

## When Income from Work Becomes a Structural Problem

Work is more than a means of earning a living. To understand it, one must grasp its structural nature.

It begins with scarcity: the empty stomach forces movement – hunting, caregiving, action. This original, "primary" form of work serves the immediate satisfaction of needs. It is life-sustaining, necessary, and goal-oriented – a biological response to the sensation of hunger, which reminds us of the necessity of eating.

But once the basic need is satisfied, work transforms. Humans begin to shape, to teach, to create, to become imaginative... From reactive necessity arises meaningful activity: cultural, symbolic, identity-forming.

In modern societies, this distinction has largely disappeared. Today, work is primarily gainful employment – income is tied to work. This leads to the implicit premise: *if you don't work, you shouldn't eat* – which creates an indirect compulsion to work, because eating is not optional, it's a condition for life. And not everyone works primarily to earn money; many view their work as a path to self-realization.

Consider a mother lovingly caring for her children, a volunteer risking their life in disaster relief, or a person tending to the sick out of empathy. This raises a question: Should a wealthy person who does not work for income be regarded the same as someone who wants to work but finds no paid employment?

Here begins the structural problem. Income – like work itself – is not a natural phenomenon, but a socially constructed one. On a structural level, three basic statements can be made:

1. **All people have fundamental needs.**
2. **Some cannot meet these needs on their own** – such as children, the sick, the elderly, the unemployed, or the working poor.
3. **Others can meet them**, often because they possess resources, property, or permanent income.

Yet those who do not work – regardless of whether they are able to or not – receive no money and thus no access to essential goods.

Therefore, the social question is not: *How do we enable someone without income to earn money through work?* But rather: *How do we ensure that all people can live in dignity and security, regardless of their economic utility?*

If access to income is tied to employment – and employment is neither available to all nor always adequately compensated – then poverty is not an individual failing, but a structural consequence of the system.

In this context, a Universal Basic Income (UBI) is not merely financial aid, but a fundamental systemic correction. It separates the right to live from the obligation to work. It provides a foundation from which people can freely decide how, where, and whether they wish to be active – without falling into existential hardship.

Work begins with hunger. But if society wants to be more than a survival machine, it must create conditions in which people can not only survive, but choose, act, and grow.

Basic income is not a reward for diligence – it is the recognition of existence.

It is not a utopia – but a logical response to a structural imbalance. It is a social dividend: a recognition that every person is part of a commonwealth whose success depends not only on visible labor, but on the interplay of all.

It is a social dividend: a recognition that every person is part of a commonwealth whose success depends not only on visible labor, but on the interplay of all.

And it is not a retreat from responsibility – but the first step toward a society that does not merely promise freedom, but enables it.