although sometimes it is very difficult to distinguish ‘academic’ from ‘political’).
- Thorough academic discussion should precede any eventual recommendation, (if any), to change BIEN’s current definitive statement.
- The views of members are so divided about some aspects of the definition, that one group or another would be unhappy whichever version were adopted.
- We have had fruitful discussions on how to house / chart different understandings of

basic income and reached a consensus about the usefulness of putting some explanation visible on the definition page of BIEN homepage. We would like to have some time to draft such explanation.

2) **Behind the recommendation: by Toru Yamamori**

The following concrete proposals to change the definition have been made so far:

- adding ‘high enough’ or ‘adequate’ (Enno Schmidt and some others from Germany);
- adding ‘uniform’ (Annie Miller),
- replacing ‘work requirement’ with ‘behavioural requirement’ (Annie Miller)
- adding ‘non-foreclosure’ and ‘non-seizable’ (Ali Mutlu Köylüoğlu),
- adding ‘human right’ (Ali Mutlu Köylüoğlu).

Also, some other issues were raised relating to the definition, but not in ways that would add new characteristics to the definition.

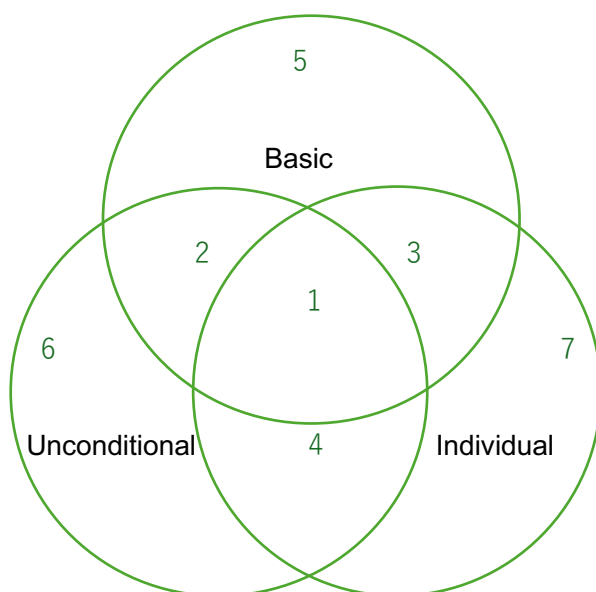
- ‘Broad and narrow understanding of Basic Income’ (Télémaque Masson-Récipon)
- ‘Score card model’ (Ali Mutlu Köylüoğlu)
- ‘Locating BIEN’s definition in the wider context (especially to see the logical gap and historical revisionism caused by the lack of threshold concept in the definition)’ (Toru Yamamori)

While I think that each proposal to add a new characteristic has made our understanding of basic income richer, I think that no consensus has emerged on any so far.

- There is a logical gap between the current definition and what many advocates (either academic or not) have in mind.
- As a co-chair, I tentatively prefer to solve this issue by adding some explanation, rather than making the BIEN definition longer / more detailed.
- Some arguments (by Ali Mutlu Köylüoğlu, Télémaque Masson-Récipon, Karl Widerquist, or Toru Yamamori) would be useful for such an explanation.
- BIEN could not police what some of us think of as a ‘flawed definition’, though some BIEN members tried and seem to feel entitled and possible. Rather, what BIEN can effectively contribute is to explain the reasons behind such diverse usages.
- The usage of the term ‘basic income’ has a long history, and some of the current diverse views have their roots in this long history. We could have a more fruitful discussion if we acknowledged this history.
- BIEN was born at the intersection of several academic endeavours and social

movements in the 1980s. And today, a similar intersection is still a good starting point for future discussion. The discussion of the definition of basic income inside BIEN can be fruitful, or enhanced, by acknowledging and respecting this history.

- In contrast, voices not directly aimed at changing the definition could be a good starting point for an academic discussion which would produce an ‘explanation/clarification’ collectively. The following is a starting point for it.



‘Basic’: above a certain threshold.

‘Unconditional/Universal’: without work, behavioural requirement, or means test,

‘Individual’: individual basis

Score	Characteristics
3:	1 (Basic, Unconditional, Individual)
2:	2 (Basic, Unconditional), 3 (Basic, Individual), 4 (Unconditional, Individual)
1:	5 (Basic), 6 (Unconditional), 7 (Individual)

The above Venn diagram is based on the historiography of the term ‘basic income’, a short overview will follow in section 4 (the detail of which can be found in Yamamori 2022 and further material in section 6). (Explaining it by using a Venn diagram is partially inspired by Télémaque Masson-Réçipon’s Narrow and Broad Understanding of Basic Income, Ali Mutlu Köylüoğlu’s Score Card of Basic Income, and Karl Widerquist’s Table.)

3) **Personal thought 1: by Annie Miller**

My interest in BIEN's current definition, as agreed at the GA in 2016, is summarised in the Table included below.

I wish to make **three changes to the definitive statement** based on the facts that:

- the current order of the wording 'unconditionally delivered' gives a misleading interpretation of the definition, implying that it is the delivery that is unconditional, rather than the cash payment,
- the definition is biased towards male pre-occupations (such as 'work' requirements, rather than other 'behavioural' requirements that could affect women), and
- it endorses prejudice against women and other minorities, by not including a new characteristic 'uniform'.

While the concept of basic income has been welcomed as something that could transform women's lives, the current definition is not only male-orientated, but endorses misogyny and prejudice against other minorities. This is political and does not do credit to the good intentions of BIEN as an organisation purporting to promote liberal characteristics and it should be changed as soon as possible.

A basic income is defined by its characteristics.

I also wish to make **three changes** to the **explanatory commentaries** that expand on the characteristics:

- I would like to see some clarifying changes to the explanatory commentaries that expand on characteristics '3 individual', and '4 universal'.
- I wish to add an explanatory commentary for 'without means test' (which is the only characteristic in the definitive statement that does not have its own commentary), based on my analysis in a paper that has been accepted by *Basic Income Studies*.

These latter are purely technical and would not require a change to the definitive statement.

These explanatory commentaries could be changed/introduced by BIEN's Executive Committee without referring to the GA, if they thought fit.

TABLE SUMMARISING ANNIE MILLER'S SUGGESTED CHANGES TO BIEN 2016 DEFINITION

JULY 2024

BIEN'S DEFINITION of 2016.	SUGGESTED CHANGES TO BI'S CHARACTERISTICS	CHANGES NEEDED TO THE DEFINITIVE STATEMENT
<p>Definitive statement A basic income is a periodic, cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement.</p> <p>1. Periodic: it is paid at regular intervals (for example every month), not as a one-off grant.</p> <p>2. Cash payment: it is paid in an appropriate medium of exchange, allowing those who receive it to decide what they spend it on. It is not, therefore, paid either in kind (such as food or services) or in vouchers dedicated to a specific use.</p> <p>3. Individual: it is paid on an individual basis – and not, for instance, to households.</p> <p>4. Universal: it is paid to all, without means test. Does it also mean 'uniform'? Does it include children? Why is 'without means test' tagged on to the end?</p> <p>The current definition of basic income could endorse misogyny or other prejudice based on age, sex, sexual orientation, race or creed, for instance.</p> <p>5. Unconditional: it is paid without a requirement to work or to demonstrate willingness to work – very male-orientated! Without means test: This is the only characteristic from the definitive statement that does not have its own explanatory statement.</p>	<p>OK</p> <p>OK</p> <p>3. Individual: it is paid on an individual basis – and not, for instance, on the basis of a couple or household.</p> <p>4. Universal: indicates who is eligible. It is paid to all, including children, and is not targeted according to any pre-existing financial categories or circumstances, without means test.</p> <p>5. Uniform: the amount of a basic income is the same/equal for everyone within a given jurisdiction at a given time and does not vary according to pre-existing categories or circumstances.</p> <p>6. Unconditional: it is paid without any behavioural requirement. It is obligation-free.</p> <p>7. Without means test: it is paid separately from, and prior to, any taxation of income or wealth. It is tax-exempt.</p> <p>The term 'basic' refers to the fact that it is a foundational income, or income floor, on which each can build with incomes from other sources.</p>	<p>Delete 'unconditionally'.</p> <p>Insert 'unconditional' before 'cash payments'.</p> <p>None</p> <p>None</p> <p>None</p> <p>None</p> <p>Yes: add 'uniform',</p> <p>Yes: substitute 'behavioural' for 'work'.</p> <p>None</p>

Recommended revised definitive statement:

A **basic income** is a periodic, **uniform**, **unconditionally** delivered to all on an individual basis, without means-test or **work behavioural** requirement.

My own concept of a basic income is that of a '**social dividend**', (which was the primary term in use when I first met the concept), and thus it is **purely instrumental**. My impression is that, in the UK, it was Hermione (Mimi) Parker who introduced the term 'basic income' (without any intention of changing its meaning) during her evidence to a Parliamentary committee in 1982-83, while a research assistant to Brandon Rhys Williams MP.

In my opinion, the addition of a 'threshold' or 'floor' into the definition introduces an objective into its otherwise purely instrumental nature, both causing confusion, compromising the definition, and is completely unnecessary for achieving its objective.

In my early years of study and advocacy, there was not the sound, easily accessible, academic basis that exists now for advocates, and my enthusiasm for a policy drew me into the confusion of instrument and objective. Latterly, I have become aware of the distinction, and wish to repair my part in causing the confusion.

4) **Personal thought 2: Toru Yamamori**

Through my experience of having served as chair of the working group on the definition during the 2016 Seoul Congress, and witnessed the irregular discussion at the 2017 General Assembly, I have learned the following:

- There are several, at least, different definitions of basic income, and some of those which are different from the BIEN's definition are (or were) endorsed by influential members of BIEN (some were its founders or past (co-)chairs), and by our regional affiliates.
- These different versions of definition have their reasonable rationale, at least the same as the BIEN's definition, and not easily solvable by an act of declaration such that BIEN defines Basic Income as α , and thus γ , β , Δ , etc. are 'flawed'.

As examined in Yamamori 2022, (paper attached), some of differences are:

- With threshold or without threshold:
Here, what is referred to as a 'threshold' is wider than 'basic' in section 2. This has been multifariously worded—as covering basic needs or the cost of living, as corresponding to a subsistence level, as being adequate, or constituting a minimum, etc. Obviously,

‘adequate’ ordinarily means something different from a ‘minimum’, and in some movements the point has been debated as to whether demands ought to be made for an adequate income or a minimum income (Yamamori, 2014). What is common among these assumptions is that all of them presuppose a certain minimum threshold as essential component of Basic Income. Here, I use the term ‘threshold’ as shorthand for this minimum threshold. I do not mean to suggest a maximum threshold.

The examples of defining basic income with this threshold are: BIRG 1984, 1985, 1988, van Parijs 1986, 1986, 1989, van der Veen and Parijs 1986, van Trier 1995, Standing 2009, 2011, 2017, Widerquist 2013, Basic Income Ireland 2022, UBIE 2022, BICN 2022, etc.

The examples of defining basic income without this threshold include: van Parijs 1992, 1995, van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017, BIEN 1988, 2016, Citizen’s Basic Income Trust 2022 (Former BIRG), Torry 2021, etc.

This definition without the threshold can be visualised in ⑤ in the figure below:

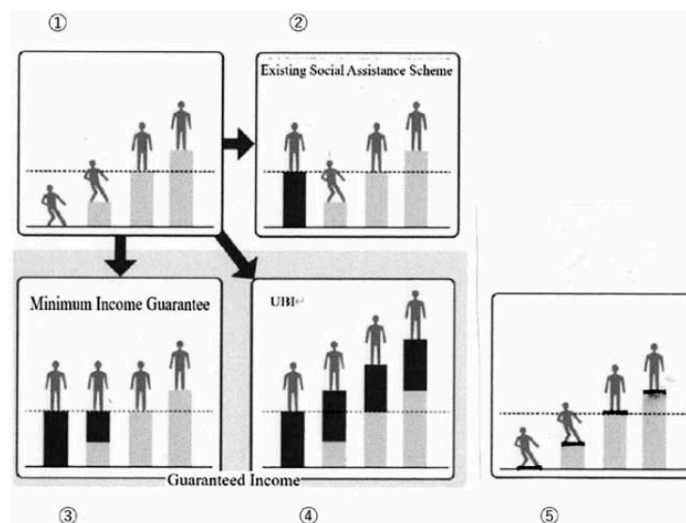


Fig. 1. Definitions of Basic Income. Source: Originally in Yamamori (2020). Slightly modified by the author.

- Cash – in kind, or Cash only

Here the difference is either basic income is defined in such a way both cash and in kind would be allowed, or exclusively in the form of cash.

The examples of the former are: BIEN 1988, van Parijs 1995, 2021 etc.

The examples of the latter are: BIEN 2016, van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017 etc.

You will find that the same individuals / organisations changed their definition over the course of time, (some changed more than twice). Interestingly none of them give any reason of change.

As Yamamori 2022 elucidated, 2 variants (with threshold / cash – in kind) have long historical roots both in the Ivory towers and the social movements. The other 2 variants (without a threshold) relatively less, but at the same time currently supported by the representative advocates and organisations such as BIEN.

As a **genealogy** of the term ‘basic income’ in Yamamori (2022) showed, ‘basic income’ originally means literally ‘Basic’ income (It can be 1, 2, 3, or 5 in the diagram in Section 2). Then some people started to use the term in the meaning of ‘Unconditional Basic’ income (It can be 1 or 2). Around the same time, some (fewer than the above ‘some’) started to use the term in the meaning of ‘Unconditional Basic Individual’ income (1).

Academically rigorous definition of the term ‘basic income’ emerged in 1980s. Almost all are ‘Unconditional Basic Individual Income’ (1), again shown in Yamamori (2022).

Basic Income Research Group (1984): The oldest basic income organisation which is still active today (as Citizen’s Basic Income Trust).

‘[a] Basic Income would be paid to every man, woman and child resident [...]. It would provide for basic subsistence and the level would depend mainly on age.’

van Parijs and van der Veen (1986), van Parijs (1986, 1989), van Trier (1995):

In his letter of 1986 addressing attendees of the first international conference on Basic Income (as well as other interested parties), Philippe Van Parijs not only informed the foundation of BIEN, but also defined Basic Income as ‘a guaranteed minimum income granted on an individual basis, without means test nor willingness-to-work requirement’ (Van Parijs, 1986b. Italics are mine). The word ‘minimum’ here ostensibly connotes a threshold

In 1989, Van Parijs provided a definition of Basic Income with seven characteristics—one being that ‘it is sufficient to cover a person’s basic needs’—in his paper ‘on the ethical foundations of basic income’ presented at a conference in 1989 (Van Parijs, 1989a, pp. 4–6; van Trier, 1995, pp. 6–7. Italics are mine). He went on to explain that ‘[t]his is one connotation of the “basic” of “basic income”, as it is standardly understood’ (Van Parijs, 1989a, p. 6). It is also worth noting that Van Parijs distinguished this ‘Basic Income’ from what he calls ‘universal grants’—lacking a threshold (Van

Parijs, 1989a, pp. 4–6; van Trier, 1995, pp. 6–7). [excerpt from Yamamori, 2022]

Invention of the no-threshold definition of basic income ('non-basic' basic income)

BIEN (1988): 'an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement'

BIRG (1988):

A Basic Income (BI) scheme would phase out as many reliefs and allowances against personal income tax, and as many existing state-financed cash benefits as practicable; and would replace them with a basic income paid automatically to each and every man, woman and child.

Basic Income would enhance individual freedom, and would help to:—

- **Prevent poverty**
- **End the poverty and unemployment traps**
- **Reduce unemployment**
- **Create a less divided society**

Parallelism since 1992

'Basic' basic income:

Almost all contributors to van Parijs (1992), some contributors to van Parijs (2001), Standing (2009, 2011, 2017), Widerquist (2013), USBIG, UBIE, and many other official affiliates of BIEN.

'Non-basic' basic income:

BIEN, CBIT (former BIRG), Van Parijs (1995), Van Parijs & Vanderborght, (2017), Torry (2021), Miller (2022)

My thought as a co-chair of the working group is to show this constellation of variants and explain the roots of each, and to remind the wider public of this rich plurality, in order to avoid unproductive miscommunications.

[My take as an academic dictated by my academic findings, not related to my role in BIEN, can be found in the conclusion part of Yamamori 2022, and elsewhere in Yamamori 2023. The bottom line is that the idea of Basic Income emerged through collective (both intellectual and social) movements, as similar as the ideas of equality, freedom, etc. It is not an invention of single individual or small circle inside the ivory tower in the case of the ideas of negative income tax, the difference principle, or undominated diversity. Surely BIEN can warn against absurd definitions of basic income, but almost all of the versions discussed in the working group are historically authentic and thus cannot be rejected as 'flawed'.]

- References can be found in Yamamori 2022

5) Recent history of the discussion on the definition

5-1) The period 2014 – 2019

Summary: motions to change the definition submitted (or raised without formal submission) at every GA from 2014 to 2019. The issues are on adequacy, non-seizability, human right, uniformity.

2014: A proposal to change the description of basic income was submitted to the GA in Montreal 2014, but because of time pressure the proposal was tabled.

2016: In the month leading up to the GA in Seoul 2016, in addition to the above motion (proposed by 5 regional affiliates and 17 members), another motion was proposed by Louise Haagh. Both concerned the issue of adequacy. During this Congress, the EC decided to have a workshop to discuss this important issue. The workshop was chaired by Toru Yamamori. After a long debate, both sides finally agreed on a compromise proposal which was proposed to the General Assembly by Yamamori and seconded by Gabriele Schmidt. The result was that the main part of the first motion (about including adequacy characteristics in the definition) was rejected and thus adequacy was excluded from the definition and its clarification. However, a note on adequacy was to be written and inserted after the definition on the same page on the BIEN website.

The amended motions (one for the definition and its clarification, and the other for a note on adequacy) were passed and the definition and its clarification together with the note appeared on the website from October 2016 for a while. (This note on adequacy – which was approved by GA – was removed sometime afterwards.)

2017: At the GA in Lisbon, supported by 72 signatures collected from members during the Congress, Ali Mutlu Köylüoğlu raised his voice about adding further characteristics relating to the definition.

2019: Before the GA in Hyderabad, Annie Miller submitted a motion, seconded by Ali Mutlu Köylüoğlu, asking to clarify the definition. The chair and vice chair asked Annie to withdraw the motion and lead a working group to discuss the issue with Toru Yamamori.

5-2) The formation of the working group and after

Summary: while several issues have been raised about the current definition, no consensus has emerged as to what the definition should be.

The working group was established at the General Assembly, August 2019. According to the GA Remit:

The Chair and Vice chair have asked that a working group should be set up, of which Toru Yamamori and Annie Miller will be leading members, and which other BIEN members will be able to join, to discuss draft wording of a new page or pages on the BIEN website to provide clarification on the definition of Basic Income, the wording to be amended and authorised by the Executive Committee before publication. The Executive Committee

thanks Annie for her initiative to set up this working group.

Soon after the GA 2019, Ali Multlu Köylüoğlu and Télémaque Masson-Récipon kindly joined with Annie Miller and Toru Yamamori in preparation for open discussions on the topics, which were to be the main task of the working group. We had regular meetings and Toru Yamamori reported the content of meetings to the EC. However, in April 2020, a letter signed by the chair and co-chair of BIEN was sent to the group by the general manager of BIEN, the content of which was to ask the working group to disband or to work independently from BIEN. The EC letter was nullified later in the year, so the group started to discuss the organisation of ‘open forums’.

6) The following fifteen Open Forums have been held:

- 1-3) During 2021 Glasgow BIEN Congress (18 – 21 August), Annie Miller, Toru Yamamori,
- 4) 11 October 2021; Ronald Blaashke (video presentation), Ali Multlu Koyluoglu, Pierre Madden Télémaque Masson-Récipon, Annie Miller, Werner Rätz, Klaus Sambor, Enno Schimidt, Malcolm Torry, Karl Widerquist (video presentation), and Toru Yamamori.
- 5) 26 April 2022; Annie Miller on “‘Uniformity’ as a Characteristic of Basic Income’.
- 6) 28 June 2022; Malcolm Torry on ‘Basic Income: A brief history of the idea’. (Paper attached)
- 7) 31 August 2022; Ali Mutlu Köylüoğlu on ‘A Non-Seizable Income’ and ‘A Scorecard Concept for the Evaluation of Basic Income Schemes’.
- 8-10) During Brisbane BIEN Congress (28-30 September 2022):
 - 7) Symposium on Basic Income and Basic Needs, chaired by Toru Yamamori, panellists are Anne B. Ryan, Chloe Halpenny, Toru Yamamori.
 - 9-10) Two roundtables were chaired by Annie Miller; panellists were Ali Mutlu Köylüoğlu, Télémaque Masson-Récipon, Annie Miller, and Toru Yamamori
- 11) 17 July 2023; Télémaque Masson-Récipon on ‘How distinguishing between a “narrow understanding” and a “broad understanding” of the basic income concept can help to contribute to the realisation of both’.

[Annie Miller and Toru Yamamori were invited as keynote speakers at the BIEN Congress 2023 in Seoul, as individuals, but asked to speak on the definition: Miller on ‘The case for a revision of the definition of BI today’; Yamamori on ‘The history of the discussion on the definition of BI’.]

- 12) 14 March 2024; Karl Widerquist on ‘The Debate Over the Definition of Basic Income’. (Paper attached).
- 13) 25 April 2024; Chloe Halpenny, Annie Miller, Toru Yamamori, and Almaz Zelleke on ‘Feminist definitions of basic income’. (paper attached)
- 14) 24 July 2024; Annie Miller on ‘Adequacy, poverty benchmarks and a maximum feasible level of BI’. (Slides attached)
- 15) 14 August 2024; Télémaque Masson-Récipon on ‘Why “high enough” just ain’t good enough: the case against the notion of “partial basic income”’, and Toru Yamamori on ‘Can BIEN police the definition of basic income? On plurality of authentic definitions of basic income – its historical roots and lessons for today’. (Paper attached)