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**PUBLIC POLICY MASTER THESIS**

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**Looking for a North Star?  
Trade Unions' Positions in the  
Universal Basic Income Debate**

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## Why should I read this research?

In the last decades, Basic Income advocates have found few allies on the labour's side. Trade unions reject the proposal on theoretical, political and pragmatic grounds. According to union leaders, a UBI would separate income from work, giving free money to the “lazy”. A basic income would entail a radical reform of the welfare system, jeopardising the accumulated rights in the social domain. Otherwise, a basic income may constitute a “Trojan horse” for neoliberal policies, giving an opportunity to further deregulate the labour market. Moreover, this policy could be financially painful for union members, incurring higher taxes and contributions.

Most studies in this field look at unions' positions from the surface, dismissing their skepticism towards a UBI as common knowledge. However, these accounts fail to detect the “invisible movements” beneath unions' official positions. In several countries, contextual and organisational characteristics have encouraged unions to endorse UBI proposals. Unions' attitudes in the public domain are the result of a complex interplay of socio-economic, political and organisational factors, which deserve closer attention from research. To say that *all* unions are opposed to a basic income is to throw the baby with the bathwater, failing to disentangle the underlying justifications that motivate unions' support for, or *vice versa* opposition to, a universal basic income.

This study aims at filling the gap in the current literature, exploring trade unions' stances towards a UBI across countries, welfare regimes and industrial relation contexts. The purpose is to dive into trade unions' very rationales, individuating key enablers and inhibitors of UBI support for labour organisations. I use a mixed-methods approach, integrating 62 survey responses with 27 in-depth, qualitative interviews. While the quantitative section is instrumental to sketch out broad trends, the qualitative part validates the hypotheses and looks at possible interactions among variables.

The analysis indicates four causal channels. First, unions' propensity to support a UBI depends on the degrees of socio-economic insecurity. In contexts characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment and precariousness, UBI proposals look more attractive in the eyes of union leaders. Secondly, welfare regime generosity is a strong *explanans* of trade unions' support. Less encompassing welfare systems encourage trade unionists to regard UBI as a legitimate policy alternative. Third, trade unions' attachment to the work ethic and the insurance principle affects their preferences for unconditionality and universality in policy settings. Fourth, their role in the industrial landscape, and their degree of organisational inclusivity, have a strong influence on UBI support.

These channels are useful to distinguish three union profiles. Organisations in the “Continental” group, including France, Germany and Switzerland, have a very low appreciation for a UBI. These unions are insider-oriented, and reject the UBI on both ideal and pragmatic grounds. Organisations from the “Nordic” cluster (Denmark, Finland, Sweden) are likewise opposed to a UBI; in these countries, unions regard UBI as a threat to the hard-earned Nordic model, leaving many groups worse off. Lastly, unions in the “Deregulated” group (Argentina, Canada, Ireland, Spain, United Kingdom) generally share the basic income's main tenets, fixing them as a “North Star” towards which to address their strategies. However, they tend to dismiss the policy for practical reasons, fearing it would further sacrifice workers' rights and entitlements.

## **PART 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Can an idea still change the world?**

A Supermarket cashier who struggles to pay her bills. A college student approaching his graduation. A worker on a zero-hour contract who doesn't qualify for social insurance. An artist that sells her canvas on the street. A Universal Basic Income (UBI) could offer a real solution to these people, relieving them from market constraints and providing them with a powerful "exit" option. For its proponents, an unconditional income floor could illuminate the economic and social peripheries of our countries, promoting a fair distribution of freedom as a driver for social justice (Van Parijs, 1997).

With these goals in mind, in 1986 the Basic Income Network was founded in Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium), gathering trade unionists, academics and members of the civil society (Van Parijs, Vanderborght, 2017). The group aimed at systematizing ideas on a basic income formulated by authors throughout the centuries, and disseminate this knowledge around the world. Despite the enthusiasm of UBI proponents, though, this visionary project has anywhere seen the light. Basic income activists have failed to form a robust coalition behind the policy, scattering across small groups and ideologically fragmented interests (De Wispelaere, Noguera, 2012). UBI activists have also faced important veto players. In many countries, the old social-democratic coalition has not acknowledged UBI as a legitimate policy option. Progressive forces as social-democratic parties and trade unions have been hostile to this proposal, seeing it as a threat to the acquired social rights.

Trade unions have had a central role in the development of modern welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990). In their history, labour organisations have been able not only to secure gains and entitlements in the welfare domain, but also to give proper shape to social policies, adjusting them to the needs and desires of their affiliates (Streeck, Hassel, 2003). In several countries, unions have generated a progressive momentum, imposing equality and redistribution at the center of the agenda. The last decades, however, have seen the deterioration of modern welfare systems, failing to adapt social protection schemes to the new social and market "realities" (Schelkle, 2011). In the labour market, processes of flexibilisation and the multiplication of non-standard contracts have increased the levels of job insecurity for some groups. In the meantime, declines in membership and collective bargaining coverage have sidelined unions from national policy-making, undermining their image of representatives of the broader working class (Visser, 2012). According to some observers, unions have lost ground among the "outsiders" of the labour market, resorting to the narrow protection of core workforce segments to guarantee their own survival (Durazzi et al, 2018, Ebbinghaus, 2007).

In light of these changes, unions may find good reasons to jump on the UBI bandwagon. First, a basic income could liberate workers from market chains, reviving the immortal goal of labour de-commodification (Polanyi, 1944). From a social policy perspective, they could champion a basic income to cope with the double challenge of poverty and unemployment, guaranteeing adequate protection to those who are not covered (Van Parijs, 2004). Strategically, a basic income could be instrumental to bridge the "haves" and the "have nots" (Bryson et al, 2012), repairing the links within an ever-more segmented working class (Standing, 2014a). A fight for a UBI would improve their

public legitimacy, silencing accusations of them as representing “vested interests”. Moreover, trade unions’ stance towards a UBI may be crucial to determine its public acceptance or political defeat. In many countries, unions still dispose of important “power resources” (Korpi, 2006), exerting great influence on economic and social policies. If unions supported a UBI, the odds for a basic income project to see the light would increase dramatically.

Research on trade unions and basic income has been scant and inconclusive. Apart from Vanderborght (2004; 2005; 2006; 2014) and Standing (2005; 2012; 2014a; 2014b), few authors have systematically navigated this domain. As a major shortcoming, trade unions’ opposition to a UBI is often dismissed as common knowledge. This assumption is problematic in two aspects. First, it suggests that *all* unions disavow a basic income. As I demonstrate in the next section, it is clearly not the case. Secondly, and more importantly, it distracts researchers from the *justifications* behind unions’ positions. Unions’ attitudes in the public domain are the result of a complex interplay of socio-economic, political and organisational factors. Likewise, it is reasonable that the institutional framework affects trade unions’ strategies. If this holds true, it should be possible to identify characteristics at the national or organisational level that stimulate, or *vice versa* inhibit, trade unions’ appreciation for a UBI. As this research shows, unions’ positions towards a UBI vary across countries, industrial relations and welfare regimes.

This thesis adds on the current literature on the politics and feasibility of a basic income. The purpose of this research project is to disentangle trade unions’ position towards a UBI, looking at the variables that motivate their support, lack of support, or outright skepticism towards this policy. I individuate four main causal channels. First, unions may endorse a UBI to respond to a demand of income security coming from society. In countries with higher levels of poverty and precariousness in the labour market, UBI proposals are more attractive in the eyes of union leaders. In close connection with the latter, a generous welfare system could be able at mitigating high levels of insecurity. Unemployment benefit and minimum income schemes may significantly affect income distribution, reducing class, gender and skill divides that exist in the phase before taxes and transfers (Emmenegger et al, 2012). More generous welfare regimes are associated with *lower* support for a UBI among trade unions élites, who prefer to promote other policies such as contribution-based social security and regulations to improve their workers’ livelihoods.

While the first two factors look at the wider socio-economic picture, the remaining two shift the focus on trade unions. The existence of a voiced demand for income security may be left unheard if unions were not ready to incorporate such requests into their platforms. On one hand, trade unions’ strategies are likely to reflect their theoretical understanding of labour, as well as the ideal objectives that give shape to their plans - what Italian unions may call the “sol dell’avvenire” (a “sun of the future”). Unions that cultivate a strong work ethic, rejecting the theoretical separation of income security from wage, may have a harder time to conceive UBI as a legitimate policy option. Likewise, factors as organisational resources and inclusivity affect union preferences for a UBI. Strong and institutionalised unions, as well as unions oriented towards the traditional workforce, are less likely to endorse a basic income, as it would reduce their bargaining power and penalise their affiliates.

These four channels lead to three different union profiles. Unions in the “Nordic” group (Denmark, Finland, Sweden), have a low appreciation for UBI, motivated by high levels of income security and

welfare generosity. In these countries, unions are hegemonic, and place great emphasis on full employment and conditionality in policy settings. A UBI is seen as a threat to their institutional position, reducing their leverage to bargain on wages and social protection. Their strategies are generally oriented to traditional wage-earners; however, thanks to high levels of membership and collective bargaining coverage, they end up representing the broader working class. In the “Continental” group (Belgium, France, Germany), the UBI is firmly rejected on ideal and pragmatic grounds. Unions are mostly insider-oriented and characterised by a strong work ethic. For these trade unionists, that acknowledge labour market and welfare divides, a UBI would menace the social insurance principle, deepen gender gaps, and further segment workers across skill endowments. Lastly, organisations in the “Deregulated” group (Argentina, Canada, Ireland, South Africa, Spain, United Kingdom) are generally open towards a UBI. Compared to the first two groups, these unions are weaker and less institutionalised, and tend to perform a “movement” function. In these countries, higher levels of poverty and labour market insecurity encourage unions to explore the hypothesis of a basic income. Leaders share the two UBI pillars of universality and unconditionality, fixing them as a “North Star” toward which to address their long-term strategies. However, having few opportunities to influence the economic and social policy-making, they fear that a UBI could convert into a “Trojan horse” to cut on benefits and promote labour market flexibilisation.

## **1.2 Aims, methods and structure of the research**

This thesis investigates trade unions’ positions in the debate on a Universal Basic Income. The aim is that of describing their stances and justifications, exploring trends across countries, industrial relations and welfare regimes. To test my hypotheses, I adopt a mixed-methods approach. In the quantitative section, I evaluate responses to a questionnaire filled by 62 trade union officers from 49 different countries. This phase helps me to clarify the main predictors for union propensity to a UBI, and to assess possible trends or interactions among variables. In the second part, I inform these preliminary results with qualitative data from 27 in-depth interviews with union staff at the national and international level. Drawing from the interviews and the survey, I am able to identify four causal channels and to classify union stances into the three groups.

Two main research questions guide the enquiry. With the first question, I want to describe unions’ attitudes towards a UBI:

*RQ1: “What are trade unions’ positions towards a UBI, and how they differ across organisations or countries?”*

The second question tries to shed light on unions’ justifications for a UBI, assessing whether socio-economic or organisational factors can increase their chances to endorse a UBI:

*RQ2: “What organisational or socio-economic characteristics are associated with unions’ support for a UBI?”*

The thesis is structured in three parts. In the first, I describe the state of knowledge on this topic. To begin, I shortly present the concept of a basic income and the most relevant cases of union support. After that, I dive into the existing literature, analysing trade unions and basic income across four

dimensions: philosophical justifications; welfare policy; political economy; politics and strategy. This review of the literature helps me to formulate five hypotheses. In the second part, I pass to the empirical analysis. First, I illustrate the data and methodology used. In the quantitative section, I describe the survey findings, correlate unions' appreciation for a UBI with a set of contextual and organisational variables, and situate unions' positions on two bi-dimensional maps. After that, I use my interviews to confirm what is found in the quantitative phase. The qualitative section evaluates and compares responses given by 27 trade union interviewees. It is articulated in five subparts: work ethics and preferences for UBI principles; welfare reform and finance; labour market policies and future of work; collective bargaining and wages; membership inclusivity. At the end of the section, I summarise the main trends and identify three union clusters. Before concluding, I briefly present a case study on Italian trade unions to refine my hypotheses. In the last part, I shortly recap the main findings, using them to elaborate three recommendations.



## 2. Trade unions and Basic Income - *What have we seen so far?*

Generally, trade unions have shown scarce enthusiasm for a basic income. However, the literature available indicates seven cases of trade unions that currently support, or have supported in the past, a UBI. After sketching out an agreed definition for a universal basic income, I examine relevant cases of unions' endorsement to a UBI, highlighting broad trends across countries and contexts.

### 2.1 The Universal Basic Income

Basic Income is “a periodic cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on an individual basis, without means-test or work requirement” (BIEN, 2019). According to the Basic Income Earth Network, it has five main characteristics: it is paid at regular intervals; it is a cash transfer; it is paid to every individual; it is given to all; it is obligation-free, and thus unrelated to labour market participation. Among the reasons that justify a basic income, the values of liberty, equality, social justice, and sustainable development are most cited. However, the objective to guarantee a decent income to those who are in need has lately raised attention on UBI, especially since the onset of the financial crisis. For Van Parijs (2004), a UBI is instrumental to handle “the joint challenge of poverty and unemployment”.

The idea of UBI is prone to various interpretations. The crucial differences relate to the generosity of the amount and its relationship with existing schemes. Pushing towards one dimension or another can transform a basic income into very different, if not completely opposed, sets of policies. While neoliberal advocates have historically called for a very cheap UBI (Widerquist et al, 2013), others favour a basic income fixed at least at the poverty line (Standing, 2017). The Basic Income Earth Network (2019) draws a difference between a “full” and a “partial basic income”. The partial UBI provides for a low income basis; the second, that regards UBI as a *primary* source of income, is often seen as the long-term objective. Another distinction is between a basic income as a *substitute* to the current services and transfers system, and one that *complements* current welfare provision. The 2016 BIEN congress in Seoul has adopted a motion in favour of the latter, clarifying that residual proposals of a UBI should be considered with extreme caution<sup>1</sup> (Yamamori, 2016).

The UBI aims at improving current welfare systems in two main aspects. For one, its universal character would make it an “instrument of freedom”. The elimination of means-testing would imply the end of unemployment and poverty traps; low-income recipients would cease to suffer the high “marginal tax rates” that other instruments, such as most Minimum Income schemes, entail (Atkinson, 2013). Reaching virtually any individual, it would strongly improve benefit take-up rates. Furthermore, it would do away with the stigma associated with targeting: “The contrast between a means-tested minimum income scheme and a basic income should be clear. The former provides a

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<sup>1</sup> The resolution states: “A majority of members attending BIEN’s General Assembly meeting in Seoul on July 9, 2016, agreed to support a Basic Income that is stable in size and frequency and high enough to be, in combination with other social services, part of a policy strategy to eliminate material poverty and enable the social and cultural participation of every individual. We oppose the replacement of social services or entitlements, if that replacement worsens the situation of relatively disadvantaged, vulnerable, or lower-income people”.

safety net that fails to catch a great many people it should catch, and in which many others get trapped; the latter provides a floor on which they can safely stand” (Van Parijs, Vanderborght, 2017).

The second way a UBI is said to enhance welfare support is freedom from obligations, or “unconditionality”. Relieving the entitled from any kind of obligation would make sure a basic income does not subsidise lousy or degrading jobs (Standing, 2017; Van Parijs, Vanderborght, 2017). Unconditionality would give people the power to say “no” to unattractive jobs. At the same time, a decent basic income floor would give the power to say “yes” to jobs that are attractive, but that by themselves are not sufficient to make a living. A basic income is expected to enhance self-employment, part-time employment, as well as creative and “non-standard” life projects, and increase workers’ bargaining power at the individual level.

## **2.2 Cases of union support**

While there is ample evidence of unions’ opposition to a UBI, trade unions’ endorsements of a basic income are relatively under-investigated. Research in this domain gathers unconvincing evidence, failing to assess their underlying justifications. The following paragraph presents a brief overview of the cases of union support, paying attention to the contextual and organisational characteristics.

### **1. North America: Canada and the United States**

North American unions have recently showed some interest for UBI proposals. According to Wernerus (2004), Canadian trade unionists from Quebec share the goals of a basic income – notably, the right of everyone to enjoy basic income security – and consider it as a powerful means to fight stigma, social exclusion and inequality. However, they fear that right-wing advocates, and possibly a liberal government, will use it to dismantle the welfare state, degenerating “into a Friedman-like scenario” (Vanderborght, 2006). Wernerus suggests that the timid openness of Canadian trade unionists is justified by an attempt to modernise their claims and cope with a decline in public legitimacy. Other positions of this kind are reported elsewhere in Canada (CUPE, 2019). Furthermore, it seems that union leaders, as well as economists who work closely to Quebecois unions, have supported the idea of a Universal Allowance fixed at the poverty level (Lalonde, 2017), though specifying that it should not imply a disinvestment in public services (FTQ, 2018).

In the United States, a number of trade union leaders have publicly revealed their support for a UBI. Andy Stern, former president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), has become one of the most fervent advocates of a UBI in the US. For Stern, a UBI is consistent with the goal of a reduction in the working week; it would also help to redistribute technological gains on a more equal basis (Stern, 2016). Stern states that unions should take a basic income as the guiding star to “keep the American Dream alive” (Atlantic, 2019). The AFL-CIO, the largest US union confederation, does not officially endorse a basic income. However, prominent union leaders and chief economists have manifested their support, interpreting UBI as a means to contrast poverty and enhance social mobility (Caputo, 2012; Nolan, 2017).

### **2. United Kingdom**

Among the British unions, the UBI proposal has been fully integrated in the debate, and discussed as a legitimate policy option. The Trade Union Congress (TUC) has recently passed a resolution on “In-work benefits and Universal basic income”. In the statement, the Congress “acknowledges” the growing popularity of a UBI, as well as the need to call for a system that is “easier to administer, [...] to navigate, paid individually and complementary to comprehensive public services and childcare provision” (TUC, 2016). The British welfare system is described as “punitive” and stigmatizing, thus motivating the research of alternative models. Soon after the resolution, the TUC contracted an external study to the think tank Fabian Society to investigate the political and economic outcomes of a basic income in the UK (Harrop, Tait, 2017). The results of the study are mixed. As a drawback, a “fiscally-neutral” UBI could negatively affect median earners. The authors conclude that the same objectives of a UBI could be reached with a set of other (less expensive) policies.

### **3. South Africa and India**

Two major instances of union support come from the BRICS. For one, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) shall be considered as a unique case of endorsement. Since 2003, the organisation has promoted a Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) as a driver of social justice and economic growth (Vanderborght, Van Parijs, 2005). The BIG, designed to deal with dramatically high levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality, is at the center of COSATU’s platform. The policy would improve the current welfare framework in two ways. First, it aims at replacing family and informal networks in the task of guaranteeing income security. With unemployment rates peaking over 25% (OECD, 2019), “union members play a major role in supporting poor dependents within their households and especially living elsewhere, through remittances” (Seekings, 2004). Secondly, it targets welfare fragmentation (Mahlali, 2019). The grant, funded with a progressive income tax, would fill the gaps of the South African ill-suited welfare system, currently unable to reach many households living below the poverty line (COSATU, 2012).

In India, the Self-Employment Women’s Association (SEWA) has likewise become a symbol of the global basic income movement (Kapoor, 2007). The union organises nearly 1.2 million women in the informal sector from all over the country. SEWA considers basic income as a source of self-empowerment for the marginalised, and an engine of economic development on a broader scale (Weir, 2014). SEWA coordinated two Basic Income pilots in 2011 in the regions of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. For the experiments, it was initially hypothesised that a UBI would be most effective in villages with higher unionisation rates; this expectation was later confirmed by the study (Standing, 2013).

### **4. The Netherlands and Switzerland**

The literature documents only two cases of union support in Continental Europe. The first relates to the Netherlands in the 1980s. Before the “Dutch miracle” of the ‘90s, the Netherlands experienced a period of high inflation, sluggish growth and double-digit unemployment rates – sometimes stigmatised as a “Dutch disease” (Vanderborght, 2004). In that context, the Food Workers branch of the powerful Federation of Dutch Unions (FNV) decided to place UBI at the core of its platform. As a remarkable feature, the union coordinated a large number of unemployed and low-wage earners.

However, the Food Workers never received official support from the FNV (Vanderborght, Van Parijs, 2005), which feared a drift towards neoliberalism (Groot, Van der Veen, 2011). More recently, FNV leaders have nonetheless declared that they would like to “study and debate basic income for the future” (Pressenza, 2017), launching a series of conferences and debates. Smaller union branches, such as the FNV welfare beneficiaries, have expressed their support for a basic income as well (Basisinkomen, 2019). For Vanderborght (2004), the existence of universal schemes, including basic pensions and student grants, and the low levels of conditionality of these benefits<sup>2</sup>, might have encouraged discussions on basic income in the Netherlands.

Another case regards the Swiss Inter-professional Union SYNA (Bien.Suisse, 2019), the second biggest union in Switzerland in terms of membership. In 2016, Swiss citizens were called to vote for the implementation of a UBI of 2500 francs to be given to all (Murray, 2012). On the occasion of the Swiss popular initiative, the organisation initially expressed its support towards a basic income. The main reason was that it would free workers from market constraints, allowing them to take on jobs that they like, and eradicate poverty (SYNA, 2012). Eventually, however, SYNA decided to give workers the freedom of choice, together with the Confederation Travail Suisse.

## **5. Common characteristics and trends**

The cases enumerated so far allow us to sketch out three broad trends. First, it seems clear that basic income proposals find some leeway in liberal contexts (Canada, UK, US). In these countries, the UBI has been framed as a response high levels of poverty and inequality, and as a means to upgrade the residual welfare provision. Other justifications relate to the need to eliminate stigma, reduce the burden of obligations, and eliminate unemployment traps. Two developing countries (South Africa and India) share most of the characteristics above. Moreover, in these countries, the goal of individual empowerment has been likewise central. Another aspect deserves attention: in all cases but Canada and South Africa, unions clearly represented or incorporated large groups of non-standard workers and “outsiders”, including service workers (US, UK, Netherlands, Switzerland), informal workers (India, South Africa) and women (India).

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<sup>2</sup> At least before the 2000s.

## 2.3 State of knowledge: trade unions' preferences for a UBI

In the following, I present the main debates around trade unions and basic income. With the help of the literature, I elaborate five hypotheses on trade unions' appreciation for a UBI. The analysis is articulated in four sections. First, I synthesise the philosophical and ethical underpinnings (H1). Then, I triangulate trade unions' positions towards a UBI in the context of welfare reform (H2 and H3). Third, I cover industrial relations and political competition (H4). Lastly, I try to open the trade unions' "black box", examining strategic issues behind their official stances (H5).

### 1. Philosophical justifications: de-commodification and the labour contract

Before proceeding, it seems reasonable to describe the ideal justifications that may motivate trade unions' acceptance, or *vice versa* rejection, of a basic income. In their recent work, Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017) recall that "political feasibility is intimately linked to ethical justifiability". The degree to which trade union élites share UBI's principles should constitute a precondition for its broader acceptance within these organisations. If that was the case, trade unions' ideological hostility to a UBI could constitute an important "barrier" to its introduction to the organisational agenda.

Theoretically, one might expect some degree of ideal alignment between unions and basic income. In principle, "the idea of providing a stipend to every person in a given country [...] seems like it would be a project that socialists would love"<sup>3</sup> (Sculos, 2018). A basic income could respond to unions' ambition to liberate workers from the market constraints, and create a society based on social justice and equality. Drawing from Polanyi (1944), Esping-Andersen (1990) defines de-commodification as the situation in which "citizens can freely, and without potential loss of job, income, or general welfare, opt out of work when they themselves consider it necessary". It goes without saying that ensuring that "a person can maintain livelihood without reliance on the market", as theorised by Esping-Andersen, is broadly in line with the UBI perspective. According to its proponents, a basic income would endow people with the power to say "no" to adverse working conditions, freeing them from the obligation of selling of their labour power.

Where the two perspectives might rather diverge is on the idea of "conditionality", that is, the idea that one's income should reflect human effort (the "reciprocity principle"). In his pioneering work on trade unions and basic income, Vanderborght (2006) points out how trade unions believe that a basic income would jeopardise the centrality of waged labour in capitalist economies, thereby affecting the "cultural centrality of paid work and work ethic". Trade unionists advance two main critiques: for one, UBI proponents are seen as doing away with class struggle (Vanderborght, 2004), proposing a basic income as a way to accommodate, but not resolve, the inner contradictions that characterise the capitalist economy. Secondly, the UBI is considered as praise for idleness. Most unions seem to be wary about the idea of an income detached from work, suggesting that it would reward the "lazy" and discourage labour market participation. For trade unionists, a basic income would be the product of the activity of those who sell their labour in the labour market; nonetheless, it would be received by

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<sup>3</sup> The reader may forgive me for the simplification of assimilating all union leaders to « socialists ». As I relate in this thesis, the reality is much more complicated than that.

everyone, regardless of employment conditions. Thus, a question arises: why should the able-bodied not contribute to the production of collective wealth?

For basic income advocates, such a question is misleading, failing to draw a distinction between labour and human activity. First, the “right to work” *per se* is not a guarantee of a decent living. The seminal work of Standing (2005; 2012; 2014a; 2014b) has shed light on the conditions of the “precariat”, overrepresented in alienating, demeaning, boring and humiliating positions. As the author notes, “Giving more people the right to dig holes in the road while the exhaust fumes of passing cars fills the lungs is scarcely a right worth having” (Standing, 2005). Likewise, Graeber (2018) points out the economic absurd of the “Bullshit Jobs”, bundles of non-sensical, useless or redundant tasks that capitalists offer with the purpose of justifying the rents they systematically accumulate. In this rather bleak scenario, a basic income would “give people the opportunity to do what *they want* to do” (Standing, 2017), liberating them from the obligation to accept precarious and badly paid positions. Ultimately, “a right to work should include a *right not to work*”. In this sense, a UBI would bridge the passage from the ethics of “work” to the ethics of “solidarity”, in which everyone has equal rights and duties independently from participation in waged labour (Sabattini, 2007).

Moreover, UBI advocates have tried to respond to the “idleness” accusation on philosophical grounds. According to Offe (2008), unions’ skepticism derives from the idea of redistributive justice anchored in Protestantism, for which people would keep working “even after they are rich enough to cover all of their needs”. In *Real Freedom for All* (1997), Van Parijs responds to the well-known paradox of the “Malibu surfer”, raised by John Rawls some years earlier. Rawls found no justification for which some “lazies”, who spend their time surfing off the waves in Malibu, should burden on the shoulders of the “crazies”, who perform work and pay the basic income for the whole community. In the piece, Van Parijs explains that, with the introduction of a generous basic income, jobs would become scarce assets (Howard, 2015); in this framework, jobs should be understood as a “luxury” the few could get, receiving the opportunity to add up an additional income to the basic floor given to everyone. This interpretation would justify high “tax” rates on paid work, to the benefit of the whole community.

A basic income would also reward activities that cannot be compensated for in the formal economy, including intellectual work, voluntary services, family, domestic and care work. Italian students of *post-operaismo* have been fervent supporters of a UBI on these grounds. For these scholars, the transition from the Fordist to the knowledge-based economy would represent the passage to a novel, immaterial dimension of labour (Vercellone, 2013). In this phase, called Cognitive Capitalism (Lucarelli, Fumagalli, 2008), the production of value is external to the traditional process of value extraction, and it happens both inside and outside the workplace. Working time stops being a valid measure of work and production, and value creation ceases being measurable. If most of the activities that create wealth happen outside the formal economic process, wages reward only a marginal fraction of the value created. A basic income would allow the full enjoyment of citizenship rights, without them being embedded in a “hierarchical model of production” (Fumagalli, 1998). According to these students, a basic income should be thought of as a *primary* income – a way of recompensing all forms of “invisible” labour we perform during our lifetime (Chicchi, Leonardi, 2018).

Other post-Marxist schools, however, have been rather hostile to these justifications. Pitts (2017) dissents with the post-operaist view, remarking that economic value is not created in the phase of production, but assigned in the moment of exchange in the market. If this holds true, productivity has always been unmeasurable: “concrete labour, individually and heterogeneously performed, produces no value in and of *itself*”; on the contrary, it is “validated” only in the moment of market exchange. A basic income would be misleading and fictitious, promoting the idea of a “fair share” and masking social exploitation intrinsic to the employment relations (Dinerstein et al, 2016). For these students, a UBI fails to address the antagonistic relations of “property, ownership and subsistence”, disregarding the “classed, gendered and racialised dimensions” the system grounds upon. A UBI would be a “safety cords” for capitalists, silencing class conflict and failing to hold employers accountable.

In addition, some stress that a basic income floor does not necessarily imply equal opportunities and a fair division of labour in society. For Harvey (2005), UBI advocates have confused the right to work with the right to income support. While dismissing the idea of thinking the jobless as “at fault of their own joblessness”, Harvey considers that a UBI would be unjust, insofar as individuals would receive the same compensation for different duties and roles in society. For Sloman (2018), such a policy would ground in the tradition of “redistributive market liberalism”, for which transfer payments can best alleviate phenomena as poverty and inequality. Describing the Argentinian case study, Tcherneva (2013) depicts how an income *per se* is no conducive to empowerment or gratification. Similarly, for Vicherat (2015) the BI would be no more than a modern version of the Christian charity, disrupting the role of work as a “locus of personal and political identity”.

Moreover, a stream of studies places the discussion on a UBI within the values and ethics literature. Attitudes towards unconditionality seem to be associated with post-materialist values; well-educated, young people and women tend to oppose conditionality (Chrisp, 2017). These trends are also identifiable on a larger scale. Collective perceptions towards the unemployed seem to be shaped by elements of the national culture. Blekesaune and Quadagno (2003) find positive feedback effects between the perception of “deservingness” and a series of socio-economic characteristics. For example, people living in societies with high levels of unemployment are more likely to display public empathy for those who lack a job. Furthermore, Sage (2018) points out that the work ethic gives form and shape to the “experience of unemployment” itself. In countries that place great emphasis on employment as a source of identity, status and respect, the unemployed are more likely to suffer from health and social problems. This would suggest that there is no direct connection between employment and well-being, as that this relation is mediated by the “social, moral and political importance societies attach to paid work”.

### **Philosophy and Ethics: discussion and hypothesis**

According to UBI supporters, a basic income would pursue the goal of de-commodification, liberating workers from market chains. Unions’ likelihood to support a basic income may be related to the strength of such ambition, and to the centrality of this long-term goal within their agenda. On the other hand, unions’ work ethic constitutes one of the deepest cleavages with the basic income scholarship. Unions conceive work - and not income - as a driver of freedom, solidarity and social inclusion. Who does not work despite being able to do so would be seen as “idle” and therefore

undeserving of an unconditional cash allowance. However, this trend may vary across countries and organisations. Trade unions that cultivate a traditional conception of work may reject a basic income because it gives “money for nothing” (DW, 2018), breaking the social contract of a fair wage for a decent job. On the other hand, some unions could have a more nuanced understanding of work and the employment relationship, and could be more open to the possibility of an income disconnected from work. This leads to the formulation of a first hypothesis:

*H1: In unions characterised by a strong work ethic, the UBI is rejected because it undermines the “emancipatory power” of work.*

## **2. UBI: the next “candidate” for the evolution of the welfare state?**

According to recent estimates, about a third of the global population lack access to adequate social protection (ILO, 2017). UBI advocates point out the ineffectiveness of modern welfare systems, unable to cope with poverty and guarantee decent income replacement to the unemployed (Standing, 2014a). Compared to traditional schemes, such as minimum income guarantees, pensions, and social assistance, a UBI is said to entail a number of advantages: it would reach out to a larger number of beneficiaries; eliminate the stigma associated with means-testing; and dramatically reduce welfare bureaucracy (Atkinson, 1996; Van Parijs, Vanderborght, 2017; Vanderborght, 2014). In complex and poorly effective welfare systems, a UBI would substitute a safety net “full of holes” with a “floor free of holes” (Santens, 2016). However, trade unions have been hostile to such perspective, failing to regard UBI as a potential remedy to the pitfalls of the welfare state. In the following, I discuss trade unions and UBI in the context of welfare reform, highlighting possible points of connection between unions’ preferences in social policy settings and basic income projects.

The last three decades have seen substantial changes in advanced market economies. A relevant strand of literature describes the emergence of the “new social risks”, such as labour market insecurity, long-term unemployment, in-work poverty, lone parenthood and work-family reconciliation (Taylor-Gooby, 2004, Bonoli, 2007;). These risks tend to be disproportionately borne by some groups, including women, people with disabilities, young people, low-skilled and informal workers. These changes have come in parallel with, and partly result from, the multiplication of contractual arrangements in the labour market. As of today, standard contracts account for only 59% of the employees in the European Union, and half of the aged 15-24 work in part-time or temporary jobs (Eurofound, 2017; European Parliament, 2016). With ever more segmented labour markets, welfare states targeted at protection against the “old” risks have proved scarcely able to guarantee sufficient levels of security to these groups, increasing gaps between a “traditional” and an “atypical” workforce (Gumbrell-McCormick, 2011). Discussions on UBI have spread in contexts characterised by high poverty, unemployment and labour market insecurity, motivated by the need to look into radical proposals to improve the current system (Zamora, 2017).

Rather than structural transformations, recent developments have seen a “recalibration” of modern welfare systems, trying to adjust social policies to the “new realities” in the labour market (Schelkle, 2011). Pierson (2011) describes a paradox of “simultaneous stability and change”: the failure of welfare states to adapt to the changing world of work, while concentrating social expenditure on the



old risks, may result particularly painful for those who are overrepresented in atypical work arrangements and exposed to new risks. In this phase, the urgency of welfare reform opened new opportunities for trade unions to intervene in public policy-making. In countries as Italy, Greece and the Netherlands, trade unions and social-democratic parties have promoted the recalibration of social policies to the new risks, accommodating for the needs of the groups exposed to unemployment, social exclusion and in-work poverty (Johnston et al, 2011). In these countries, unions have favoured the “collectivisation” of these risks, extending social security and employment protection to people in atypical working conditions.

In other countries, unions have been reluctant to promote the inclusion of the new social risks in the mainstream social protection pool, rather concentrating on the protection of the traditional workforce. The dualisation literature highlights unions’ efforts in insulating traditional workers from the risks of unemployment and social exclusion, while disregarding the risks borne by non-standard workers (Clegg, 2007; Emmenegger et al, 2012; Palier, Thelen, 2010; Rehm, 2011; Rueda, 2012; King, Rueda, 2008). In Continental Europe (Belgium, France, Germany), unions guarded an “institutionalised influence over policy development” (Clegg, 2007), making sure that recalibration of unemployment benefit systems maintained a preferential route for the “core” workforce. In France and Germany, trade unions favoured policies aimed at sharpening the institutional separation between social insurance and social assistance, while condescending to flexibilisation at the margin of the labour market (Palier, Thelen, 2010). These strategies have been consequential in states where the “insurance principle” makes it difficult to cut benefits paid out of contributions, as they are perceived as “acquired rights” (Clegg, 2007). Even if these trends have been more prominent in Bismarckian welfare systems, Liberal countries would have likewise furthered dualisation through labour market deregulation, creating an underclass of “cheap labour” in the standard sector (King, Rueda, 2008).

As I discuss further in the next sections, unions’ strategies in welfare recalibration have been seen to depend on their role and function within a given national context. Trade unions’ institutional position in the system affects their preferences for welfare reform, reducing incentives to back structural transformations in social policy settings. Unions that hold central responsibilities in welfare provision are likely to defend their position to secure their “power resources”, opposing initiatives aimed at moving away from the current system. This is the case of Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Belgium, where unions manage unemployment insurance funds in what are often defined as “Ghent systems” (Clasen, Viebrock, 2008). In these countries, unions’ hegemonic role in coordinating unemployment insurance allows them to strengthen their ties with workers and maintain very high membership levels. Trade unions keep solid links with the unemployed, which constitute an important membership pool for the organisations (Checchi, Nunziata, 2011). As proof of that, in the last decades Ghent system countries have suffered only small decreases in union membership compared to other OECD countries (Brugiavini et al, 2001; Ebbinghaus et al, 2011), enjoying a stronger institutional position to bargain with the employers and the government. According to recent evidence, unions operating in Ghent countries are more successful at pushing for high wage levels and sustaining high employment rates (Checchi, Nunziata, 2011; Bengtsson, 2014).

Unions’ ability to adjust social policies to their interests depends not only on their organisational strength, but also on the regulatory and industrial context they operate within. Hooghe and Oser (2016) find a positive correlation between trade union density and social expenditure. The higher the

membership levels, the higher the unions' capacity to increase government spending on social policies. The relationship seems bi-directional, in that "stronger" welfare systems have a positive effect on union density, and a higher union density increases social spending. However, the association between union density and social policy expenditure is not straightforward, as it seems to be mediated by the regulatory and industrial framework. Whereas in coordinated market economies (CMEs) social expenditure is positively associated with trade union strength, this effect cannot be individuated in liberal market economies (LMEs), characterised by a competitive model of interest interaction and low regulatory constraints.

For unions that have some interest in preserving the current system, a shift towards a UBI could result even more costly, disrupting the accumulated rights in exchange for a "leap in the dark". Not only their institutional position, but also the generosity of the welfare system is likely to affect preferences for a UBI. While unions in Ghent system countries face institutional incentives not to move away from the current system, other may refuse to undertake perilous reform processes simply because they consider the current system good enough at guaranteeing protection to their members. Parolin and Siöland (2019) find that trade unionists' path-dependence to generous welfare systems motivates their aversion to a UBI. Analysing results from the European Social Survey, the authors find that union members that identify with a left-wing ideology are more likely to endorse a UBI. However, this relationship ceases to be significant in countries with encompassing welfare systems. A higher degree of welfare generosity trumps out the left-union membership interaction, determining a negative appreciation of a UBI among union members.

In the past, unions have expressed concerns that a basic income could have detrimental effects on benefit adequacy and coverage. To accommodate for a UBI, governments may be forced to retrench a number of existing programs and privatise public services (Vanderborght, 2006). The strong individualist and libertarian rhetoric of some UBI supporters is seen as dangerous, giving a pretext to cut on in-kind support (Vanderborght, 2014). The OECD (2017) models the effects of a budget-neutral UBI, that would reallocate all existing social security benefits into one "package". According to the organisation, this scheme would seriously increase levels of poverty and inequality in several countries, leaving vulnerable groups worse-off. Likewise, experts from the ILO find that a basic income financed on cuts on social contributions would create losers among the middle- and low-income households (Ortiz et al, 2018). A basic income could also prevent people with specific needs from accessing contingency-based benefits and services, such as childcare and disability schemes (Jackson, 1999). On this note, the World Bank (2019) clarifies that a UBI cannot be "an alternative to health, education, or other social services". Moreover, a number of UBI supporters warn that basic income should not be seen as a *panacea* to all problems (Pateman, 2004); on the contrary, it should be sequenced with essential services to make sure that people are protected against external risks and, to some extent, "against themselves" (Vanderborght, 2014).

Some authors discuss projects for a generous UBI that *complements* current welfare provision. According to UBI proponents, this scheme may be financed out of progressive taxation, as well as with the introduction of new taxes (e.g. wealth, financial transactions, etc.). However, for union leaders a project like that would still be "impossibly expensive" and therefore unrealisable (Independent, 2019). The net effects of a generous UBI would probably be negative on workers' earnings, requiring a substantial increase in tax rates (Vanderborght, 2006). Quite intuitively, UBI

models financed out of progressive taxation would make low-income segments better off, while burdening on middle- and high-income earners that, in many countries, correspond to union members (Gilroy et al, 2013). According to Martinelli (2017), increases in taxes may meet public hostility in systems based on social insurance, where one's contributions are conceptually earmarked to future benefits. Conversely, UBI projects may find more breeding ground in Liberal welfare systems, where social security payments are financed out of general taxation.

### **Welfare policy: discussion and hypotheses**

In discussions on welfare reform, unions have rarely considered UBI as a viable policy option. From a political standpoint, unions contend that it would sacrifice the accumulated social rights of workers (Ortiz et al, 2018). Other criticisms relate to policy design and finance. For trade unionists, a UBI could entail a “slippery slope” towards the dismantlement of the welfare state and the privatisation of public services. Unions from Bismarckian and Nordic countries, which include Ghent system countries, have incentives to maintain the current system, because of their strong institutional position, the system's generosity, or features inherent to the taxation structure. For these organisations, UBI projects should result seem less appealing. While a “cheap” UBI may be opposed on the grounds of inadequacy, a “generous” one could be rejected for its costs. This position can be summarised with Luke Martinelli's words: “an affordable UBI would be inadequate; an adequate UBI would be unaffordable” (2017). By contrast, unions that operate in largely insecure labour markets, and face ineffective welfare systems, may be more open to a radical reform such as the introduction of a universal basic income. In these countries, the integrated taxation and welfare structure could provide further incentives to consider UBI as a legitimate policy alternative. This helps me to advance two concomitant hypotheses:

*H2: trade unions are more likely to oppose a basic income in contexts characterised by low levels of poverty and insecurity.*

*H3: In encompassing welfare systems, the UBI is seen as financially unsustainable and less effective against existing schemes, or as a “slippery slope” towards their dismantlement.*

### **3. The more powerful, the more skeptical? The political economy of a universal basic income**

Since 1960, unions have faced a spectacular decline in membership and coverage. Among advanced economies, union density has decreased by 15,6 percentage points on average, and collective bargaining coverage by 9 p.p. (Schmitt, Mitukiewicz, 2012). While Liberal economies have suffered the highest losses (22,6 p.p. in density and 26,2 in coverage), this trend is common to all OECD countries except Finland. As a result of this decline, unions struggle to retain some influence on national policies. To say it with Visser's words (2012), “more likely, 21st century capitalism will be shaken up by banks rather than by trade unions”. In front of these changes, unions are called to devise new strategies, accounting for the new labour market realities and interacting with a novel institutional landscape (Bryson et al, 2012). According to some observers, a universal basic income could respond to these ambitions, lowering workers' dependence on wages and improving their bargaining strength. However, trade unions have shown scarce appreciation for the idea, fearing that

a UBI could undermine wages and their role as labour market actors. In the following, I discuss trade unions' assessment of a UBI from a political economy standpoint, assessing advantages and disadvantages at both the individual and aggregate level.

For UBI proponents, a basic income would increase the bargaining power of individual workers. For one, it would give people the freedom to say “no” to poorly paid jobs and inadequate working conditions (Offe, 2008). Workers would not be obliged to “price themselves into work”, enjoying a “true, reliable and unconditional exit option” (Vanderborght, 2004). To find people disposed to work, employers would have to make jobs more attractive, with a positive effect on the economy as a whole. At the same time, a basic income floor would allow some workers to say “yes” to low-paid jobs that, by themselves, are not sufficient to make a living. People would be able to complement their UBI with flexible, part-time or gig- jobs, enjoying the freedom to organise their working time as they wish. As Vanderborght (2014) explains, the combination the two main characteristics of the UBI, unconditionality and universality, would empower workers: “because it is universal, basic income functions as a subsidy for less productive work, but because it is unconditional, it does not serve as a subsidy for degrading jobs. Basic income favours employment, *but not under any condition*”.

According to existing evidence, trade unions have showed scant enthusiasm for such claims (Lucarelli, 2017; Standing, 2017). For one, the idea that a basic income would empower people generates confusion. Basic income supporters argue that a UBI would *discourage* workers from accepting bad jobs, while at the same time *increasing* their likelihood to take on low-paid jobs (Van Parijs, Vanderborght, 2017). The two effects seem in contradiction, possibly canceling each other out. For Harvey (2005), people could fail to enjoy a real increase in bargaining power, thereby being forced to lower their reservation wages to find a job. Secondly, creating incentives for taking on low-paid and non-standard positions, the UBI could bring to the proliferation of atypical jobs. A UBI fixed at the poverty level could encourage employers to increase the supply of non-standard jobs, and full-time positions would become scarce. In that case, a UBI would be anything else than “a Trojan horse” to flexibilise the economy, reduce wage levels, and segment the workforce into a multitude of precarious jobs (Vanderborght, 2004).

Trade union leaders have advanced concerns that, in a UBI framework, gains in bargaining power would be unequally distributed among the workforce. A basic income could not compensate for other forms of disadvantage, such as skill barriers, job shortages across geographical areas, and discriminations (Hassel, 2017; Pulkka, 2017). Birnbaum and De Wispeleere (2016) point out one fundamental fallacy behind the idea of UBI as an opportunity to threaten one's “exit” from the labour market: in absence of sufficient job supply for the low-skilled, only the high-skilled may benefit from this option. The exit option of low-skilled people is fictitious, in that they would still be prone to be substituted with other workers. Low-skilled people would compete for scarce positions, and market forces would probably water down their wage levels accordingly. A “collective exit” of the low-skilled would not be credible to the employers, so that the low-skilled would be obliged to resort to other strategies – including “costly” strikes – to improve their working conditions. Conversely, high-value workers could credibly menace their exit to the employers, enjoying a competitive advantage to bargain individually to the detriment of the least well-off.

Some authors discuss the effects of a UBI on collective action. UBI advocates suggest that a basic income would reinforce trade unions' financial and organisational resources. A UBI would provide workers with a powerful "strike fund", improving their endurance in the case of prolonged strikes (Standing, 2017; Vanderborght, 2006; Wright, 2006). At the aggregate level, workers could pool together their incomes to sustain their organisations during these periods. This argument has been rather marginal in the debate, and it has received scarce consideration from trade unions. Nonetheless, Birnbaum and Wispelaere (2016) point out that strike funds would provide at best a "soft" exit strategy for vulnerable workers, because low-skilled people's threat to sever their employment ties would still look weak and poorly credible from the employers' perspective.

For unions, a UBI is far from the only solution to enhance workers' bargaining power. Alternative policies could be at least as successful as a UBI at improving workers' position, including employment guarantees, training and regulations (TUAC, 2018). Among the others, several authors compare a UBI with the idea of a Job Guarantee (JG). A number of trade unions in Europe seem to prefer Job Guarantee strategies to a basic income, in line with the old aspiration of "full employment" (Groot, Van der Veen, 2011). JG and UBI proposals share several characteristics. For one, both theories acknowledge unemployment as a default feature of unregulated markets, which urges some form of intervention (Elster, 1988; Kalecki, 1943; Minsky, Kaufman, 2008). Furthermore, both policies are said to increase workers' power to say "no" to bad jobs in the private sector. Once the labour market is "tight", employers will be forced to improve employment conditions to attract workers (Harvey, 2005; Srnicek, Williams, 2015). As regards monetary policy, there is virtually no difference between the two projects; while one provides an income floor regardless of participation, the other allocates a certain grant in form of salary through job creation (Gnesutta, 2018). From a Keynesian standpoint, both measures are said to stimulate the aggregate demand, generating a "multiplier" effect on jobs (Crocker, 2015).

Despite the similarities, advocates from the two sides are mutually suspicious. Basic income activists regard a Job Guarantee as a form of paternalism (Standing, 2005); in their view, people should have the freedom to choose by themselves *whether* and *where* to work. In addition, the bureaucratic and management costs of a job guarantee scheme could offset the gains it generates. For JG advocates, instead, the pursuit of full employment has a number of advantages compared to a UBI. First, it would ensure that jobs that are created in the public sector comply with certain quality standards. Secondly, and more importantly, it would constitute a credible exit option for *all*, placing public jobs as a "minimum floor" for the entire economic system (Gnesutta, 2018). In this way, a job guarantee would mitigate the salary gap between the high- and low- skilled, and eliminate the industrial "reserve army" that cannot reject badly paid jobs (Tcherneva, 2013).

A number of authors debate whether a basic income can be an answer to the progressive rarefaction of jobs caused by new technologies. Among the others, Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017) ask themselves if it is still meaningful to seek full employment while most of the workers might become redundant to value production. To the extent that these gains are fairly shared among the populace, a basic income would enhance people's well-being and working time (Srnicek, Williams, 2015). Pulkka (2017) reviews recent studies on automation, questioning whether a basic income could give an answer to unemployment and job polarisation. While the use of these technologies will increase exponentially, the ultimate effects of these transformations is far from clear. In any case, the author

points out that job polarisation is not novel. Disruptions caused by technological unemployment might be also dealt with other policies, including re-skilling programmes and stimuli to the aggregate demand, without requiring radical reforms such as a UBI.

While these perspectives emphasise bargaining power at the individual level, what seems to be missing in these accounts is trade unions' role in altering wage and employment relationships. Despite a structural decline in membership (Visser, 2012) and bargaining coverage (European Commission, 2008), unions still hold a crucial role as intermediaries between the workers and their employers. Recent evidence shows that collective bargaining levels in European member states have not been affected during the great recession (Regalia, Regini, 2018). Stronger unions manage to increase the wage share in the economy *vis à vis* the capital share (Bengtsson, 2014), to enhance employment (Checchi, Visser, 2005) and to reduce inequalities across income ladders (Crouch, 2017). On the other hand, the long-term decline of union membership and coverage rates would have been the main cause for a substantial increase in profits and rent income (Chu et al, 2018), and a corresponding drop in the labour share since the end of the '90s (Fichtenbaum, 2011).

Unions' influence on wage and employment levels mirrors their organisational strategies. Analysing industrial relations in the US, Chu et al (2018) suggest that unions could be employment- or wage-oriented. Employment-oriented unions mobilise their resources to enhance employment levels. Conversely, wage-oriented unions prioritise wages, and the effect on employment rates could result to be negative. In addition, the institutional context mediates the relationship between union strength and employment levels (Checchi, Nunziata, 2011). Ghent system countries enjoy a positive and self-reinforcing equilibrium: high unemployment rates have a positive effect on density rates (as unemployed people enter trade unions), which in turn increase employment rates *via* a stronger bargaining power. On the opposite, unions in liberal market economies have fewer opportunities to defend employment levels, and decreases in employment rates undermine their membership rates.

Trade unions' appreciation for a UBI may depend on their features, and the function they cover in the political and economic arena. For one, Hyman (2001) describes three interacting "souls" in the workers' movement: that of economic interests that operate as lobby groups; that of vehicles of equality and rights to the benefits of the broader society; that of "schools of war", engaged in the eternal fight between labour and capital. Other authors have drawn a dichotomic distinction between "vested interests", or unions as organisations, and "swords of justice", or unions as movements (Flanders, 1970). The degree to which trade unions exert a "vested interest" role, or rather act as "sword of justice", is likely to reflect the specific equilibrium of "market", "society", and "class" characterising a given political context (Frege, Kelly, 2004; Hyman, 2001). Unions as movements may find strong incentives to champion a UBI as a catalyst for social justice. By contrast, unions that place a strong emphasis on their narrow economic function are less likely to pursue risky strategies, and more likely to prefer conventional instruments such as collective bargaining and regulations to promote the interests of their affiliates (Ebbinghaus, 2011).

Secondly, unions' propensity to endorse a UBI is expected to vary across industrial regimes. The literature describes four main "varieties of unionism" (Bernaciak et al, 2014; Brugiavini et al, 2001; Crouch, 2017; Kranendonk, de Beer, 2016; Regalia, Regini, 2018). In "corporatist" systems, that correspond to the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden), hegemonic unions enjoy

a stable, centralised and institutional position. In these countries, unions are politically compact, and rely on high membership and collective bargaining rates. For this reason, major public policies in the economic and social policy domain can rarely pass without the unions' *nulla osta*. In the "social partnership" model (Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland), interest representation is likewise institutionally integrated, and unions often form works councils. However, differently from Scandinavian countries, density rates in this group are rather moderate, and unions tend to be oriented towards the "core" workforce (Emmenegger et al, 2012). Enjoying high levels of collective bargaining coverage, unions in Corporatist and Social Partnership contexts are likely to be hostile to a UBI, as it would shift key responsibilities away from the social partners and shrink the component of one's income on which it is possible to bargain.

The "pluralist" (UK, US, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand) and the "contestative" group (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain), share a number of features. Union membership in these countries is generally low; bargaining is conflict-oriented; unions lack recognition from the employers and the state. Nonetheless, they differ on three main aspects. First, Southern European countries rely on higher collective bargaining rates than the pluralist group. Thanks to legal extension mechanisms, they can cover a wider number of workers despite the low membership levels (Murtin et al, 2014). Conversely, Liberal unions have limited bargaining power: their membership rates are typically close to the collective bargaining rates, and collective agreements are usually discussed at the firm level. Secondly, Mediterranean unions are often divided along ideological and political lines, encountering difficulties to coalesce. Lastly, Liberal unions place greater emphasis on their "movement" function. Unions in these countries tend to gather in umbrella organisations; in lack of institutional channels to exert their influence, they recur to public pressure and advocacy to advance workers' interests.

### **Political economy: discussion and hypothesis**

Drawing from this analysis, unions' appreciation for a UBI may meet a number of organisational and political barriers. In general, unions fear that a UBI could reduce their control on the employers, and undermine wage levels. However, this assessment is expected to depend on trade unions' strength and role in the institutional framework. Unions that rely on different forms of organisational or regulatory power ("social partnership" and "corporatist" models) could find it harder to conceive UBI as a legitimate policy option. *Vice versa*, unions that lack access to institutional pathways for collective bargaining ("pluralist"), and that resort to a "movement" or social repertoire ("pluralist" and to some extent "contestative"), should be more likely to endorse a UBI. Moreover, unions in the Liberal group may regard UBI as a device for improving workers' conditions, providing them with sufficient income security to escape employers' retaliation. I formulate a fourth hypothesis:

*H4: Strong and institutionalised unions consider UBI as a threat to their bargaining power, and a pretext for the employers to undermine wage levels.*

## **4. A sword of justice: universal basic income between insider and outsider politics**

Up to this point, trade unions have been analyzed from a holistic perspective. However, labour organisations are first and foremost *sets of human aggregates*; that is, collectives of individuals,

potentially moved by diverse concerns, sentiments, ideals, sensitivities. A relevant question is hence whether union strategies account for, and are modelled to, opinions and desires coming from the grassroots base. If a large pool of union members supported a basic income, and managed to convey this proposal into one organised claim, union leadership could find it convenient to endorse a UBI in the public realm. The following section navigates this hypothesis. I look at trade unions as organisations, disentangling whether their stances towards a basic income could be responsive to their internal membership composition.

According to basic income students, political reasons may explain unions' lack of interest for a UBI. Trade unions should be less tolerant of proposals that would reduce workers' income via taxation, as people that would most benefit from a UBI are rarely union members (Caputo, 2012; Christensen, 2018). For Vanderborght (2006), it seems "a difficult task to convince insiders of paying for an unconditional grant which will mainly benefit the outsiders". Martinelli (2017) clarifies that "basic income does not serve the interests of labour market insiders, that comprise trade union membership". Likewise, Standing (2014a) observes a mismatch of interests between traditional workers, usually affiliated to trade unions, and the "precariat", whose members are less likely "to imagine that jobs are the road to happiness". The fact that relevant cases of basic income support have emerged from unemployed associations and atypical workers' unions seems in line with this hypothesis.

In the UBI literature, it is often stressed that the unemployed, the working-poor and the least wealthy would greatly benefit from a basic income scheme (Standing, 2014a; Van Parijs, Vanderbogh, 2017). A number of studies have tried to assess preferences for a basic income among socio-demographic and labour market groups. In 2018, the European Social Survey contained a question on basic income support. Looking at the results, basic income preferences seem to be correlated with the experience of unemployment or work-seeking within the last five years (Vlandas, 2018) and with younger age cohorts (Parolin, Siöland, 2019). Chrisp (2017) unpacks basic income support in four variables: redistribution; public intervention; conditionality; work ethics. According to the author, unemployed and atypical workers are against conditionality and to the "primacy of paid work", while women, young people and highly-educated are opposed only to conditionality. On the other hand, the risk of disadvantage is *not* a significant predictor of UBI support. For Chrisp, present disadvantages may be effective at explaining preferences for conditionality, but not the risk of disadvantage.

According to some authors, women would have good reasons to back a basic income scheme (Fraser, 1994; Elgarte, 2008; Pateman, 2004). This strand of literature highlights that women are concentrated in unpaid and poorly valued activities, including service, informal and care work. Authors contend that a UBI could be particularly beneficial to women, breaking the chains of a gendered division of labour and advancing social justice. Furthermore, a basic income would compensate for tasks performed within the households, and encourage a fair share of family responsibilities. Nonetheless, others have stressed that a basic income may also discourage women's participation and perpetuate the male breadwinner model (Hassel, 2017). For instance, low-skilled women in the service sector could find a basic income more attractive than their current jobs, thereby reinforcing divides in participation.

As regards union membership, the literature is almost unanimous in describing unions' lack of representation in some labour market and demographic groups. Checchi and Visser (2005) suggest



that labour organisations are still characterised by the historical imprint of a white, industrial working class, and most of their members are on permanent and full-time contracts. In general, unions fail to recruit among the young, low-skilled, and less-educated segments of the workforce (Ebbinghaus et al, 2011). Nonetheless, trends vary substantially across welfare regimes. In the Nordic countries, where unions enjoy high density levels, there is no membership gap between full- and part-time workers (Visser, 2012). In Liberal countries, where unions exert a strong “movement” function, outsiders are even more likely to be union members (Emmenegger et al, 2012). The same applies to age and gender groups. Bonoli (2007) reports no difference in union membership between genders and cohorts in Nordic countries and the UK. On the contrary, Continental and Southern European unions would display a strong bias for adult, male and full-time workers (Ebbinghaus, 2007).

Politically, vulnerable groups are penalised by a lack of organisational resources, failing to aggregate their demands on a larger scale. In the past, the industrial working class constituted a homogeneous coalition, using labour organisations and parties as vehicles to promote their demands (Gingrich, Hausermann, 2015). By contrast, NSR and NSW individuals often fail to coalesce. These groups tend to be dispersed and weak, failing to mobilise support towards specific sets of policies (Bonoli, 2007). On this note, Rehm (2011) argues that the “homogeneity of the risk pool”, that is the degree to which preferences for welfare benefits are dispersed across income segments, is a strong predictor of welfare generosity. Struggling to convey their requests into mainstream social-democratic parties, atypical workers are likely to flee the “old left”, and support new organisations that are more open to their demands (Marx, 2014). With some caution, this reasoning may be extended to trade unions. In countries where unions are oriented to the “core” workforce, and outsider groups are dispersed or unorganised, organisations may be reluctant to include outsiders’ demands in their agenda. Conversely, a UBI is more likely to be integrated in the unions’ strategy in the presence of solid and larger outsider coalitions, and unions that adopt a broader social function.

Unions’ capacity to integrate outsiders’ demands into their platforms also depends on their strength and institutional role. Durazzi et al (2018) contend that, in the past, standard employment has not only been a reality but “a normative goal” for trade unions, in view of securing insiders’ privileges against labour market risks. Likewise, the dualisation literature has pointed out unions’ efforts to secure protection for traditional workers (Emmenegger et al, 2012; Palier, Thelen, 2010; Rueda, 2012). Even accounting for a shrinking membership base, some unions could have poor resources to adapt to the new social and economic transformations (Hyman, 2005). According to Ebbinghaus, (2007), to guarantee their survival, trade unions “face the dilemma of whether to compete for [...] high-skilled professionals and white-collar service employees, or radically improving their organizing capacity among the less protected and less skilled groups”.

Moreover, unions face major obstacles in organising non-standard groups. Atypical workers find themselves in a vulnerable position, with the constant threat of being fired or their contract not renewed (Fulton, 2018); their lower “attachment” to a single employer makes it difficult for unions to coordinate their claims. Furthermore, the non-standard workforce is often fragmented along a multitude of employment forms (dependent self-employment, zero-hours or flexible schedules, temporary agency work, platform and gig work, etc), placing new obstacles to organizing collectively. Despite that, in the last decades unions have done substantial efforts in building new coalitions and reaching new peripheries of the workforce. Examples are abundant in the literature

(Gumbrell-McCormick, 2011; ILO, 2015; Johnston and Land-Kazlauskas, 2018; Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2017). Among the others, since the 1990s Italian confederations have devised strategies to secure employment protection for atypical workers, creating specific unions for the “new work identities” (Johnston et al, 2011). Likewise, unions from Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden have been committed to the transition of temporary agency and service workers towards higher degrees of contractual security *via* collective bargaining and regulations (ILO, 2015).

### **Politics and strategy: discussion and hypothesis**

Inferring on the existing research, unions should have few incentives to include a basic income in their platforms. For one, there seems to be a mismatch between the “basic income” and the “trade union” coalitions. At the risk of over-simplifying, trade union members and basic income supporters are generally not the same people. People exposed to new social risks (NSR), and people concentrated in non-standard forms of work (NSW), are generally *less likely* to be union members, despite being *more likely* to endorse a basic income. Second, NSW and NSR groups rarely operate as compact political groups, thereby failing to convey their demands into one collective “voice”. Third, even if a substantial share of the membership base were in support of a basic income, and these demands were articulated into a convincing set of proposals, there is no guarantee that union élites would be willing or able to integrate them into their platform. These trends are nonetheless expected to vary across countries. Unions that orient their strategies towards the core workforce (Continental, Southern European) could be less likely to endorse a basic income, because it would leave most of their members worse off. On the other hand, in some contexts (Liberal, Nordic) unions seem to be more open to outsiders, which may stimulate a higher propensity to support a UBI. This leads to the development of a fourth hypothesis:

*H5: in unions that orient their strategies towards the core workforce, the UBI is regarded as less beneficial to trade union members, and therefore less strategically convenient.*

## PART 2

### 3. Data, sources and methodology

For this research, a mixed-methods approach has been taken (Bryman, 2012). The main reason is that adopting a pure qualitative, or *vice versa* a pure quantitative approach, could lead to less clear results. Rejecting the dogmatism of a strict choice between the two, mixed methods convey the strengths of both approaches, enhancing inclusivity and complementarity among disciplines (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, 2004). While quantitative strategies are successful at describing broad patterns across unions and countries, a qualitative approach could strongly enhance the quantitative analysis, improving the former on two main aspects. For one, qualitative methods are successful at developing relevant hypotheses and consolidating causal explanations. Furthermore, they can be useful for disentangling unforeseen interactions between variables, which a quantitative analysis may fail to detect. As trade unions' assessment on basic income is expected to be very context-specific, rationales for basic income support are more likely to emerge in personal, in-depth interviews, than in comparative settings. On a similar note, qualitative methods seem suited to detect "invisible" justifications that do not necessarily fit unions' official positions. The empirical strategy of this thesis is developed with two strategies: a quantitative approach, that adopts a survey design; a qualitative approach, integrating interviews with accessible documents.

#### 3.1 Cross-sectional survey

In the quantitative phase, a self-completion questionnaire was sent out to 270 unions belonging to the International Trade Unions Confederation (ITUC). In the e-mail, I encouraged to hand over the questionnaire to the person who covers these fields, in most cases corresponding to a social protection, labour market, employment, or wage policy specialist. Two weeks later, a follow-up e-mail was sent to those for which any response had been recorded. Ultimately, 62 responses were collected from 49 different countries.

The questionnaire was composed of three parts: general questions; assessment of a UBI in different domains; final remarks. In the first section, officers were asked to express their propensity to support a UBI as defined by the BIEN; to give a personal definition of a UBI; to describe their union's position; to express whether it should substitute current schemes of welfare provision. Insofar as most unions lack a clear-cut position on this issue, this strategy aimed at assessing both unions' orientation (where applicable) and the respondents' personal leanings. In the second part, respondents were invited to express their level of agreement with a series of statements on a 5-item Likert scale. The questions broadly covered the four main domains of the enquiry and the eight hypotheses. Finally, they were asked to indicate their organisation, country, and whether they considered trade unions' support as crucial for the discussion / approval / implementation of a UBI.

The limitations of this approach will be discussed at length in the next sections. For now, it suffices to point out that cross-sectional designs, and surveys more specifically, are prone to several biases. For one, the response rate has been fairly low (22%). As the questionnaire was sent in only two languages (English and French) and exclusively via e-mail, a number of potential respondents may have encountered technical barriers. A low response rate may also indicate a lower level of interest

for the issue being discussed. If that was the case, people with good levels of IT and language skills, or who cultivate a personal interest in a UBI, should be more likely to respond to the survey. This feature may bias the sample, as these skills tend to correspond with people in younger age and with higher educational attainment, who are also more likely to endorse a basic income (Chrisp, 2017; Vlandas, 2018).

### **3.2 Interviews and official documents**

In a later phase, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews on trade unions' positions towards a basic income. Interviews addressed three different groups: country-level officers and leaders; staff members at the international level, including the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC), and the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI); experts, including trade union and basic income researchers. At the end of this process, I had gathered 22 interviews from national leaders; 5 interviews from international staff; and 6 expert interviews. To find policy officers to interview, I adopted different strategies, including e-mails and invitations to get me in touch with the person I wished to discuss with. Most of the interviews have been performed via phone or skype call, except for those with the international staff (ITUC; TUAC; ETUI). For logistical reasons, it was possible to interview a Belgian, British and a Finnish expert in person. Where applicable, I availed myself of accessible documents, such as congress statements, reports, declarations and press releases.

Quite obviously, this approach entails strengths and weaknesses. As we shall see later, interviews have strongly enhanced the quantitative analysis, shedding light on the "hidden" debates happening within trade unions. However, a number of issues should be considered. First, there might be a selection bias in the choice of the interviewees. As the UBI is still poorly acknowledged among union leaders, I might have been simply redirected to somebody who is knowledgeable on, or interested in, basic income. This could also explain why some interviewees show a higher degree of appreciation compared to official union positions. Furthermore, I had relatively low control over the choice of the persons to interview (their role and function within the organisation). This of course risks to undermine the homogeneity of the sample and lead to biased estimates. From a technical standpoint, limitations of phone interviews have been largely described in the literature, including a lower spontaneity, no access to visual observation, and an overall inferior quality of data (Bryman, 2012).

## **4. Findings**

In the following, I describe the main findings of the research. First, I examine the results of the survey, trying to highlight trends across industrial and welfare regimes. The qualitative section seeks confirmation to what I find in the quantitative phase, singling out four main causal channels. Lastly, I shortly test these hypotheses within the Italian case study, evaluating trade unions' positions towards a basic income in the context of welfare reform.

### **4.1 Quantitative analysis**

#### **1. Union support**

At the moment of the analysis, 62 responses have been collected. Respondents come from 49 different countries: Albania, Argentina (3), Belgium, Bermuda, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia (2), Canada (2), Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland (4), France (2), Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy (2), Kazakhstan, Latvia, Macedonia, Madagascar (2), Malta, Mauritania, Montenegro, Moldova, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines (2), Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey (3), United Kingdom, Zambia.

At a glance, the sample shows a good level of appreciation for a UBI. Contrary to the conventional belief that unions are hostile to a UBI, most respondents seem to endorse an unconditional and universal cash allowance (table 1). Only a third of them declare to be against or indifferent to a UBI, while all the rest is either in “favour” or “strongly in favour”. The fact that trade unionists from developing contexts are supportive of a universal basic income is perhaps less surprising, and that may be linked to the desire to set up a welfare system in the first place. However, this result holds true even when focusing on middle- and high- income countries (39,5% against; 56,2% in favour; 4,1% indifferent). In the next paragraphs, I will formulate possible explanations for this trend. As a caveat, the reader should bear in mind that this methodology is prone to desirability bias (Bryman, 2012), and that respondents may have been selected across degrees of interest and appreciation for a UBI. Furthermore, as I discuss later, some union officers seem to have a poor understanding of the concepts and the characteristics underlying a basic income, confusing the UBI with other forms of income guarantees.

## RESPONSES TO PART 1

Have you ever heard about a Universal Basic Income, in all its forms (also known as Basic Income Grant, Unconditional Basic Income, Citizens' Income, Social Dividend, etc.)? [N = 59]	Yes 74,5% (44)	No 10% (6)	I am not sure 15,2% (9)		
A UBI is usually defined as “a periodic cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on an individual basis, without means-test or work requirement” (basicincome.org, 2018). Are you in favour of, or against, this idea? [N = 62]	Strongly in favour 19% (12)	In favour 46,7% (29)	Indifferent 4,8% (3)	Against 24,2% (15)	Strongly against 4,8% (3)
If you are in favour, should it replace all the existing welfare schemes? [N = 53]	Yes 18,9% (10)	No 66% (35)	I don't know 15,1% (8)		
Do you think your organisation supports this idea? [N = 62]	Yes, of course 14,5% (9)	Yes 20,9% (13)	I don't know 35,4% (22)	No 27,4% (17)	Absolutely not 1,6% (1)

Table 1: trade unionists' responses to Part 1 of the questionnaire.

The finding on respondents' appreciation for a UBI is puzzling, in that it sometimes fails to match with the union's official position. In 60% of the questionnaires received, the respondents' and the unions' positions correspond. Three cases are nonetheless more contentious. For instance, a French and a Swedish trade unionist declare to be in favour of a UBI, while there is no evidence of labour organisations that support a UBI in these countries. As a confirmation, the French trade unionist states that her organisation is opposed to a UBI. The Swedish, though, declares not to know what is the union's policy on UBI. Another case is represented by the Italian respondent, who says to be against a UBI, while suggesting that the organisation is in favour. This result is counterintuitive, as the three Italian confederations have been traditionally hostile to any form of unconditional income support. Moreover, more almost a third of the respondents (35,4%) are uncertain about their union's position. Basic income, currently debated in several organisations, is often the object of controversies within unions, which would explain why some leaders are cautious in declaring their union's position.

## 2. Interpretations of UBI

When discussing UBI, one major problem is that different versions of a basic income have been designed. UBI proposals cover the full political spectrum, ranging from the neoliberal idea of a fiscally-neutral benefit, to that of a generous income floor. Whether it should represent a “minimal” or a “primary” income, and whether it should replace the current system of cash transfers and public services, are crucial to determine the UBI orientation in the context of policy reform. This issue was dealt with two strategies. First, officers were asked if a UBI should replace existing welfare schemes. The vast majority of respondents declare that a basic income should complement, and not substitute, current welfare provision. Among high- and middle- income countries, only a small group of seven officers (Argentina, Brazil, Estonia, France, Montenegro, Portugal and Turkey) suggest that it should replace current welfare provision.

Secondly, they were invited to provide their own definition of a UBI. As expected, trade unionists have different understandings of what a basic income is. Several respondents take a theoretical or

philosophical angle, charging definitions with normative statements (“should be” language). These experts say that the UBI is a guarantee against labour market imbalances (Bulgaria); that it should be devised to reduce vulnerability (Namibia); and that it should protect workers against the risk of technological “exclusion” or unemployment (Mauritania, Malta). For a Latvian officer, UBI features will greatly depend on the circumstances in the labour market and the level of technological advancement. Interestingly, a few officers place great emphasis on the liberating and egalitarian character of a UBI, framing basic income as “a new tool in the general aspiration of fairer societies” (Argentina), or a “sustainable and subsistence income to all human beings on Earth” (Turkey).

Other definitions put the accent on policy design and finance. A Finnish respondent interprets the UBI as a scheme combining existing transfers into one package. Unsurprisingly, the same respondent says to be “strongly against” a basic income. A good number of respondents endorse a generous UBI that does not substitute current welfare provision. An officer from Malta points out that, on top of a basic income, the most vulnerable would still receive additional compensation. Likewise, an expert from Latvia acknowledges UBI’s likely role in mitigating extreme poverty, and sustaining those who cannot participate in the labour market. However, a basic income cannot be a panacea for all problems, because some groups would still need additional support. An Argentinian officer argues that this reform shall be framed in a comprehensive way, including “the coordination of minimum wages”, a “promotional framework of employment”, and that “it must be designed on a rights-based approach”. The respondent is worried that a UBI may come with the privatisation of fundamental public services, such as health and education. In that case, far from a freedom-enhancing income, a UBI would deepen inequalities and undermine social rights.

In other cases, the concept of a UBI seems poorly acknowledged or misinterpreted. A large number of respondents confuse the UBI with a minimum income guarantee or a living wage (Argentina, Bermuda, Botswana, Italy, Madagascar, Sweden, Turkey, Zambia). A Peruvian leader suggests that a UBI should address people that fall short of decent pensions and jobs, which are not specific objectives of a basic income. A French officer points out that CGT promotes a “new workers’ statute”, consisting of “transferable” social security entitlements attached to the individual, which should be independent from the current employment relationship. Moreover, some respondents take the chance to clarify that there is no agreed position within their organisations (Argentina, Latvia, New Zealand), and that they would like to see more investigation on it (New Zealand).

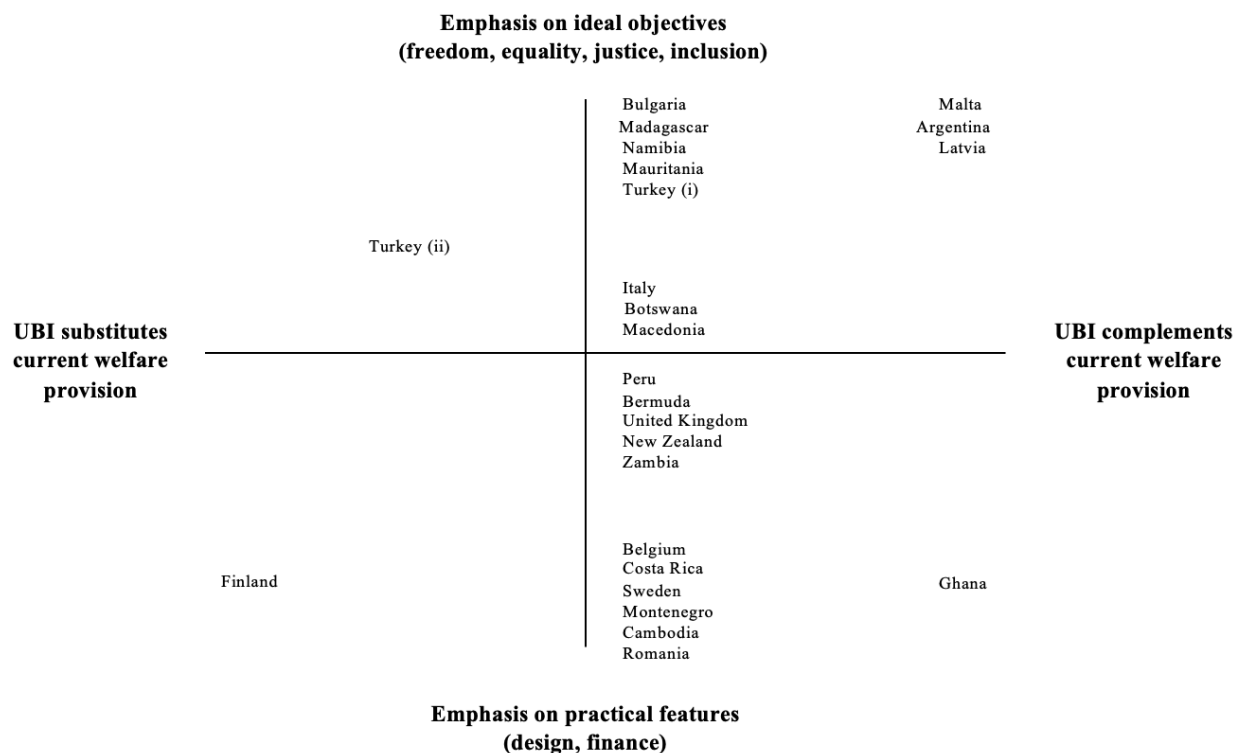


Figure 1: basic income definitions across two axes. On the horizontal line, whether the UBI is considered as a substitute, or as a top-up to current welfare provision; on the vertical line, whether the emphasis is placed on practical features or on ideal objectives [N=25].

### 3. Preferences for a UBI across four dimensions

In the second part of the survey, union leaders were asked to indicate their level of agreement with respect to eleven statements. The sentences covered the four main fields of the enquiry: philosophical justifications; economic and welfare policy; political economy; politics and strategy. Trade unionists were invited to select one among five options, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. This design aimed at “unpacking” the different angles of a UBI, trying to assess if trade unionists differ in their views towards topics such as de-commodification, conditionality, effects on the economy and wages.

To proceed with the analysis, I narrow down the focus to a group of 44 unions from 31 middle- and high-income countries. This decision is based on the interest to look at trends across industrial relations and welfare regimes. The shortlisted countries are OECD members, plus a group of middle-income countries for which data is available (Albania, Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Russia).

Looking at the multiple-item responses, UBI seems to generate mixed feelings among trade unionists (table 2). Overall, there is a strong consensus that a basic income would protect people from shocks. Recoding the answers on a scale from 1 (lowest agreement) to 5 (highest agreement), reactions to the



sentence “A UBI would protect people from economic fluctuations, non-cyclical unemployment, automation, precariousness, or poverty traps” score an average of 3,55 over 5 (63,8% of the respondents in favour). Most respondents agree that a UBI would make it easier for workers to join strikes and voice “discontent” (3,26, 70,7% of the respondents) and that a UBI would free human activity from market constraints (3,11). On the other hand, they are almost as likely to say that a UBI is financially costly, unfeasible or ineffective compared to existing cash transfers (3,26, half of the interviewees sharing this opinion), and that it could make the economy more flexible or deregulated (3,16 with 46% agreeing). Other scores stay close to the average, ranging between 2,58 and 2,79. Many respondents agree with the idea that the UBI would benefit more the “outsiders”, while producing zero or negative effects on unions and their members (2,79); and that a UBI could serve as a strategy to include less unionised groups (2,79).

## RESPONSES TO PART 2

	Strongly in favour	In favour	Indifferent	Against	Strongly against	Score (1-5)
A UBI would create a disincentive to work, rewarding who sits on the sofa. [N=38]	7,9% (3)	21% (8)	21% (8)	42% (16)	7,9% (3)	2,63
With a UBI, human activity (labour) would be freed from market constraints. [N=35]	5,7% (2)	37,1% (13)	28,5% (10)	25,7% (9)	2,8% (1)	3,11
A UBI would protect people from economic fluctuations, non-cyclical unemployment, automation, precariousness, or poverty traps. [N=36]	16,6% (6)	47,2% (17)	8,3% (3)	25% (9)	2,7% (1)	3,55
The introduction of a UBI would imply a reduction in wages, easily translating into a “subsidy” to employers. [N=37]	2,7% (1)	18,9% (7)	32,4% (12)	45,9% (17)	(0)	2,76
Receiving a UBI independent from wage would make it easier for workers to join strikes or protests and voice discontent. [N=38]	2,6% (1)	44,7% (17)	28,9% (11)	23,7% (9)	(0)	3,26
A UBI would reduce trade unions’ bargaining power to negotiate with employers, industry associations, governments, etc. [N=38]	5,2% (2)	13,1% (5)	26,3% (10)	50% (19)	5,2% (2)	2,58
A UBI would benefit more those who are NOT affiliated with trade unions, while producing zero or negative effects for unions and their members. [N=38]	2,6% (1)	18,4% (7)	36,8% (14)	39,4% (15)	2,6% (1)	2,79
The UBI proposal is financially costly, unfeasible or ineffective with respect to existing cash benefits. [N=36]	13,9% (5)	36,1% (13)	13,9% (5)	36,1% (13)	(0)	3,26
The UBI is the only protection against "new social risks" - as the working poor, NEETs, unemployment of women, youth and low-skilled, etc. [N=37]	2,7% (1)	21,6% (8)	24,3% (9)	40,5% (15)	10,8% (4)	2,68
A UBI could make the economy more flexible or deregulated, and contribute to dismantle the “welfare state”. [N=37]	5,4% (2)	40,5% (15)	21,6% (8)	29,7% (11)	2,7% (1)	3,16
Introducing a UBI could serve as a strategy to include less unionised groups (e.g. women, young people, non-standard or precarious workers, migrants) in the workers' movement. [N=38]	(0)	23,7% (9)	36,8% (14)	34,2% (13)	5,2% (2)	2,79

Table 2: trade unionists’ responses to questions contained in Part 2. Unions from middle- and high-income countries

#### 4. Differences across welfare regimes

Comparing responses across welfare clusters, a number of characteristics seem to stand out<sup>4</sup>. Nordic respondents (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden) are generally opposed to a UBI, and almost everybody agrees that the policy would be too expensive or less effective than other schemes (four agreeing, two neutral). Unsurprisingly, and in line with the previous sentence, they strongly resist the idea that a UBI is the only protection against the new social risks (five disagreeing with only one neutral). Anglophone respondents (Canada, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand, United Kingdom) locate at the antipodes. A majority (four over six) is in favour, as only two declare to be indifferent to a UBI. They generally disagree with the idea that a UBI would create a disincentive to work (five disagree, one neutral); however, similarly to the Nordics, they suggest that a basic income would be costly or less effective *vis à vis* other schemes (six over six). Mediterranean trade unionists (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain) are generally in favour of a UBI (three over four). They tend to think that a basic income would protect people from market distortions (three over three available responses), and none of them think that it could undermine trade unions' bargaining power. Continental trade unionists (Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland) strongly oppose a UBI (four against, one in favour). Contrarily to the Mediterranean group, almost all respondents say that a UBI would reduce trade unions' bargaining power (three over four), and nobody regards it as a "strategy" to include less unionised groups. Lastly, officers from Central-Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro), are overwhelmingly in favour of a UBI (eight in favour and one against). They seem most concerned with labour market insecurity. All trade unionists say that the UBI would protect people from market flaws (nine agree, one neutral); nevertheless, a majority of them fear that the policy could contribute to dismantling the welfare state (six agree, one neutral, two against).

#### 5. Explanatory variables for UBI support

The following section aims at assessing which socio-economic and organisational characteristics are associated with unions' support for a UBI. To this purpose, five variables are individually regressed on trade unions' appreciation for a basic income. Then, I build a model to check the strength of these explanations, and how these variables interact with each other. In the next section, the same variables are used to situate trade unions' positions across labour market and welfare regimes.

As a dependent variable, I compute levels of union support for a UBI. A "propensity score" is coded 1 to 5 on the answers to this question:

*"A UBI is usually defined as 'a periodic cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on an individual basis, without means-test or work requirement' (basicincome.org, 2018). Are you in favour of, or against, this idea?"*

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<sup>4</sup> Due to a large number of responses and variables in this section, it is impossible to include here a table on these data. The reader can find more tables in the annexes.

Before proceeding, a number of limitations should be highlighted. Due to the high frequency of “I don’t know” to the question on the unions’ position (35,4%), I am unable to take the unions’ positions as a dependent variable. This strategy has to be considered as a second-best, insofar as individual respondents’ views may not necessarily fit with the union’s platform. However, the fact that survey respondents are policy experts speaking on behalf of their organisation is a (partial) guarantee on the reliability of this data<sup>5</sup>. As a second barrier, the use of socio-economic variables at the country level urges me to compute “national” propensity scores, that is, taking the country as a unit of analysis. To this purpose, I compute the means of the respondents’ scores at the country level. A more appropriate strategy would have been to run a two-level analysis, comparing unions’ attitudes at the country level before coming to the cross-country design. Nonetheless, due to the low number of unions per country, multi-level setups cannot be used. While this is an additional limitation of this study, variation within countries seems rather moderate. In all countries but one, trade unionists record similar opinions at the national level. Only in the French case, the two union officers (from different organizations) express divergent opinions. A further problem relates to the structure of the index itself. The fact that propensity has been strictly measured on a scale from 1 to 5 does not allow for much variance across countries<sup>6</sup>. Due to these shortcomings, the “propensity score” should not be seen as a comprehensive index of trade unions positions, but rather as a proxy of union leaders’ attitudes towards a UBI at the country level.

To test the influence of socio-economic and institutional factors on UBI support, I select four independent variables related to the main hypotheses. First, I measure whether higher levels of socio-economic insecurity are associated with higher levels of support of a basic income (H2). My supposition is that, in countries characterised by high levels of insecurity, unions feel compelled to take UBI more seriously into consideration. To test this hypothesis, I include a measure of income insecurity at the country level. I use national OECD poverty rates, defined as the share of people whose income falls below half the median disposable household income (OECD, 2019). This index is integrated with World Bank data (2019) on national poverty lines for the four missing countries (Albania, Argentina, Bulgaria, Macedonia). While these definitions of poverty rates are not strictly comparable, using World Bank data for only four countries should reduce the entity of the problem. As a second clarification, I use poverty rates instead of unemployment rates with the purpose of estimating the share of people whose income falls beyond a certain threshold *regardless* of employment conditions.

Secondly, I test whether welfare generosity has any impact on union preferences for a UBI. In systems that ensure income protection for those who are in need, unions may feel less urgency to discuss UBI (H3). In these contexts, they could prefer to stick with the current system, and to call for the expansion of existing policy instruments. Conversely, unions that operate in welfare systems characterised by poor coverage and benefit levels may find it attractive to consider more “radical” proposals such as a UBI. To measure this, I use an indicator of the share of jobless people that currently receive unemployment benefits (ILO, 2017). The index describes the share of unemployed individuals that receive contributory or non-contributory cash transfers, and includes both social insurance and social

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<sup>5</sup> Due to the problems mentioned in the previous sections, two “inconsistent” responses from Italy and France have been re-calibrated to the union’s stated position.

<sup>6</sup> In the last section of this analysis, I employ an adjusted propensity score, that integrates responses from the 11 statements.

assistance. The index aggregates data from a series of database, including SSI, OECD SOCR, ILOSTAT and other national sources. With this measure, I intend to assess whether unions are less supportive of a UBI in countries where the unemployed enjoy good levels of income security. Here I choose to look at people in a situation of unemployment, rather than in poverty, because it is the population that unions directly target in their strategies. If a large part of their current or potential membership base was exposed to income insecurity, unions could look at the UBI as a way to guarantee them the support needed. A strong limitation of this index is that it does not reflect income replacement rates for the unemployed. For instance, a single person without children with earnings at the average wage enjoys a net replacement rate of 61% in Belgium, while only 46% in Ireland (OECD, 2019); despite the 15 p.p. difference, the two countries are placed at the same level of the scale (100% coverage level).

Third, trade unions' propensity towards a basic income is likely to depend on unions' strength and role in the industrial relations landscape (H4). As a UBI would shift critical responsibilities from the social partners to the state, stronger unions may perceive UBI as a threat to their bargaining power. To estimate trade unions' strength at the national level, I employ a measure on wage bargaining centralisation retrieved from Visser's ICTWSS database (2016). The index ranges from 0 to 3. The measure includes a list of items, including the main level of bargaining, frequency and scope of enterprise bargaining, and clauses in sectoral agreements. Unions that negotiate at a high level (general or sector), and that successfully coordinate their actions across bargaining tiers, should have fewer incentives to promote a UBI, because the policy would deprive them of crucial "power resources" to alter wage levels. Instead, unions that have fewer opportunities to affect wages and that bargain at a lower level (firm) should be less reticent towards a UBI; on the contrary, they may decide to endorse a UBI to increase bargaining power at the individual level.

Finally, I test whether in societies characterised by a strong work ethic, unions are more hostile to a basic income (H5). As a UBI would operate a disconnection between work and income, unions that are more anchored in the "culture" of work may be more skeptical towards a UBI. To define cultural attitudes, I incorporate two questions from the European Social Survey (2016). In ESS 8, interviewees from European countries were asked whether they thought that social benefits and services could make people lazy, and to what extent the standards of living of the unemployed shall be considered as a government's responsibility. The link with the first question is straightforward: in societies that believe that benefits and services could make people lazy, unions may oppose the UBI. The second needs certain clarifications. With the second question, I want to measure whether people think that the "locus of responsibility" for being unemployed is in the person unemployed, or outside the direct control of the individual. If the former is true, the condition of unemployment is seen as a reflection of individual characteristics and efforts. If the latter is the case, people may believe that having a job is *not* the mere result of one's efforts (depending on exogenous factors), and that the government should intervene to repair this injustice. In countries where the intervention of the government to provide for the unemployed is seen as legitimate, because unemployment is not under the direct control of the individual, unions should be supportive of a UBI. Conversely, in societies where the unemployed are seen as responsible for their situations, unions should be reluctant to the UBI, because, if somebody is unemployed, it is certainly her or his fault ("he/she does not want to work", "is not trying hard enough", etc.). As a caveat, the two questions were administered to a random sample of citizens (and *not* union leaders); therefore, they should be regarded as proxies of cultural

attitudes at the national level. Secondly, the second question may be prone to alternative interpretations. One may be that societies scoring high believe that the state should not hold any responsibility for the unemployed and leave this function to social partners (e.g. Ghent system). Otherwise, it could simply be an indicator of the desired equilibrium between the “state” and the “market”, and thus the degree to which the government should intervene in the economy. Finally, the variable could indicate the degree of economic insecurity in a certain society; in that case, it should lose significance when “competing” with the variable on poverty rates. To compute national scores, I calculate means at the country level. To cope with the missing countries (Argentina, Canada, Iceland), I integrate responses from a quasi-identical question contained in the ISSP survey<sup>7</sup> (2006).

## 6. Regressions results

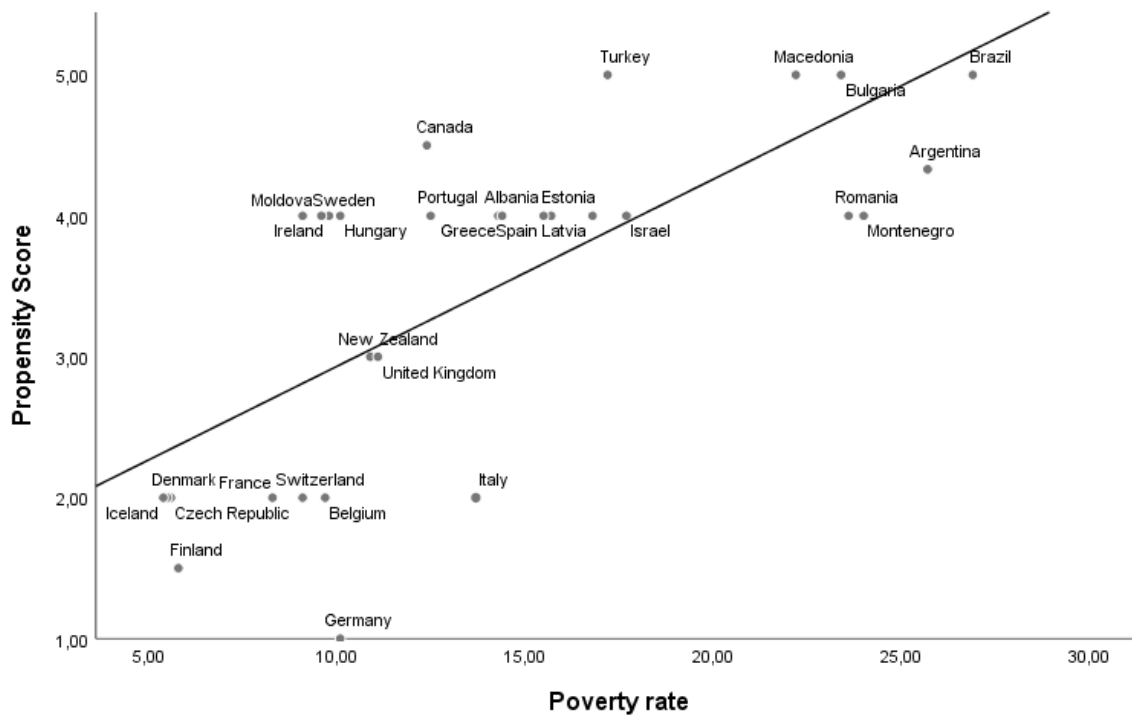


Figure 2: Poverty rate (OECD) on propensity score (own calculation). (B: .133;  $R^2$ : 0.51; sign. at 0.005)

Figure 2 shows the relationship between UBI support and poverty rate. As it is clearly noticeable, poverty is an important predictor of the propensity to support a UBI. The poverty rate is strongly associated with propensity score, and the relationship is very significant ( $R^2$ : 0.51; significant at the 0.001 level). This result confirms the existence of an insecurity “channel” (H2), in which widespread poverty at the social level stimulates a major openness to a UBI among union leadership.

<sup>7</sup> The question was: “The government should provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed”. People should respond on a 1-5 scale. To integrate them into the analysis, I recoded these answers from 1 to 10.

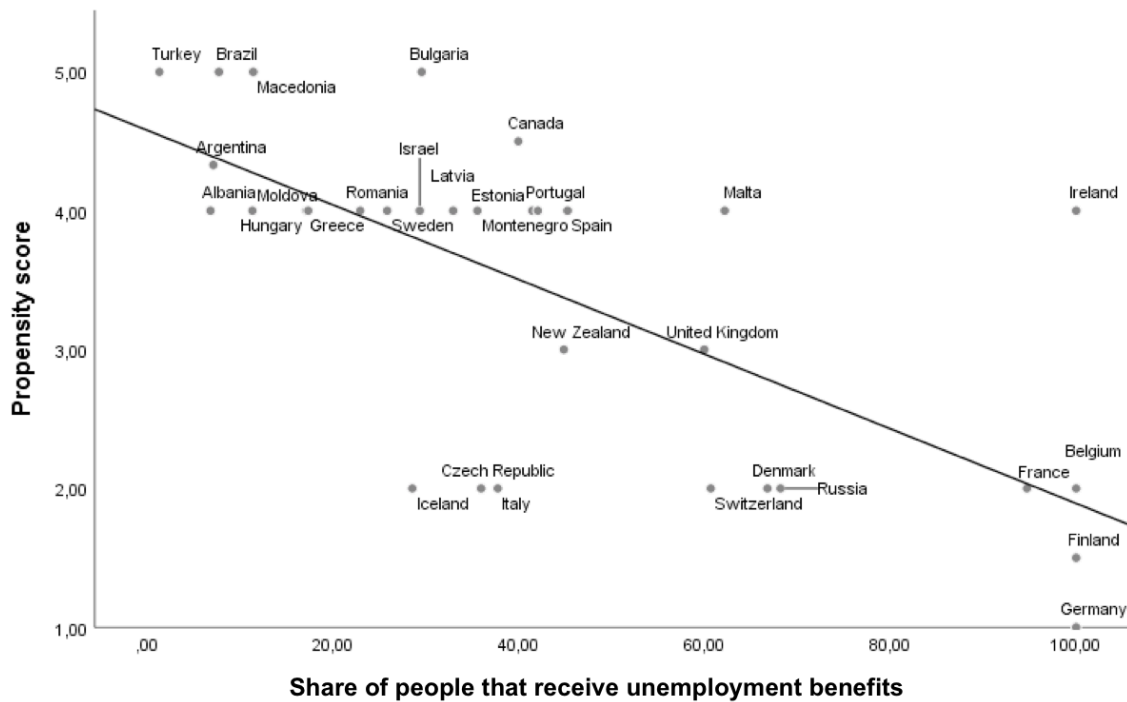


Figure 3: Share of people entitled to unemployment benefits (ILO) on propensity score (own calculation). (B:  $-.27$ ;  $R^2$ :  $0.48$ ; sign. at  $0.005$ )

Likewise, the higher the share of unemployed people that receive income support, the lower their appreciation for a UBI ( $R^2$ :  $0.48$ ). This finding is relevant, suggesting that in countries where the welfare system mitigates the impact of labour market distortions, unions are less likely to champion a basic income (H3). In figure 3, Ireland stands out as an outlier, displaying a higher propensity rate than its unemployment benefit coverage would suggest. On the opposite, Czech Republic, Iceland, and Italy display a lower propensity score than their coverage level would predict. Reading the two relationships together, unions are more likely to support a basic income in contexts characterised by higher levels of socio-economic insecurity, and where current welfare schemes are ill-suited to address these gaps.

The variable on wage bargaining centralisation shows good predictive strength and significance (R-square  $0.37$ ; sign. at  $0.05$ ). As expected, the relation is negative, suggesting that unions that rely on a higher degree of wage bargaining centralisation are more opposed to a UBI. This result indicates that in countries where trade unions have strong bargaining power over wages, the introduction of a UBI is seen as detrimental to their institutional position in advancing workers' interests (H4). In a UBI framework, in which the state coordinates and administers cash transfers, powerful unions have less leeway to bargain over wages with the employers (Dinerstein et al, 2017).

As regards cultural attitudes, I find no relation with the variable on laziness. However, with the variable on government responsibility for the unemployed, the relationship is positive and significant (R-square  $0.33$ ; sign. at  $0.05$ ). In a number of countries, paid work remains a fundamental driver of identity, status, respect and human worth (Sage, 2018). Societies characterised by a strong work ethic tend to consider living standards as directly related to individual skills and efforts, rather than to contextual characteristics such as the state of the economy and the role of the government. In countries

where the well-being of the unemployed is not considered as a government's responsibility, unions seem more hostile to the idea of an income detached from work, which could undermine the centrality of labour (H1). Conversely, in societies where the government is regarded as holding responsibility for the well-being of the unemployed, unions could be likely to back the introduction of an unconditional income guarantee.

#### Summary of the model

Model	R	R-sq	Adjusted r-sq	std. err.
1	,883	,780	,713	,66571

#### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	Sign.
		B	Standard error	Beta		
1	(Costante)	2,521	2,205		1,143	,273
	Poverty Rate (OECD)	,090	,038	,398	2,353	,035
	Share of people that receive unemployment benefits (ILO)	-,022	,010	-,540	-2,179	,048
	Centralization of wage bargaining (ICWSS)	-,039	,233	-,034	-,167	,870
	Standard of living for the unemployment is govt responsibility (ESS)	,086	,321	,051	,267	,793

a. Dependent variable: Propensity score

Figure 4: model with the four variables selected. Summary of the model and coefficients. ( $R^2$ : 0.78)

Looking at the model (figure 4), three elements stand out. First, the model is effective at explaining the variance of trade unions' support for a UBI (0.78). Second, the two variables on contextual characteristics (poverty and welfare generosity) are relevant *explanans* of the propensity to support a UBI. This confirms that socio-economic features have a great influence of unions' perceptions of a UBI. However, once running the model, two variables become completely insignificant: wage bargaining centralisation and standard of living of the unemployed. As anticipated, the variable on cultural attitudes may have failed to explain work ethic, being absorbed by the variable on income insecurity. Likewise, the variable on centralisation of wage bargaining may not have a true independent effect; it might be the case that unions in countries with encompassing unemployment benefit schemes are less likely to endorse a UBI, and these unions operate in countries with high levels of wage bargaining centralisation. Another explanation may be given by multicollinearity between individual variables, which would have a negative effect on significance levels. Moreover, the results of this section bring substantial evidence for H2 and H3, and moderate evidence for H1 and H4. To confirm the existence of the two socio-economic channels, and seek for solid confirmation to the other two hypotheses, I make extensive use of the interviews in the qualitative section.

## 7. Mapping labour market and welfare clusters

In the last section of this analysis, I use these variables to situate countries on a bi-dimensional spectrum. This procedure is useful for illustrating commonalities across labour market economies and welfare regimes, assessing whether certain socio-economic features and propensity scores produce different country profiles. I compute an adjusted propensity score, that integrates the eleven questions from the multiple-item measure. The two components (the answers to the question of union support, and the result to the set of 11 questions) are weighed 0,5 each. To calculate country scores, I build a scale with three degrees of propensity: low (1 to 2,5); medium (2,5 to 3,5); high (3,5 to 5). The wider margin for the two “extremes” (low and high) intends to account for the moderating bias typically associated with Likert scales<sup>8</sup>. Then, I compute means at the national level and calculate country scores. In the figures, adjusted propensity scores are indicated with colours (green, red, blue).

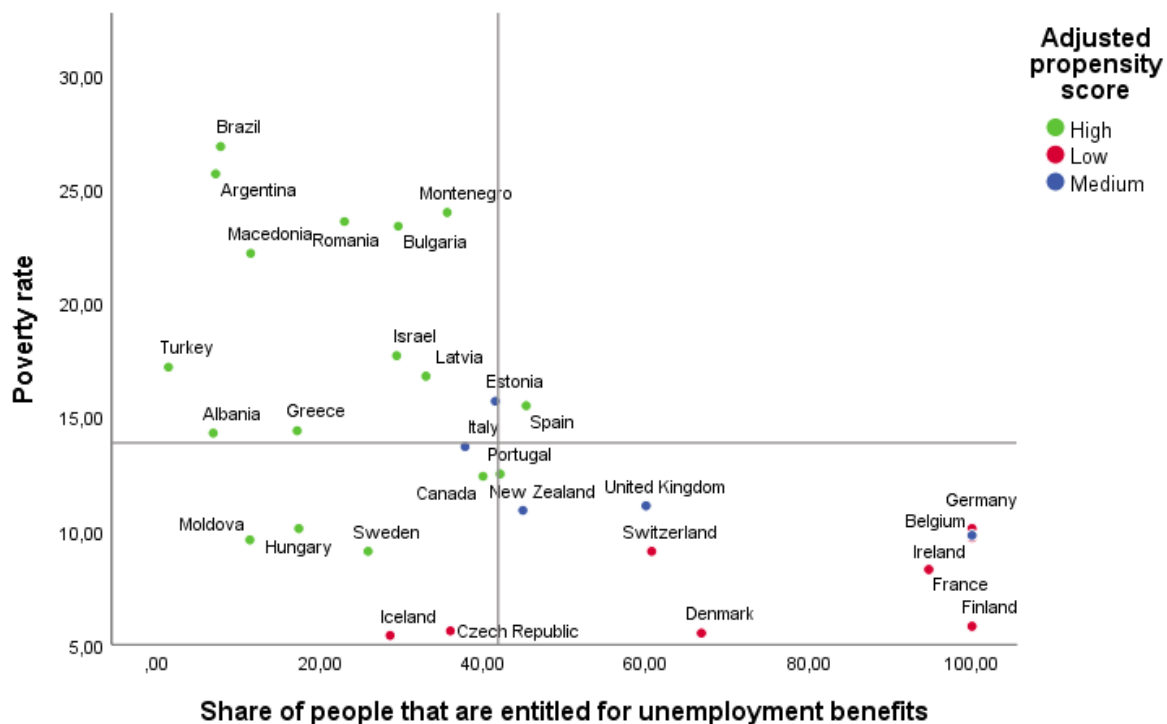


Figure 5: mapping countries across unemployment benefit coverage (ILO) and poverty rates (OECD).

Figure 5 locates states according to their poverty rates (on the y axis), and the shares of people entitled to unemployment benefits (x axis). In the upper-left, we see a group of countries characterised by low unemployment benefit coverage, high poverty rates, and high UBI approval scores among union élites. This group includes Liberal, CEE and Mediterranean countries. On the opposite of the spectrum, Nordic and Bismarckian welfare states display very high coverage rates, low poverty rates, and generally low support for a UBI among union leaders. As these countries are characterised by an

<sup>8</sup> The structure of Likert scales may divert people from choosing extreme items, such as “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree”, thereby moderating responses towards the mean.



encompassing welfare state, unemployment coverage is probably dealt with other forms of income support. Close to the middle of the spectrum, four countries (Italy, Estonia, New Zealand, UK) have average support scores, medium poverty rates, and medium coverage rates.

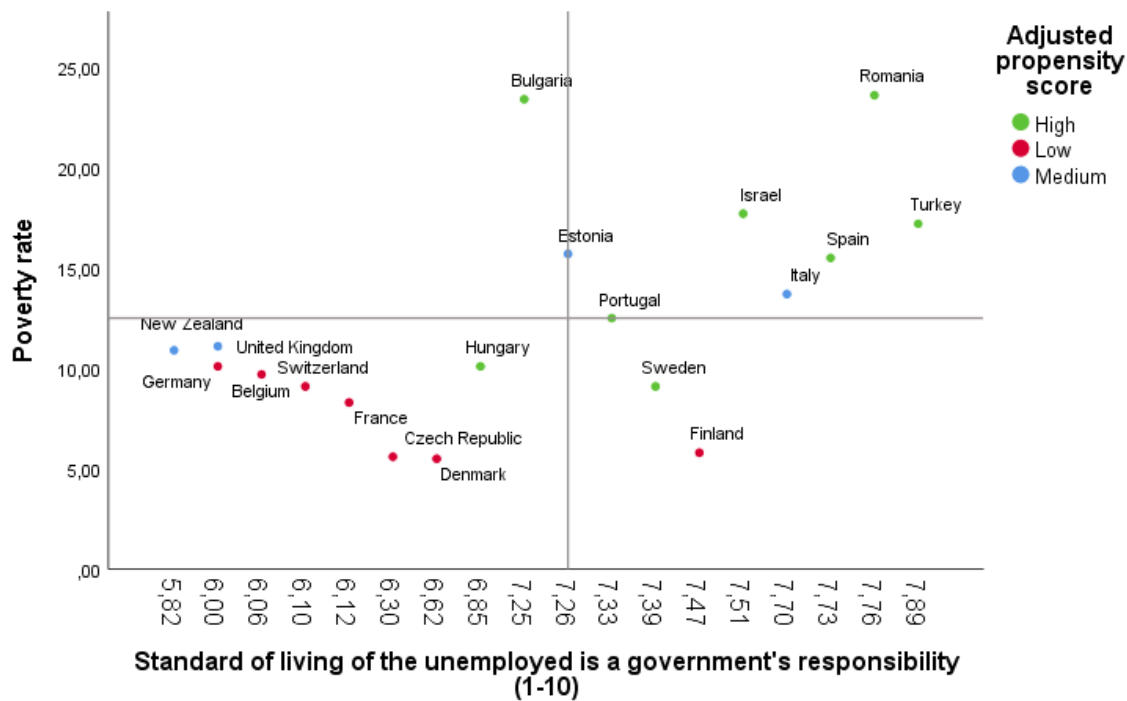


Figure 6: mapping countries across work ethic (ESS) and poverty rates (OECD).

Figure 6 compares poverty rates with the measure on the work ethic. As many countries from CEE and Balkans were not included in the ESS and ISSP surveys, 10 countries are missing from the graph. In the lower-left hand, unions with low levels of appreciation for a UBI seem to operate in countries with moderate poverty rates and a low perceived responsibility of the state towards the unemployed. All the four Continental countries feature in this group, together with Denmark and the Czech Republic. More surprisingly, New Zealand and the United Kingdom locate close to this group. The two liberal countries display a high level of support for a UBI among union leaderships, and a low expectation from the state to ensure a decent living for the unemployed. The reader may recall from the previous sections that Liberal trade unionists contend that a basic income *would not* discourage people's employment to the labour market. The ideal disconnection between a UBI and willingness to participate in paid employment for union leaders may explain, at least in part, the unexpected position of the two countries on the left of the spectrum. By contrast, Swedish and Finnish citizens seem to have high expectations from the state, and their unions diverge in the degrees of appreciation for a UBI. On the center and upper-right side, a number of countries are characterised by a low work ethic, high poverty rates, and a medium-to-high support for a UBI among union leaders. It is plausible that, in countries with higher levels of poverty, union leaders do not consider unemployment as a pure responsibility of the individual, thereby favouring the introduction of unconditional measures of income support.

## **8. Main trends**

In this part, I find strong and compelling evidence for the two socio-economic channels (H2 and H3), and moderate evidence for the cultural and organisational channels (H1 and H4). The findings presented so far allow me to distinguish two broad groups. On one hand, Nordic and Bismarckian countries display low levels of insecurity; high levels of welfare generosity; a solid work ethic; and high levels of bargaining power. These factors are conducive to a low level of support for a UBI among union leaders. On the other hand, Liberal, Mediterranean and CEE and Balkan countries are marked by high levels of poverty; a generally low effectiveness in welfare provision; middle-to-low work ethics; and poor levels of bargaining power. Unions from these countries display middle-to-high levels of support for a UBI. In the following section, I inform this analysis with a qualitative approach, making use of the interviews to prove the hypotheses.

## 4.2 Qualitative analysis

In the previous section, I find robust confirmation for the hypotheses 2 (in generous welfare systems, unions see a UBI as financially unsustainable or less effective compared to existing schemes) and 3 (trade unions are likely to endorse a UBI in contexts characterised by high levels of poverty and insecurity). Furthermore, I find moderate confirmation for hypothesis 1 (unions characterised by a strong work ethic are distrustful of a UBI) and 4 (powerful and institutionalised unions consider UBI as a threat to their bargaining power). Due to the character of the analysis, it was not possible to test Hypothesis 5 (when trade unions see a UBI as less beneficial to their members, they are less likely to endorse the policy). The purpose of this chapter is to check with the interviews the validity of the four causal pathways identified in the quantitative section. In addition, I verify whether the existence of an insider/outsider cleavage has any impact on preferences for a UBI (H5). If that was the case, I should expect it to interact with my fourth channel: unions' strength, inclusivity and position within the institutional framework are probably telling of the degree to which unions represent the demands of the outsiders, and stimulate leaders' appreciation for a UBI.

In the following, I present the main results from 33 interviews collected between January and April 2019. At the end of the process, I interviewed: 22 people who are national leaders, officers, or researchers who work or have worked within a trade union; five international officers or researchers at international organisations; six experts that have no direct link with trade unions. Among the national trade union respondents, I discussed with people from the following countries: Argentina; Belgium; Canada; Denmark; Finland; France (2); Germany; Ireland; Italy (5); Netherlands; Sweden; Switzerland (2); South Africa (2); Spain; United Kingdom (2). At the international level, I interviewed two people from the ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation); two from the ETUI (European Trade Union Institute); one from the TUAC (Trade Union Advisory Committee at the OECD). Eight interviews have been run in person (two from ITUC; two from ETUI; one from TUAC; one from Belgium; one from UK; one from Finland), and all the rest by phone or skype call. Despite the scarcity of official texts on UBI, I have integrated the analysis with nine documents: four congress statements (France; Italy; Switzerland; UK); four position papers (Belgium; France; Italy; ITUC); one press statement (Switzerland).

The sample includes: three interviewees from the corporatist group (Denmark, Finland, Sweden); five interviewees from the social partnership group (Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, two from Switzerland); eight from the contestative group (two from France, five from Italy, Spain); four from the pluralist group (Ireland, two from UK, Canada). This classification broadly corresponds to the welfare typology of Nordic, Bismarckian, Southern European, and Liberal regimes (Ferragina, Seleeib-Kaiser, 2011). The only difference between the industrial and welfare typologies concerns France. Despite operating in a country characterised by a Bismarckian welfare regime, French unions adopt an adversarial logic of action and split along ideological lines (Bernaciak et al, 2014). Therefore, the country situates in the contestative group according to the industrial relations literature, and in the Continental group for the welfare scholarship (Bonoli, 1997; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Korpi, Palme, 1998). In addition to these clusters, I include two middle-income countries (Argentina and South Africa). For the sake of simplicity, I associate these two countries with the Liberal group.

Country or Organisation	N.	Industrial regime	Welfare regime	Position	Interview method
Argentina	1	Pluralist	Liberal	Health and social security officer	Skype call
Belgium	2	Social Partnership	Continental	Social policy expert – European and International relations Office	In person
Canada	1	Pluralist	Liberal	Senior researcher – social and economic policy department	Skype call
Denmark	1	Corporatist	Nordic	Labour market policy advisor	Skype call
Finland	1	Corporatist	Nordic	Director – EU representation	In person
France	1	Contestative	Continental	Confederal secretary – inclusion, poverty and unemployment	Phone call
	2	Contestative	Continental	Wage officer – metal sector	Phone call
Germany	1	Social Partnership	Continental	Political economy officer – service sector	Skype call
Ireland	1	Pluralist	Liberal	Political economy researcher	Skype call
Italy	1	Contestative	Mediterranean	Welfare and reforms expert	Phone call
	2	Contestative	Mediterranean	Economic, health and social policy expert	Phone call
	3	Contestative	Mediterranean	Confederal Secretary – social and welfare policies	Phone call
	4	Contestative	Mediterranean	General Secretary – atypical workers sector	Phone call
	5	Contestative	Mediterranean	Social policy officer – atypical workers sector	Phone call
Netherlands	1	Social Partnership	Continental	Labour market and social security officer	Skype call
Sweden	1	Corporatist	Nordic	Policy director	Skype call
Switzerland	1	Social Partnership	Continental	Health and social security officer	Skype call
	2	Social Partnership	Continental	Head of migration unit	Skype call
South Africa	1	Pluralist	Liberal	Research institute co-director	Skype call
	2	Pluralist	Liberal	Research institute director, past experience as social policy researcher for trade unions	Skype call
Spain	1	Contestative	Mediterranean	Social policy expert	Skype call
United Kingdom	1	Pluralist	Liberal	Senior European officer	In person
	2	Pluralist	Liberal	Pay policy officer	Skype call
ITUC	1	n.a.	n.a.	Policy advisor	In person
	2	n.a.	n.a.	Policy officer	In person
ETUI	1	n.a.	n.a.	Researcher	In person
	2	n.a.	n.a.	Researcher	In person
TUAC	1	n.a.	n.a.	Policy advisor	In person

Table 3: Detail of union respondents. Country of origin, role, industrial and welfare regime of belonging, and method for conducting the interview.

As anticipated, I had poor control over the choice of the person I was going to interview. Both the selection criteria (trade unionists with expertise in social, labour market, economic, wage policies or similar) and the selection process (convenience sampling through personal contacts or e-mails to confederations) may suffer from biases. For one, albeit presenting rough similarities, the roles

covered by the interviewees are not perfectly comparable. As a major difference, three respondents (two from Italy and one from France) cover a *political* and not a *technical* role. These persons have accessed their job position through political election or appointment and, differently from the rest of the interviewees, should not be considered as a part of the organisational apparatus in a strict sense. Furthermore, four interviewees (Belgium; Finland; France; UK) worked at the European or International departments of their organisations. This may be problematic, insofar as their attitudes could be “insulated” from the national context where they come from. The number of Italian interviewees involved was non-proportional to that of other countries (five against an average of 1,3 per country). As we shall see later, the high number of Italian respondents is justified on the need to analyse the Italian case study more in depth. Lastly, due to the lack of official statements on UBI in all but five cases (Belgium; France; Switzerland; UK; ITUC), it is impossible to check whether the interviewees’ position is consistent with that of their organisation. Therefore, positions expressed by the interviewees are not necessarily representative of their unions. Respondents’ stances are at best a proxy of unions’ leanings towards a UBI, useful to highlight variations across countries, welfare systems and industrial relations models.

The analysis is articulated in seven sections. First, I examine the work ethic and preferences for unconditionality and universality, seeking for confirmation to H1. Then, I assess trade unions’ appreciation for a UBI in the context of welfare reform, highlighting differences across welfare clusters. In that section, H3 will be under scrutiny. The third part relates to labour market policies and the “future of work”, and I look for further evidence to my H2. Fourthly, I examine the perceived effects on collective bargaining, wages, and industrial relations. In that section, I assess H4. Lastly, I take a political angle, describing cleavages across labour market and socio-demographic groups, and checking whether the propensity to support a UBI fits with the composition of their membership pool (H5). After summarizing the main trends, I briefly cover the Italian case study to test whether these expectations apply to the real policy-making process.

## **1. Theoretical underpinnings**

### **Work, idleness, and separation of income from wage**

The simple reason for which some trade unionists dismiss UBI is that it hardly fits with their cultural and political tradition. For seven interviewees, a UBI would be “not a union issue” (Germany, Finland), or not in line with the unions’ agenda (Ireland, three from Italy). An officer from Italy suggests that to imagine an income detached from work is an “enormous cultural effort”, which would explain a delay in adjusting their strategies. A German trade unionist puts it even more bluntly:

“The point is, what is the relevance of this for the daily work of trade unions? In my view, it doesn’t exist. [...] We can discuss about everything, but it is not a point that is relevant for our work. It’s not on the table. It’s.. It’s.. It’s like thinking about socialism. I think it would be good to think more about socialism again, but that’s a more difficult question. [...] If you want to think about an alternative to capitalist production, you have to think a bit deeper than that.”

Four respondents from Conservative welfare regimes (Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, France) defend the role of labour as a driver of dignity and freedom. This result is consistent with the previous

findings, as these countries rank among the five highest places on the variable on cultural attitudes (2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> respectively). In these societies, where people tend to “glorify employment as a signifier of identity and status” (Sage, 2018), union leaders are reluctant to sever the ties of labour and income. For the Belgian interviewee, work “is the means for the individual to succeed, to fulfill a social coherence, to develop yourself as a person. [...] It is an element of social evolution”. In this framework, a UBI would be a “pretext for eroding the right to work”. An interviewee from Switzerland takes a similar stance, arguing that work “is a factor of social integration in society, participation, rights”. Likewise, a report from the French CFDT depicts labour as “essential to emancipation and social connections” (CFDT, 2016).

However, not all interviewees from Conservative welfare regimes are of this view. Two respondents (Netherlands, Switzerland) stress that work is not necessarily a synonym for well-being. The Swiss trade union SYNA has never made a secret of its favourable views for a UBI, seen as a means to guarantee protection against degrading or humiliating jobs (SYNA, 2010). For a Swiss officer:

“Work is not only source of dignity and freedom, but it can be also the reverse. We talk about modern slavery. In Switzerland, we have some domestic workers, migrants from Slovenia, staying always at home, they never get out [...] Work should not be sanctified, there are also these cases. It would be nice if all jobs were equivalent to dignity and freedom, but they aren’t”.

In UBI discussions, the issue of work incentives has been highly contentious. As demonstrated in the quantitative section, trade unionists do not have a clear position on this issue. 49,9% of the respondents to the survey think that a UBI would *not* discourage participation, against 28,9% thinking that it would discourage participation. Similarly, the interviewees who think that a UBI could make work less attractive constitute a minority. Four trade unionists (Finland, two from Italy, Sweden) advance the hypothesis that a basic income could push people out of employment. This concern is vivid among Scandinavian interviewees. The Finnish respondent worries that a UBI would “discourage people from work”, undermining the Finnish compromise of high taxes, high employment, and high levels of trust in society. Likewise, for a Swedish interviewee a basic income “could lead people out of the labour force, that is good neither for society, nor for the individual”. Furthermore, an unconditional UBI could create the “dangerous” perception of the “undeserving poor, who don’t like to have a job, because they’re not required to”. An Italian trade unionist wonders: “Once a basic income is financed out of labour, who would be the foolish who works for those who do gardening?”.

Three interviewees (Ireland, Netherlands, Switzerland) deviate from a work-centered perspective, arguing that a UBI could stimulate a broader redefinition of labour. According to the Dutch expert, a UBI would allow people to work for shorter hours, transit from one job to another, and take care of their “loved ones”. For the Dutch officer, a basic income would help “many people [who] struggle with work, study and caring responsibilities”. In like manner, an international staff member clarifies that a UBI would reward other forms of work, not necessarily recognised in the labour market: “If a housewife is taking care of their children, *that’s labour!* If you do like painting, or everything that is good for society – all these good things are not paid”. For a Swiss interviewee, “people would still have jobs because they like doing something, because they benefit from social networks, and from the social status related to work”. Moreover, “we would still need lawyers, doctors..” For an Irish

expert, past evidence of UBI trials show that such policies do not necessarily decrease employment, because “you know - people *want to work*”.

### Attitudes towards unconditionality and universality

In the interviews, experts were asked to express their attitudes towards universality and unconditionality. With the term of universality, UBI proponents intend universal allocation of a benefit to a given population regardless of any economic, social or personal characteristic. For unconditionality, they refer to freedom from any form of obligation preceding, following, or during the reception of a certain benefit. Whereas a UBI may be dismissed for pragmatic reasons, union leaders could still share universality and unconditionality as long-term goals within their platforms. Preferences for unconditionality and universality can be visualised along two axes<sup>9</sup>:

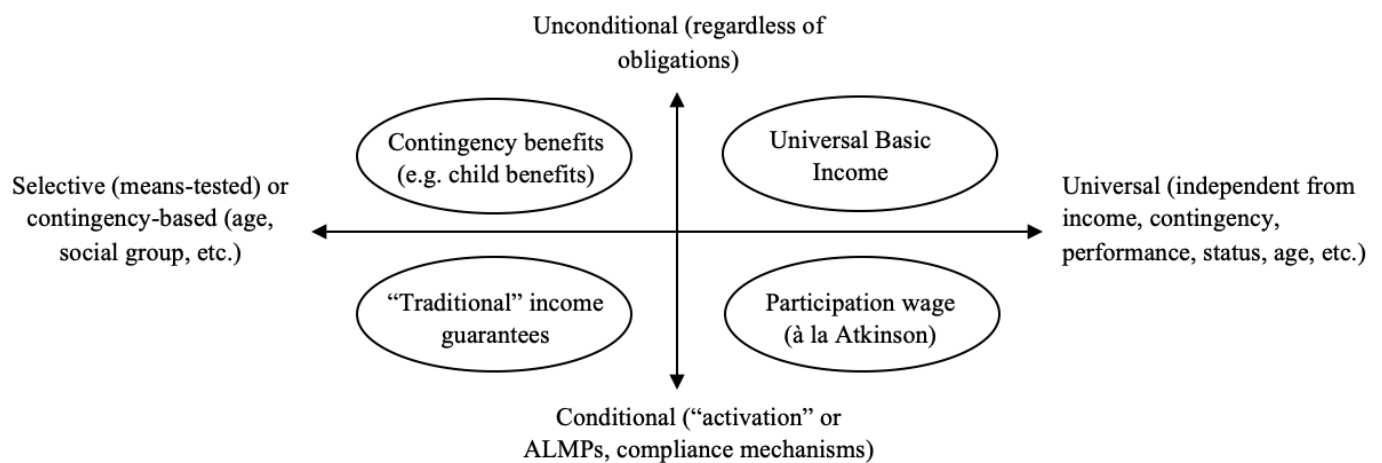


Figure 7: unconditionality and universality in policy settings.

Preferences for universality differ neatly across welfare regimes. Universality is generally opposed in Bismarckian and Nordic countries, and endorsed in Liberal and Mediterranean countries. Respondents from Belgium, France, Germany, and Sweden show scant enthusiasm for universality in welfare provision. This finding reflects my expectations for two reasons. First, as I further demonstrate below, these unions are mostly oriented to the traditional workforce; hence, they should be less interested in universal schemes, as they would benefit people who are not union members. Secondly, they are strong sponsors of, and path-dependent to, the social insurance principle, according to which one should receive benefits proportionally to how much she or he contributes. Six unions (two from Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Sweden) explicitly defend the contributory system. In a position paper (2018), the Belgian union FGTB contends that a UBI would “break the link between activity, remuneration and social protection”. For the German, minimum income should be provided only to people in need. In the analysis, both the Belgian and German interviewees envisage the progressive extension of social insurance to larger parts of the population, prioritizing “universal social insurance” over a universal basic income. Likewise, a French officer says that the

<sup>9</sup> I use these two dimensions as the “least common denominator” across UBI policies around the world. For the sake of analytical simplicity, other criteria (e.g. individuality, periodical allocation) have not been included.

organisation does not share the idea of a basic income accessible to everybody. The person declares to be “in favour of a basic income - but only for those who really need it”. On the same note, the Swedish interviewee argues that basic pensions are not fair in that they cannot reward work performed during the lifetime: “after you work 40 years you only get this little bit more. With a UBI it would be the same: why should I work, if I get only a little more money?”.

Six trade unionists are in favour of the universality of policy settings (two from Italy, Ireland, South Africa, Spain, UK). Interviewees from Ireland and South Africa consider universality as a long-term goal. For an Irish respondent, both universality and unconditionality are desirable, and to some extent they already characterise the Irish system. For a South African researcher, it is quite clear that South African unions have strongly opposed means-testing, and championed the extension of income support to the whole population. A group of three trade unionists from Italy, Spain and UK share universality as a principle, but renounce to it for pragmatic reasons. This finding is coherent with the survey findings: Liberal and Mediterranean respondents do support a UBI in principle, but fear that it could be too expensive or ineffective compared to other schemes. The British interviewee points out that “it is well known that take-up rates are higher for universal benefits than means-tested; but we are also conscious that there is a limit about the money that can be spent. Our possible orientation to universality mismatches with our British *pragmatism*”. Likewise, a Spanish expert contends that a universal benefit could be desirable in the long-term; however, given the under-investment in social expenditure, Spanish unions cannot ask for more than a means-tested benefit. A similar position is taken by an Italian expert: “In a country like ours, where there is no adequate labour market policy nor public services [...] and a great part of the population is in hardship, a universal benefit is not a priority on the agenda”. Interviews from Liberal and Mediterranean unions show a clear disconnection between ideal and pragmatic objectives, as first anticipated in Vanderborght (2006).

Positions towards unconditionality are less clear. The only cluster that is distinguishable from the others is the Nordic, whose respondents are strongly opposed to unconditionality. This resonates with the qualitative finding on work ethic, as Nordic trade unionists place a stronger emphasis on employment and individual effort than the other interviewees. For a Swedish leader, “benefits should come with requirements. And from that perspective, basic income is problematic. [...] If you start giving money for nothing, you start giving up with people”. The Danish and the Finnish interviewees take similar stances, prioritising activation over unconditional cash transfers. By contrast, seven respondents favour unconditionality as a long-term goal (Ireland, South Africa, Spain, UK), or criticise the obligations linked to the reception of social assistance (Belgium, Germany, Italy).

Despite disavowing “strict” conditionality, five respondents (Belgium, France, Canada, Italy, Netherlands), declare to support the expansion of services for individual recipients. This position contrasts with the original idea of a UBI, that regards services as a form of paternalism<sup>10</sup> (Standing, 2004). The Belgian respondent criticises activation programs linked to the Belgian unemployment insurance; however, “some people” should still be given special support. Two representatives from Italian unions claim that activation programs such as job-search and training are needed to make sure

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<sup>10</sup> With the exception of “essential” public services such as education and health care. To the rest, they may apply the “Paternalism test” principle: “A policy or an institutional change is just only if it does not impose controls on some groups that are not imposed on the most free groups in society” (Standing, 2004).



people do not fall into long-term unemployment. Discussing minimum income programs, a French leader stresses the importance to “accompany these people to get out of the street, find a job, find housing, train themselves”. On a similar account, leaders from Belgium, Canada and France are wary of the idea of cash benefits alone. In a congress resolution (2016), the French union CFDT takes a firm stance against cash allowances: “Being independent and living decently cannot be ‘summed up’ with a monetary transaction”. The Canadian respondent takes a similar stance:

“In Canada, unions are very supportive of public services. [...] Basic income means so many things for so many people. But, no matter what model is, you cannot have it by itself [...] If the simple answer is just to put a certain amount of money into people’s pockets, and then you don’t do anything else, [...] it won’t really work”.

### Preferences for Universality

<b>Preferences for unconditionality</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>
	<b>Low</b> Belgium; Finland; France; Sweden	Netherlands
	<b>High</b> Germany; Italy (one respondent)	Ireland; Italy (two respondents); South Africa; Spain; Switzerland (one respondent); UK

Table 4: country labels on preferences for universality and unconditionality. No sufficient data for: Argentina; Canada; Denmark; Switzerland (one respondent).

## Discussion

The analysis of cultural attitudes brings further confirmation to my H1. Unions’ openness to a UBI is related to their conception of work and employment. Three main trends can be identified. Respondents from three Bismarckian countries (Belgium, France, Germany) and two Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden) are strongly opposed to universality. These unions defend the social insurance principle, dismissing the UBI from a theoretical standpoint. Secondly, Nordic unions display a clear aversion to unconditionality and a marked work ethic. This attitude is reflected by a strong emphasis on activation, in-kind benefits, and measures to prevent work disincentives. Third, trade unionists from Liberal (Ireland, South Africa, UK) and Mediterranean countries (two from Italy, Spain) have a more nuanced understanding of the “labour contract”. Their openness to an income detached from work motivates fair preferences for unconditionality and universality. The fact that these trade unionists do *not* believe that a UBI would create a disincentive to work, as emerges from the survey, rhymes well with the attitudes expressed in the interviews. As the UBI would not make work less attractive, people should be free from any form of monitoring. As we shall see later, high preferences for universality in Liberal countries are associated with the low segmentation of their welfare and taxation systems, as well as a high degree of membership inclusivity. Despite sharing

these ideals from a theoretical standpoint, trade unionists from Italy, Spain, and UK are nonetheless disposed to sacrifice the two principles when financial or political circumstances do not allow.

## **2. Welfare system and finance**

### **Perceived deficiency of the welfare state**

Perceptions towards welfare systems vary substantially across countries. 11 interviewees, mostly from Southern European and Liberal welfare regimes, declare not to be satisfied with the current system. Experts make reference to issues of system design and adequacy (France, Italy, Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, UK); poor coverage (Canada, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain, UK); and bureaucratic complexity (France, Ireland, Spain, UK). Six interviewees suggest that unemployment benefits are too low and should be increased (Argentina; France; Ireland; Italy; Spain; Sweden), while Italian and Spanish interviewees lament the lack of “basic” entitlements and insufficient public services. As regards welfare fragmentation, a Canadian trade unionist describes a very “piece-meal, patchy system”, which hampers coverage levels. According to four respondents, bureaucracy constitutes a relevant barrier to potential recipients, depressing take-up rates (France, Ireland, Spain, UK). Moreover, experts from the Netherlands and South Africa denounce the perverse effects of unemployment insurance on participation, because of reductions in payments as one finds a job.

Respondents from Nordic and Continental European countries appear significantly less critical. These trade unionists contend that their welfare systems require small adjustments, rather than structural transformations. The analysis reinforces what is found in the quantitative section, as the appreciation for a UBI is lower in countries with higher unemployment benefit coverage ( $R^2$ : 0.48). As a further confirmation, survey respondents from Nordic and Bismarckian countries label basic income as expensive and less effective *vis à vis* existing schemes, and the same perception emerges from the interviews. For the German trade unionist, “The social security system in Germany is not *that* bad; it can always be improved, but it could be much worse [...] Better to have a system like this than *no system*”. On a similar note, a Swiss interviewee leans towards a “soft-reform” approach. The union would like welfare recipients to be “less stigmatised”, and policies to better address some categories; however, she still thinks that the Swiss model “is quite a good system” overall. For the Finnish respondent, the generosity of their welfare system explains, at least in part, trade unions’ mistrust towards a UBI: “If we had low social security, we would probably have another position on UBI”. The Dutch respondent seems to be the sole exception in this group. For the interviewee, the Dutch welfare system is expensive and poorly effective, which motivates an internal discussion: “Do we want all workers in the system, or do we want *another* system? This is the question at the moment”.

### **Impact on the “new social risks”**

The perception of the system as failing to address the “new social risks” is widespread. Interestingly, this applies also to trade unionists from countries offering generous unemployment benefit schemes (Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands), as well as respondents that have a positive appreciation of their welfare systems (Denmark, Germany, Switzerland). A possible explanation to this conundrum is that these trade unionists think that their welfare systems ensure a good level of protection against the “old” risks, but they are poorly suited to address the “new” risks, which may

require specific sets of benefits and services. Interviewees from Belgium and France place a great emphasis on the need to enhance coverage for young people, that often balance between unemployment and precarious jobs. Two respondents from Switzerland criticise the male-breadwinner imprint of the Swiss welfare system, calling for gender-responsive policies that promote a fair division of responsibilities. For an international interviewee, complementing statutory social insurance with non-contributory benefits is essential to ensure coverage to vulnerable groups: “contributory schemes are good at providing income replacement for people facing risks, but they are not good for those with fragmented labour market histories [...] We need to better look at the role of non-contributory guarantees”.

For a minority of respondents (Ireland, Netherlands, South Africa, Switzerland), a UBI is seen as instrumental to extend coverage to those excluded from social protection systems, and to ensure a decent income floor to everyone. South African unions have unequivocally championed a basic income grant as a means to reduce exclusion: “100 Rand [the initially planned amount] was very small, but based on econometric modeling, that would reduce the poverty rate by about 67%”. The Irish advisor takes a similar stance:

“Significant sectors, not only the unemployed, but also the lone parents and those with disabilities, suffer high levels of poverty and deprivation. [...] A UBI would be beneficial to those on low incomes who are below the tax threshold and who don’t get the allowance, precarious workers who are in and out of the system, falling through safety nets”.

According to two Nordic trade unionists (Denmark, Sweden), and a respondent from the Netherlands, a basic income could *not* benefit who is exposed to the “new social risks”, precluding additional support to categories with specific needs, including children, people with disabilities and young mothers. This finding is consistent with the quantitative analysis, as trade unionists from Bismarckian and Nordic regimes assert that a UBI would fail to protect people against the new risks. For the Danish respondent, “it’s good that we can target some specific groups that need extra social allowances [...] The problem is that, when you have to give a flat benefit to everybody, you can only give them a *lower* benefit”. The Swedish officer suggests that, if a UBI came as a substitute to these policies, some groups would be further at risk of exclusion. The Dutch respondent is worried that a UBI would “replace arrangements for special groups”, especially precarious workers and persons with disabilities. These concerns are best phrased by an international expert:

“When you have contingency-based benefits, like disability benefits, you’re providing additional support to people who may have higher expenses than the average person. [...] Let’s imagine you give everyone the same, but some people with disabilities need more... You need to understand how to sequence basic income with specific forms of support for those who really need it”.

### **The elephant in the room: financing a universal basic income**

Two thirds of interviewees (18 over 27) share the belief that the UBI would be difficult, if not impossible, to finance. The fact that the large majority of the respondents are worried about financing echoes the result of the quantitative section (50% of the overall respondents believe that a UBI is unaffordable or less effective than other schemes). About a third of the interviewees (8) do not express

any views on this issue. The sole respondent who is *not* worried about costs is a South African researcher. For the interviewee, a number of studies would confirm the affordability of a Basic Income Grant in South Africa, and even experts from the South African government would agree that “the price tag is certainly affordable”. The respondent adds that “COSATU came up from the beginning saying that it was a question of political will - not one of financing”.

In concrete terms, trade unionists see two alternatives for financing a UBI: either *via* an increase in taxes, or by replacing existing schemes. Respondents from Bismarckian (Germany, Switzerland) and Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland) are worried that a basic income would demand higher tax rates to wage-earners. The German trade unionist contends that, in absence of an unexpected windfall (“money doesn’t fall from heaven!”), a UBI at a decent level would impose very high tax rates on workers. For the expert, “paying everybody a UBI just doesn’t work” as it would impose tax rates “of 70% or more”. For the Finnish leader, a UBI poses a trade-off between adequacy and feasibility: “A sufficient basic income would be too expensive; a small one would make no sense”. Other unions highlight this paradox. In a position paper (2016), the French CGT states that “it goes without saying that a basic income at a level substantially higher than current benefits would constitute a great progress for poor people”; however, they remain skeptical that this solution is financially sustainable.

Trade unionists from Canada, Ireland and Switzerland, who are not necessarily opposed to a UBI, worry that an increase in tax rates could penalise low-income earners. Before the 2016 popular initiative, SYNA chose to withdraw its endorsement to the legislative proposal. The project meant to pay the basic income out of VAT, with possibly regressive effects on workers and the broader population. As a result, the union considered that the solution proposed was “not convincing”, and decided to leave their affiliates freedom of vote. Likewise, two Liberal trade unionists (Canada, Ireland) fear that a UBI could have adverse effects on low wage earners. The Canadian interviewee clarifies: “We have to make sure it aims at redistributing. If the government gives a basic income, but then takes back more in taxation, this defeats the whole purpose”. Moreover, the Irish interviewee remarks that, according to recent models, “many of the losers could be in the lower income brackets”.

Country-specific features may pose additional obstacles to the introduction of a UBI. Southern European and Belgian interviewees place a strong accent on taxation, albeit for different reasons. For an Italian officer, the only way to finance a UBI would be to strongly enhance fiscal progressivity; right now, a reform like that would not be viable. Likewise, the Spanish expert laments high levels of inefficiency and tax evasion: “If you don’t have a strong fiscal policy, that guarantees that everybody pays, UBI is not only impossible to fund, but also ineffective in pursuing its objectives”. By contrast, the Belgian trade unionist is concerned that a UBI would phase out the contributory system. In Continental countries, a basic income would lack popular legitimacy, since social contributions are seen as a “postponed salary” (*salaire reporté*). She explains:

“Systems where social security is paid out of taxation, notably the Beveridge systems, are always poor systems. In Bismarckian systems, we have more generous entitlements. [...] We are for maintaining the current system in which social protection is linked to work - a *contributory* system.”

Moreover, if such an enormous amount of money was to be spent, trade unionists from Belgium, Canada and Italy would prefer to funnel it into public services. Commenting on the Italian situation,

an expert suggests that “in front of the lack of fundamental services, a basic income would result unequal to the population”. Similarly, the Belgian respondent comments: “Wouldn’t it be better to invest this money on social infrastructures? Or kindergartens? Or in the care sector... Rather than just giving money to everybody?”. For a Canadian officer, a UBI could not resolve a number of issues. She reports a concrete example: “In many cities, we don’t have enough spaces for childcare. Giving a family more money through UBI, does what? You cannot buy anything with that money, because there are no spaces! [...] More money in people’s pockets doesn’t create public services”.

### **The welfare retrenchment hypothesis**

In short of an increase in taxation, trade unionists fear that governments would have no other way to introduce a UBI than retrenching existing schemes. Eight respondents (Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, UK) worry that a UBI could be introduced as a substitute to current welfare provision. This finding is in line with what is found in the survey, as 46% of the respondents fear that a UBI would make the economy more flexible or deregulated, and contribute to dismantling the welfare state. In addition, the near totality of the respondents (80%) declares that a UBI should complement, and not replace, existing benefits and services. For a French officer, the scenario is quite bleak, in that “a UBI would substitute all forms of social allowances”. An interviewee at the international level is likewise pessimist: “You have to get the money from somewhere [...] then you will need to start looking at what expenditures you can scrap. It’s very likely that social security and benefits will be the first to be cut”.

For trade unionists from liberal countries (Canada, Ireland, UK) a basic income may imply a compilation of existing welfare instruments into one package, sacrificing crucial benefits and services. The British advisor points out that a UBI could absorb the UK National Health Service and the tax credit system, leaving many people worse off. Anglophone trade unionists believe that a UBI could give even more control to governments, that would be free to retrench and arrange social security as they wish: “The old fashion tax credit in the UK is under the control of traditional politics. And that applies to basic income as well. Once you have a basic income, it’s politicians’ responsibility to maintain it”. A similar point is raised by the Belgian trade unionist, who illustrates the advantages of social insurance: “When you have a welfare system like that [based on general taxation], you are more vulnerable, because governments can do whatever they want. In our system, it’s impossible”.

For the British and Irish respondents, a UBI entails a high opportunity cost. The Irish expert explains that a basic income would be “hugely transformative”. In case it did not work, it would be extremely costly to move back to the previous system. Whereas models based on social protection, such as those in Germany and France, already provide a benchmark to follow, passing *ex abrupto* to a basic income would represent “a short in the dark”. Likewise, for the British respondent the problem is one of political choice. The interviewee argues that endorsing a UBI is politically risky, as the same money could be invested in other and perhaps more efficient ways: “what else could be done with this amount of money? Could we use it for health services, could we target people in need?”.

Welfare regime		Southern European	Liberal	Bismarckian	Nordic
Perceived deficiency of the welfare state	Poor system design	Italy (3), Spain	South Africa, UK	Netherlands	
	Low benefit adequacy	Italy (1), Spain	Argentina, Canada, Ireland, UK	France	Sweden
	Bureaucratic complexity	Spain	Ireland, UK	France	
	Unemployment traps		South Africa	Netherlands	
	Stigma associated with means-testing		Ireland, South Africa, UK	Switzerland	
Overall satisfaction	Low	Italy, Spain	Argentina, Canada, Ireland, South Africa, UK	Netherlands	
	High			Germany, Switzerland (1)	Denmark, Finland
Lack of coverage against “new social risks” (NSR)	Young people		UK	Belgium, France (1)	Denmark
	Women			Switzerland, France (1)	
	Atypical workers			Switzerland	
	People with disabilities		Ireland, UK (1)		Denmark
Role of a UBI against NSR	A UBI could improve protection against new risks		Ireland, South Africa	Switzerland	
	A UBI could reduce protection to people with special needs			Netherlands	Denmark, Sweden
Financing	A UBI would increase tax rates		Canada, Ireland	Belgium, Germany, Switzerland	Denmark, Finland
	It would be better to spend in services	Italy	Canada	Belgium	
	A UBI would require cuts on other schemes		Canada, UK (1)	Germany	Finland

Table 5: country labels on attitudes for welfare generosity, protection to new social risks, and financing issues.

## Discussion

The survey and the interviews show a clear pattern across welfare regimes. Trade unionists from Nordic (Denmark, Finland, Sweden) and Bismarckian countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland) are generally satisfied with their systems, despite requiring some adjustments. The protection their members enjoy is directly connected with the contributions they make during their

lifetime. My H3 finds here strong confirmation, as unions that operate in well-functioning welfare systems have few incentives to seek for radical reforms in the social policy domain. Despite acknowledging that the system is biased towards the “old” risks, Nordic and Bismarckian trade unionists distrust UBI as a solution to enhance coverage against the new social risks. These leaders fear that a UBI would entail strong increases in tax rates on wage-earners, and motivate a shift towards other models of social protection that are not based on social insurance. Trade unionists from Liberal (Canada, Ireland, UK) and Mediterranean (Spain, Italy) contexts are critical of their welfare systems, that they consider deficient on many accounts; this invites them to consider UBI as a legitimate policy option. These respondents hypothesise that a UBI could better protect workers from market distortions, and ensure coverage against the new risks. In Liberal countries, the “integrated” taxation and welfare system would remove the feasibility barrier individuated in dualised systems. However, the integrated system represents a double-edged sword, making them more vulnerable to retrenchment. Liberal respondents fear that governments may use a UBI to absorb existing schemes and services, and reduce benefit levels even further.

### **3. Labour market policy and the future of work**

#### **Unemployment and socio-economic insecurity**

UBI discussions find a breeding ground in contexts characterised by high unemployment, poverty and insecurity. In the quantitative section, I find a strong association between UBI support and poverty rates ( $R^2 0.51$ ). As further evidence of this link, 80% of those who support a UBI also declare that it would protect people against market distortions. An international officer highlights this trend:

“The discussion comes back in each crisis, so in the ‘80s the idea popped up. Now we see it coming back on the agenda. It is crisis-linked. After a crisis, there is this idea that jobs are disappearing, and you get the interest of some unions.”

For some officers, the current state of things compels a renewed debate on basic income. A good number of interviewees (Argentina, Ireland, Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, UK), acknowledge the existence of a growing “precariat” in their economies, marked by in-work poverty, atypical work arrangements and overall low quality of life. With the exception of the Netherlands and Switzerland, these countries all belong to the Liberal or Mediterranean group. This finding confirms that a UBI is felt as more salient in contexts characterised by higher degrees of labour market insecurity, lower regulatory constraints, and weaker trade unions. An international officer hypothesises that a UBI could be a response in contexts of “proliferating low wage and precarious sectors”, where “minimum wage levels and policies cannot really apply or be implemented fully”. The British respondent highlights that it is not unemployment *per se* – the UK displays record-low unemployment – but the poor quality of the jobs that urges unions to monitor the subject. For the SYNA (2010), traditional policies have failed to tackle these problems: “Wanted: possible solutions for a just economy. Who has them, make a step forward! UBI deserves at least to be considered”.

However, a large majority of the interviewees (17 over 27) see a UBI as a poor remedy to unemployment and precariousness, shifting the focus away from regulations. Whereas some

respondents consider UBI as *a* solution to economic flaws, it is far from sure that it is the *best* solution they may think of. As shown in the survey, 46% of the respondents fear that a UBI could make the economy more flexible or deregulated; the figure peaks to three fourths in the Liberal and Bismarckian clusters. For an officer at the international level, “One thing we are completely clear on is that we don’t think UBI is the way to respond to increasing insecurity in the labour market”. The growing incidence of atypical, low-paid and precarious work would be “the product of regulatory shortcomings and predatory practices on behalf of the employers”, which should be dealt with social dialogue and regulations. Likewise, an international expert sustains that we should rather “tackle gaps in the labour law, and have good labour market regulations”. For a Belgian interviewee, “we should not abandon the ambition to defend the right to decent jobs and decent salaries”; according to the officer, the UBI would imply a sort of “defeatism”, missing the point of regulations and standardisation of atypical work. A UBI could “increase the levels of workers’ exploitation” (Italy), multiplying the incidence of “mini” jobs in our economies (Belgium, Sweden); for this reason, basic income would not resolve the problem of labour market insecurity, making it only “more bearable” (FGTB, 2018).

### **UBI and the “future of work”**

Nine interviewees cite UBI as a policy alternative for problems related to the “future of work”, including technological unemployment, skill-biased technological change, and automation (Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Ireland, two from Italy, Sweden, Switzerland). The Irish respondent argues that we should devise “new strategies to face automation, artificial intelligence, robotics, and the fragmentation of work”, which may include a basic income. He argues that “staying in silence in front of these developments would mean acquiescence in front of the market forces, [...] and we know it won’t take us to a very good place”. The Canadian respondent stresses the importance to discuss UBI in light of these changes:

“The future of work is uncertain right now; we don’t know what type of jobs they’re gonna be once that level of technology comes in the future. One of the things that encourage us to look, or think again, about the concept of basic income is in the change it’s coming [...] It’s a period that helps us to think more about what a basic income will look like”.

Nonetheless, only a minority of the respondents individuate UBI as a solution to technology-driven unemployment. The only interviewees that are open to this possibility are from Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and Switzerland. This finding echoes again the perception of a UBI as a fascinating idea for many interviewees, but far from a real solution to the concrete issues. To put it with the words of an Italian expert, the UBI is no more than a “beautiful utopia”. For five respondents, automation would not imply a rarefaction of jobs in the first place: “If we look back in history, there has always been the idea of technological unemployment. [...] Of course, what you get is structural change; but we will not run out of jobs” (Sweden). For the German officer, “employment rates are higher than ever”, while productivity is slower than in the past; in this case, a UBI would be a misguided solution. The Belgian respondent shares this perspective, suggesting that technological advances can actually bring *more* jobs; “we just need to make sure that such transformations do not affect workers”. An Italian interviewee points out that the “green revolution” may create as many jobs as they will be lost



due to automation. For the Argentinian leader, it would be “unfair to put responsibility on the ‘future of work’, while nowadays work is *already* precarious without robots or technologies”.

### **Policies for the future: working time and job guarantees**

Due to the high economic and political costs that a UBI entails, nine respondents would prioritise other objectives for the medium- and the long-term. Six people (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Switzerland) indicate a reduction of working time as a more desirable goal than a UBI. The trade-off between income support and reduction in working time is made clear by a French respondent: “If we assisted to gains in productivity, automation, digitalisation, we would rather opt for a reduction in working time, in order to give a job to everybody”. Likewise, a Swiss officer would like “to see alternatives in the debate. More radical propositions. I have a radical proposition: fewer working hours at the same salary”.

Four trade unionists (Ireland, Italy, Sweden, UK) support job guarantees and public investments. For the Swedish respondent, very high participation and employment levels are at the foundations of the Nordic welfare system, and therefore constitute a priority for Swedish unions. Likewise, respondents from Ireland, Italy and UK set full employment as a target for their organisations. An interviewee from Italy calls for a renewed approach to public policies:

“Italy needs to put money on investments and public works, extraordinary maintenance, building schools, bridges. Instead, the government shifts money onto the ‘non-work’ – that is important, for God’s sake - but it should not replace an intervention on the labour market.”

Due to the peculiar conditions of the South African labour market, COSATU has shifted away from a full employment strategy. In South Africa, public job creation programs are described as ineffective and ill-suited to address the enormous number of unemployed. A South African researcher sets out a clear rationale for which COSATU has preferred a basic income to job guarantees:

“We have an unemployment rate of about 30-40%; for young people, it’s over 70%. We have very high dependency ratios on workers: on average, five people are dependent on one worker’s income. There is a very clear understanding that jobs are not going to spread, and hence we need to provide for people who are not going to be employed.”

Welfare regime		Southern European	Liberal	Bismarckian	Nordic
Issues raised	Low employment protection		Argentina, UK (1)	Switzerland	
	Poverty, inequality, unemployment	Spain	Argentina, South Africa, UK	Netherlands	
Role of a UBI in the future of work	The UBI could be a solution to job rarefaction	Italy (1)	Ireland	Netherlands, Switzerland (1)	
	Technological unemployment may not materialise / UBI not a solution	Italy (3)	Argentina, UK (1)	Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland (1)	Denmark, Sweden
Policy alternatives	Regulations	Italy (1)		Belgium, France	
	Reduction in working time	Italy (1)	Ireland	Belgium, France (1), Germany, Switzerland (1)	
	Job guarantee	Italy (1)	Ireland	France (1)	
	Public investments	Italy (3)		Belgium	

Table 6: positions on labour market issues, future of work, and policy alternatives to a UBI. No data for Canada and Finland.

## Discussion

This section has two main drawbacks. First, poverty and insecurity are clear *explanans* for UBI support, confirming my H2. The strong association between poverty and UBI support found in the quantitative phase is validated by the interviews. Most of the respondents in favour of a UBI describe insecurity, unemployment and precarious work as trademarks of their economies (Argentina, Ireland, Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, UK). The second relates to trade unions' strategies to deal with these issues. Similarly to UBI proponents, they observe rising levels of job and income insecurity, and an overall declining quality of jobs. Despite sharing the diagnosis, however, they distrust UBI as a viable policy solution. For a majority of trade unionists, a UBI remains *on paper*. In fact, their vocation is to offer concrete solutions to improve workers' conditions, including tougher regulations, stronger employment protection and social dialogue. Even if there were enough funds to finance a UBI, most of these interviewees would prioritise other areas of expenditure, such as public investments, job creation, as well as policies addressed to the achievement of full employment or a shorter working week. Moreover, I detect only mild differences between Nordic, Continental, Mediterranean and Liberal countries. In the survey, respondents from Mediterranean countries suggest that a UBI could protect people against the malfunctioning of their economies. However, as the interviews demonstrate, this does not imply that these leaders consider UBI as the *best* solution to these pitfalls. On the contrary, both Liberal and Mediterranean respondents think that a UBI could make the economy even more flexible or deregulated, so that other solutions may be more suitable.

## 4. Political economy and basic income

### Industrial relations and collective bargaining

Unions' support for a UBI depends on their role in the institutional and political context (H4). In the quantitative section, I find an association between unions' support for a UBI and the degree of centralisation of wage bargaining, albeit it loses significance when interacting with the other variables. In general, stronger and more centralised unions seem less likely to champion a UBI, fearing that it would de-legitimate their role before the employers. Survey data across industrial regimes bring additional proof for this channel. Respondents from contestative and pluralist contexts, characterised by lower levels of coordination and institutional embeddedness, think that a UBI would *not* necessarily jeopardise unions' bargaining position. On the other hand, three fourths of the unions from social partnership contexts fear it could undermine their bargaining power.

The interviews confirm the existence of this mechanism. Respondents from Ghent System countries (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden) reinstate their unions' centrality in the institutional framework. Seen their role in coordinating unemployment insurance, a basic income would undermine their function, strongly reducing their room for manoeuvre over wages and social protection. This position finds emphasis in the words of a Finnish respondent, who thinks that a UBI "would dramatically change the dynamics between unions and employers". Whereas today Finnish unions "have a strong role in deciding the rules and administrating some social security", holding "the power to make employers accept higher salaries", with a basic income "the counterpart would be not much the employer, but the state". This possibility is felt as a threat to their position, as they "would have to protest against the state if [they] wanted a higher income". The Belgian respondent raises similar concerns. The expert says that in the current system unions participate in most important decisions in the economic domain; a UBI would give the government a pretext for disengaging in labour market policies, and to the employers to neglect their social obligations, such as fair salary scales and labour standards. Swedish and Danish interviewees dismiss these concerns *tout court*, suggesting that in concrete terms a basic income would be too low to affect their dominant position.

As expected, the degree of unions' control on unemployment insurance is a strong predictor of their appreciation for a UBI. In systems where unions coordinate and administer unemployment benefits (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden), a basic income would shift key responsibilities from the social partners to the state. This would have three effects. For one, unions would find it harder to compel employers to guarantee decent wages and good levels of social protection. Secondly, the state would become the main "enemy" to address in collective bargaining, making it much more difficult to bargain for higher wages and benefits. Thirdly, unions' public role and leadership would be substantially downsized, losing a crucial source of legitimacy.

Four interviewees hypothesise that a basic income could increase bargaining power at the individual level (Ireland, Netherlands, South Africa, Switzerland). For a Swiss respondent, a "UBI could affect labour conditions because employers could not rely anymore on cheap workforce. [...] People would think it twice before taking a job that does not suit their needs". Even losing some bargaining power

at the organisational level, unions would still be crucial to promote workplace and labour standards. The Dutch expert seems in line with this view, as a basic income would “make people stronger, give them a better position; they won’t have to accept unattractive jobs or insecure working hours”. For the respondent, unions would still be needed because “employers cannot bargain with every employee”. Irish and South African respondents claim that a UBI “would increase the bargaining power of the many, especially those on precarious work” (Ireland) and that “their reservation wage would increase” (South Africa).

Interviewees from social partnership contexts (Belgium, France, Germany) are worried that bargaining power could be unequally sorted across skill endowments. Even in the case individuals were given the power to say “no” to precarious jobs, that would not apply equally to every worker. For an international expert, rare skills will be more rewarded and thus conducive to a stronger bargaining position, while a UBI will not give any advantage to people with common skills. The French expert clarifies: “Those who are able to valorise their skills, on rewarding jobs, whose abilities are needed, will be able to negotiate. For those that are paid at the *smic* [French minimum wage], with low value-added, it will be more difficult to negotiate their salary”. In a position paper (2018), the Belgian FGTB contends that a basic income would destroy all the social links and solidarity within the working class: “UBI would worsen the current trend of a worker alone against his boss, with very low bargaining power, because ‘If he’s not happy, other people are waiting behind the door to take his place’”.

The preoccupation of Belgian, French and German interviewees for the unequal distribution of bargaining power may reflect the belief that a UBI would undermine their role in negotiations, and further divide the workforce across income segments. Divisions between skill groups could discourage high-skilled workers to join trade unions, forcing these organisations to resort to a shrinking industrial or low-paid service sector workforce as their main membership pool (Ebbinghaus, 2007). Conversely, the interviews highlight that unions in contestative and pluralist countries do not necessarily fear a reduction in bargaining power. In these contexts, unions have poor access to institutional channels to affect public policies, or enjoy poor levels of collective bargaining. Therefore, a basic income would *not* substantially change the bargaining dynamics in these countries. Moreover, in industrial contexts where bargaining happens mostly at the firm level, as in the case of Ireland and South Africa, respondents are moderately optimistic, suggesting that the UBI could increase the power of negotiation of individual workers.

### **Perceived impact on wages and minimum wage legislation**

Almost half of the interviewees (14) consider that a UBI may have an adverse impact on wages. In general, this result highlights that negative effects on wages are among the most important reasons for skepticism, and that these concerns are shared among diverse groups. Furthermore, the finding is interesting, as it does not perfectly fit with the survey. French, German and Swiss responses to the survey are consistent with the interviews, sustaining in both cases that a UBI would imply a reduction in wages. However, unions from corporatist and pluralist countries declare to be “neutral” towards the idea of a decline in wages in the survey, while expressing this preoccupation in the interviews. Besides the differences in the two samples, it is possible that, in the interviews, trade unionists had the chance to elaborate on the circumstances in which a reduction in wages is likely to materialise.

For instance, the Swedish respondent provides a very clear rationale for the wage depression mechanism, contending that a basic income would create a reserve labour force: “UBI would probably be very low, and then there could be this ready workforce who could go in and work for very low wages [...] That would be problematic for unions’ bargaining power”.

Five respondents discuss that, with a basic income in place, unions would lose their role in promoting wage increases (two from France, Italy, South Africa, Sweden). According to an international researcher, the introduction of a UBI would make it very difficult to build an argument in collective bargaining. For the expert, “every employer might say ‘why should we pay above that? It’s taken care of’”. The other respondent adds that “some unions have a crucial role for wage or social floors; if that is outsourced, they will have no role to play”. French and German officers are not optimistic either. A French respondent says: “We know the French *patronat*... We know their attitude not to pay work as they should”. Likewise, the German expert points out that employers would lose any incentive to raise salaries. If people were given a basic income at a subsistence level, why should firms increase wages? Even for South African unions, a UBI could pose a problem to wage bargaining. An interviewee reports that the projected amount of the BIG was fixed at 100 rand, while the minimum wage in collective agreements was 20 to 30 times higher (2000-3000 rand). For this reason, the argument of wage decline would have always been “an unspoken fear” within COSATU.

For some UBI proponents, a basic income should be complemented by a minimum wage to prevent downward pressures on salaries (Gray, 2017). In the sample, almost all the interviewees (22) operate in a country adopting a minimum wage legislation (Visser, 2015). Only Danish, Finnish, Italian, Swedish and Swiss trade unionists do not live in countries that set a minimum wage. A British interviewee explains why unions supported a minimum wage in the UK: “At a certain point in time, British unions did not have ‘Scandinavian’ levels of collective bargaining coverage; thus, we thought we should guarantee for those who were not covered”. The Argentinian respondent justifies a UBI on the same grounds as a minimum wage: “Once you have minimum wages, you can push for higher floors, better wages, and improve your power of negotiation”. On the other hand, Italian unions’ skepticism for minimum wages is motivated by a potential loss of bargaining power. An Italian expert suggests that, like a minimum wage, a UBI is likely to “dismantle industrial relations the higher you set the bar”. The interviewee draws a comparison with a neighboring country:

“In countries where collective bargaining is more effective, even the hypothesis of a minimum wage is seen with suspicion. Think about Italy and France. Italian confederations are significantly more influential than the French; a minimum wage would reduce their power of discretion, *setting a floor for everybody*. The more a union is influential, the more such instruments are opposed, taking a piece away from the union’s representative role.”

The combination of union strength and minimum wage legislation seems to divide unions in three groups. Unions from countries with high collective bargaining coverage and minimum wage legislation (France, Germany) are moderately concerned by the impact of a UBI on wages, fearing that it would give employers the pretext to push wages close to the legal minimum. Unions that operate in countries with high levels of collective bargaining coverage, but where no minimum wage legislation is in place (Italy, Sweden), seem to be *strongly* concerned by the introduction of a UBI; in these countries, there is virtually no limit to which employers could reduce wages. Finally, unions

from pluralist contexts, that have minimum wages but poor levels of bargaining coverage, have mixed perceptions on UBI effects on wages (positive for Argentina, negative for Ireland and South Africa).

### **UBI: a “Trojan horse” for neoliberal policies?**

For eight interviewees (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland), UBI is perceived as a slippery slope towards labour market deregulation. This result is consistent with the survey, in which 46% of the respondents give voice to this concern. Seen the forces who promote a UBI, interviewees from Belgium, Finland, Germany and Sweden fear that it could engender a process of flexibilisation of the labour market, increasing the share of atypical jobs. The Swedish interviewee explains that, in the current political climate, a basic income could stimulate the employers to hire on a casual basis; for the Finnish expert, “the political right could seize this opportunity”, leading to labour market deregulation. Likewise, the German trade unionist fears that campaigning for a generous UBI is not convenient in this situation:

“If we are not strong enough as a labour movement to raise wages and get better regulation, how can you think that we will be strong enough to tax the rich so that they will pay for a very high UBI? I think it is completely unrealistic. For higher wages, at least we can fight, at least we can strike.”

Moreover, discussions over a UBI are perceived as more perilous in countries where trade unions are weaker, and workers lack adequate employment protection. This regards especially pluralist contexts (Canada, Ireland, UK). According to an Irish respondent, Irish unions are not powerful enough to promote “social-democratic policies” such as regulations. As the Irish right “has a very strong grip on the agenda”, a UBI could end up imposing a very high price on citizens. The Canadian interviewee fears that a UBI could initiate a wave of neoliberal policies: “If we have a political government that has a certain agenda, they could say ‘that’s a great idea, we give you basic income’”, and erode labour rights and social protections.

### Perceived effect on bargaining power

<b>Perceived effect on wages</b>		<b>Adverse impact on bargaining power</b>	<b>Moderate or no impact on bargaining power</b>	<b>Positive impact at the individual level</b>
	<b>Negative effect on wages</b>	Belgium; Finland; France (1); Germany; Italy (1); Switzerland (1)	Sweden*	Ireland; South Africa; Switzerland (1)
	<b>Not mentioned</b>	France (1)	Denmark*	Argentina; Netherlands; UK

Table 7: Perceived effect on wages and bargaining power. No sufficient data for Canada and Spain

\*UBI seen as unfeasible or otherwise too low to affect their bargaining position

## Discussion

The qualitative analysis adds on previous quantitative evidence, substantiating my H4: trade unions' institutional position, as well as their bargaining power, affect their preferences for a UBI. Unions that enjoy a hegemonic role in social protection and collective bargaining (Belgium, Finland) see the hypothesis of a basic income as a threat to their position. Nordic trade unionists think that the policy could have a strongly adverse impact on wages (Denmark, Finland, Sweden); incidentally, their countries lack minimum wage legislation. Similarly, French, German and Swiss unions perceive UBI as a threat to their bargaining power; however, the mechanism is somewhat different from that of the four Ghent system countries. In these contexts, middle-to-high bargaining coverage rates are inconsistent with relatively low membership rates. These unions dismiss UBI because it could further segment the workforce, reduce their membership rates, and hamper their legitimacy as bargaining actors. The preoccupation for skill-biased effects mirrors the problem of labour market segmentation, and the fear to lose collective leverage with the employers. Finally, in pluralist contexts (Ireland, South Africa, UK) results are mixed. These unions have few reasons to fear that a UBI would reduce their bargaining power, since the coverage of collective agreements is already low and bargaining settings are decentralised. Despite fearing a downward pressure on wages, some of them contend that a UBI could increase workers' bargaining power at the individual level.

## 5. Politics and strategy

### Openness to outsiders' demands

In the interviews, I tried to ascertain the effects of membership composition on UBI support (H5), which was not possible to test in the quantitative phase. In the last decades, unions have done some

efforts to reach out to the so-called “outsiders” of the labour market. Among these groups, demands for a basic income have been substantially more vocal. The degree to which unions’ platforms effectively incorporate these requests, however, varies across countries and industrial regimes. Interviewees from Denmark, Germany and Finland suggest that a basic income would lack political support among their members. This concern is made clear by the Finnish delegate: “To be frank, we represent wage earners; with a UBI, they would have to pay much higher taxes. It wouldn’t really be rational for us, that represent wage earners, to advocate for policies that diminish their income dramatically”. Likewise, the Danish respondent clarifies: “we cannot see a major rise in the income tax in Denmark; I am afraid our members wouldn’t support it either”. He adds that outsiders are “not the focus of our attention”. For the German expert, low-income people such as artists, self-employed workers, and long-term unemployed who rely on social assistance may find a UBI attractive; however, these groups constitute an “absolute minority” within the organisation.

### **Actions to expand coverage**

Seven union respondents (Finland, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, UK) stress the need to expand coverage beyond the traditional working class. However, there is a clear perception that gaps in union representation shall be resolved by other means than a UBI. This is consistent with the results in the quantitative section, in which all the Continental and most of the Nordic respondents contend that the UBI does *not* offer a strategy to include less unionised groups (women, young people, atypical workers and migrants). Interviewees suggest that this can be done through legal action (Germany, Netherlands); campaigns for precarious workers, young people or people with disabilities (Argentina, Italy, UK); or progressive expansion of insiders’ guarantees to the outsiders (Finland, Sweden, Switzerland). The Swedish officer argues that the insider-outsider divide is less concerning in Sweden, as membership rates peak over 70%; however, his union aims at improving precarious workers’ positions, promoting reductions in the share of atypical contracts and the conversion of temporary into permanent jobs. Likewise, the Finnish interviewee describes their efforts to transform all “outsiders” into “insiders”. He highlights a political channel behind the unions’ demands: “We try to organise atypical groups of workers: the more they come to the union, the more they will influence our policies”.

Trade unionists from Anglophone contexts place a particular emphasis on outsiders’ representation (Canada, Ireland, South Africa, United Kingdom). From a linguistic standpoint, the use of words as “workers’ movement” and “society” is recurrent in these interviews. As highlighted above, trade unions from these countries tend to consider themselves as societal forces, and are far less attached to the “core” industrial workforce than those in social partnership and contestative contexts (Ebbinghaus et al, 2011; Chu et al, 2018). Due to the lack of institutional channels and low collective bargaining coverage, their strategies often address directly the government, trying to influence national policies through public pressure and advocacy. An Irish officer describes insiders-outsider demarcations as “extremely disingenuous”, because Irish unions have always had a social role: “The trade union movement opposed social expenditure cuts [...] We want more people in employment, and austerity was pulling people out of work. Who’s the insider and who’s the outsider in this situation?” The respondent also clarifies that a basic income is not exclusively in the interest of outsiders, benefitting union members as well. Likewise, the Canadian interviewee explains:



“A lot of work we do applies to people who are both unionised and non-unionised. [...] We have done vigorous work on precarious, migrants, vulnerable groups who are racialised, indigenous workers, all of that work is for both unionised and non-unionised [...] There’s a good number of people who see these issues to be social justice issues.”

The South African case confirms that, in pluralist industrial relations, a UBI can be justified as a driver of social justice to the benefit of the whole population. Starting from their role in the anti-apartheid movement, South African unions have always appealed to overarching societal goals. For a researcher, COSATU “has always been a voice that reached beyond workplace issues”; according to the interviewee, endorsement to a basic income reflects “the historic function of the union movement as a broader player within society”. In this context, marked by dramatic levels of unemployment, the high dependency ratios of non-wage earners on workers’ salaries would blur distinctions between insiders and outsiders. Nonetheless, another interviewee specifies that the BIG campaign was also instrumental to bolster the legitimacy of the union, and silence the accusation over the “workers’ aristocracy” raised by the oppositions at that time.

Moreover, three international officers place a strong emphasis on unions’ efforts to empower atypical workers globally. An advisor expresses some disappointment with the idea of “outsiders”; in her views, it fails to acknowledge that unions have incorporated informal and atypical workers in their structures, and fought against labour market segmentation over the last decades. Similarly, an international officer suggests that unions worldwide have radically reviewed their agenda, including issues that involve society at large, such as inequality, gender discrimination and climate change.

### **Socio-demographic cleavages**

According to four interviewees, a UBI could have disparate effects across gender groups. Experts from Belgium, France, Switzerland and Sweden suggest that a basic income would go against the interests of women, discouraging their participation in the labour market. This finding confirms what found in the survey: unions from Continental countries are skeptical that a UBI could enhance protection to NSR groups, and that a UBI campaign could attract outsiders to the organisations. According to a Swiss respondent, a basic income given to all, regardless of the real distribution of household tasks, would fail to reward the person who performs care and housework, reinforcing gender divides. Likewise, the Belgian officer argues that a UBI would not be the best way to compensate informal work. A French interviewee clarifies: “For us, basic income cannot be a reason for women to come back to their households, and look after their children and relatives. For us, this is *a red line*”. These results are interesting, because the UBI is often justified on the grounds of enhancing, and not reducing, women’s independence and participation in the labour market (Pateman, 2004). As illustrated above, though, Continental welfare systems are characterised by a strong segmentation along gender lines, reinforcing divides in the distribution of economic, social and political opportunities (Ebbinghaus et al, 2011). The attention given to gender inequality may thus demonstrate that Continental trade unionists acknowledge the existence of this divide, and that unions devise strategies to address these issues.

Two interviewees (Italy, South Africa) connect the fight for a UBI with a generational divide. The fact that Italian and South African respondents raise this concern may be motivated by the strong

disadvantage experienced by young people in these countries. Youth employment rates average 32.2% in Italy, and peak to an astonishing 53,4% in South Africa (OECD, 2018). Likewise, for an international officer, the “old” generation has a certain resistance towards innovative policies as a UBI; having lived through a “romantic phase” of capitalism, in which unions had a strong say on the socio-economic agenda, they have a bias for traditional tools such as social protection and regulations. However, new “structural” conditions urge a renewed strategy. According to the interviewee, a “new generation of union leaders”, that has lived through periods of crises and high unemployment, might be more open to a UBI. A South African respondent similarly suggests that younger policy-makers are more supportive of a UBI, while older ones are “trapped in an ideological opposition” to any non-conventional form of social security.

Tensions may emerge even within the same umbrella or confederal organisations. Three Italian trade unionists over five describe potential conflicts between traditional sectors and non-standard workers’ unions. An Italian respondent remarks that the retirees, that in Italy account for half of the total union members, have a strong say on the confederation’s agenda. For him, unemployment policies are less central due to a lack of interest from these groups. Respondents from two atypical workers’ unions stress the difficulties to push their demands through. For an interviewee, there are tensions between core sectors, such as industrial, school, and public workers, and the atypical workers. Another expert illustrates why “mainstream” unions may be less interested in a UBI:

“All unions that operate in situations of extreme precariousness take seriously into account basic income. Organisations linked to traditional workers feel less this need. [...] Metal-mechanic workers, despite having enormous doubts about what will be their future, are clearly less interested; there’s still the centrality of the factory, of the salary, of collective bargaining [...]. From a cultural point of view, it gets difficult to coalesce”.

Type	“Movement”	“Organisation”	Mixed
<b>1. Strategic orientation</b>	Outsider-oriented	Insider-oriented	Inclusive
Countries	Argentina, Italy (3), Netherlands, Switzerland, South Africa	Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy (2)	Sweden
<b>2. Actions to expand coverage</b>			
- Legal action	Netherlands	Germany	
- Campaign for non-standard groups	Argentina, Italy, UK		
- Extension of collective bargaining to outsiders	Switzerland, Netherlands	Finland	Sweden
<b>3. Perceived cleavages</b>			
- Income		Finland, Denmark	Sweden
- Gender	Switzerland	Belgium, France (1)	Sweden
- Age	Italy (1), South Africa, UK		
- Organisation	Italy (3)		

Table 8: Unions across 4 dimensions: type; strategic orientation; actions to expand coverage; perceived cleavages. No sufficient data for Spain

## Discussion

The analysis of political divides highlights three main trends. First, in confirmation to H5, unions’ appreciation for a UBI is linked to the internal degree of representation among the “outsiders”. Unions that orient their strategies towards traditional wage-earners (Denmark, Finland, Germany) find fewer incentives to support a UBI. The reason is that a basic income would benefit more those who are *not* their members, while imposing high tax rates on their members. The opposite is true for pluralist and, to a lower extent, contestative countries. In these countries, characterised by high levels of income insecurity and less generous welfare systems, union members may benefit from a UBI as well. Furthermore, organisations that operate in pluralist contexts cover broader societal functions, and design strategies to go beyond the traditional working class. In this group, the dissonance between societal and internal demands is substantially lower than in social partnership countries. As a second finding, unions’ strategic orientation towards traditional wage earners does not necessarily imply a lack of interest towards outsiders. Despite focusing on the core workforce, unions from Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden) make great efforts to organise outsiders, and to ensure that all outsiders progressively move towards higher levels of employment and income protection. These organisations rely on exceptionally high density and collective bargaining coverage rates, thereby

addressing both insiders and outsiders. Lastly, unions from social partnership (Switzerland) and contestative contexts (France, Italy) acknowledge that their labour market and welfare regimes are segmented along gender and age lines, and fear that a basic income could deepen these divides. In various forms, these unions declare to promote policies that aim at reducing these gaps.

## **6. Connecting the dots. What (if anything) can justify trade unions' support for a UBI?**

According to the literature at-hand, basic income receives scant support among trade union élites. Unions in favour of a basic income should be few, small and often isolated. The title of this section, that recalls Van Parijs' renowned book *"Real Freedom for All: What (If Anything) Can Justify Capitalism?"* (1997) aims at enlightening this paradox. Trade unions, that are workers' organisations, should have no interest in a UBI almost by definition. However, the picture of trade unions' appreciation for a UBI traced in this thesis is far more complex than it may look from the surface. A specific set of socio-economic, cultural and organisational characteristics may encourage trade unions' openness to a UBI. From the analysis above, four main causal channels can be identified:

High levels of labour market insecurity surround most UBI discussions. Debates on a UBI proliferate in contexts characterised by high unemployment and poverty, as well as high levels of distress among precarious or atypical workers. In the past, UBI has been defined as a litmus test for austerity penetration (Zamora, 2017), or a thermometer of unemployment (Groot, Van der Veen, 2011). For how picturesque, these formulations certainly reflect some attitudes of union leaderships. High levels of insecurity urge unions to at least acknowledge UBI, and discuss the idea in the political realm. This finding, first highlighted in the quantitative section, finds solid confirmation in the interviews. Liberal, Mediterranean and CEE countries display high levels of poverty and insecurity, and high levels of appreciation for a UBI among union leaders. Conversely, in societies where such demand for income security fails to arise (Continental, Nordic), unions have lower incentives to break the *status quo*. As Vanderborght (2004) put it, "why bother then, with the pet idea of cranky academics?"

Welfare systems can be successful at mitigating high levels of insecurity. In 11 European member-states, poverty rates pre-tax and transfers are reduced by about a half in the post-tax and transfers (Eurostat, 2019). Employment volatility and a larger share of non-standard contracts are not necessarily conducive to lower income security, provided that an encompassing welfare state fills these gaps (Emmenegger et al, 2012). In generous social protection systems (Nordic and Continental) unions have few or no reasons to call for structural transformations of the welfare state, rather promoting small adjustments to accommodate for who is not covered. The association between unemployment benefit coverage and aversion to a UBI, as well as the interviews with Continental and Nordic respondents, validate these expectations. *Vice versa*, segmented or inefficient welfare states, that lack coverage for more or less peripheral groups in the labour market, stimulate union leaders to consider "radical" proposals for welfare reform such as a UBI. This trend is clearly visible in responses from Liberal and Mediterranean countries.

Far from being pure-market actors, cultural attitudes give shape to union strategies. Operating a disconnection between income and individual efforts, a basic income looks like a "bitter pill" to some union leaders, typically from Bismarckian (France, Germany, Switzerland) and Nordic countries

(Denmark, Finland, Sweden). In the survey, I find that cultural attitudes have predictive power on UBI support; the interviews validate this hypothesis, shedding light on how organisations that are path-dependent on a traditional understanding of the work struggle to accept basic income as a legitimate policy option. These unions are likely to believe that a UBI would discourage people from working, and undermine the “labour contract”. Not all unions, though, are hostile to a basic income from a theoretical standpoint. Some leaders see individual well-being not as the pure consequence of one’s efforts, but as the product of a complex interplay of economic, political and social factors. Unions from Ireland, Spain and South Africa frame UBI as the realisation of the idea of de-commodification, liberating workers from the caprices of unruly markets.

The degree to which societal demands are incorporated in union strategies depends on organisational features and the industrial relations context. In corporatist and social partnership countries, unions enjoy a central position in the institutional framework, and rely on high levels of collective bargaining coverage. The quantitative section shows that higher levels of wage bargaining coordination are associated with a lower propensity to support a UBI. Additionally, the interviews indicate that stronger unions are less willing to pursue politically risky strategies, preferring to stick with collective agreements and regulations to advance the interests of their affiliates. As these unions orient their strategies towards the traditional workforce, internal membership composition is less likely to mirror societal demands, which motivates a lower interest in a universal basic income. Conversely, weaker unions from pluralist contexts enjoy lower coordination and bargaining coverage levels, and claim to speak on behalf of the broader workforce. As a result, they are more open to a UBI, championing it as a “sword of justice” to the benefit of the whole society.

These drivers produce three different profiles. A “continental” group, including trade unionists from France, Germany, as well as one union from Switzerland, display a very low appreciation for a UBI. These organisations are characterised by a solid work ethic, explaining their opposition to the unconditionality and universality of policy settings. In this group, the perceived deficiency of the welfare state is rather moderate, so that they call for the expansion of current schemes. While a “cheap” UBI is dismissed *tout court*, a generous UBI is considered as too expensive and incompatible with the social insurance principle. These organisations cannot count on high membership rates, which motivates an insider-oriented strategy. Despite that, institutional incorporation and encompassing collective bargaining coverage provide them with critical sources of influence. Union leaders from these countries fear that a UBI could negatively affect their bargaining power, reducing employers’ incentives to pay decent wages. They exclude that a UBI could empower workers at the individual level, thinking it would sort bargaining power unequally across skill endowments, and discourage women’s participation to the labour market. On the contrary, a basic income is seen as a threat to their legitimacy, further segmenting the workforce and possibly encouraging the “flight” of high-skilled workers from their organisations.

A second, “deregulated” model (Argentina, Canada, Ireland, Spain, United Kingdom) includes countries that have middle-to-high preferences for a UBI. While “decent work” remains central in these organisations, union leaders adopt a more nuanced approach, that accounts for structural factors such as poverty, in-work poverty, unemployment, contractual insecurity and inequality. Strongly opposing means-testing and “workfare” on welfare recipients, leaders from this group tend to share UBI’s ultimate goals (universality, unconditionality) from a theoretical standpoint. This approach is consistent with their strategies, that are oriented to society at large. For them, a UBI is instrumental

for ensuring coverage to those who lack adequate protection, giving people the power to refuse low-paid jobs and humiliating working conditions. Differently from the first group, the “integrated” welfare and taxation structure in most of these countries would remove barriers of political and technical nature. Enjoying poor levels of institutional representation and collective bargaining coverage, they are not worried that a UBI would affect their bargaining power; on the contrary, it could increase workers’ leverage at the individual level. Nevertheless, these trade unionists feel not to have enough power to push UBI on the agenda, or see it as the last step of a long path of guarantees yet to be achieved (a “first-things-first” approach). In political terms, they face a high opportunity cost, fearing that the UBI could be used by right-wing advocates to dismantle the welfare state.

Unions from Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden) deserve to form a separate, “Nordic” group. Potentially, these trade unionists might regard UBI as a “natural” next step on the evolution of the welfare state. The combination of a series of schemes, including unemployment insurance, minimum income, and contingency-based benefits, could lead to the creation of a sort of “citizens’ wage”, as first anticipated by Esping-Andersen (1990). Nonetheless, UBI support among these unions is rather scant. They share with the Conservative group a strong work ethic, with high preferences for conditionality in the form of services and activation, and a strong emphasis on full employment. Nordic leaders fear that a basic income could leave many groups worse off, deprive people with special needs from crucial support, and ruin the hard-earned Nordic welfare state. However, they differ from the Continental group on three accounts. For one, Nordic trade unionists are particularly concerned with the work disincentives a UBI may create, mirrored by the strong aversion to unconditionality. Second, the institutional position these unions enjoy is peculiar, in that they coordinate and administer unemployment insurance (Ghent systems). For this reason, a UBI is seen as a threat to their bargaining power, shifting key responsibilities from them to the state (Finland), and bringing wages in a downward spiral (Finland, Denmark, Sweden). Thirdly, their strategies are theoretically oriented to their members; however, due to the high levels of union density and collective bargaining coverage, they end up covering the broader working class.

	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>
<b>Type</b>	Continental	Deregulated	Nordic
<b>Countries</b>	France, Germany, Switzerland (1)	Argentina, Canada, Ireland, Spain, United Kingdom	Denmark, Finland, Sweden
<b>Work ethic</b>	high	low	high
<b>Preferences for unconditionality and universality</b>	Low unconditionality; low universality	High unconditionality; high universality	Very low unconditionality; low universality
<b>Perceived labour market insecurity</b>	Middle	High	Low
<b>Perceived welfare state deficiency</b>	Middle	High	Low
<b>Organisational strength</b>	Middle	Low	High
<b>Perceived impact on collective bargaining</b>	Negative	Positive	Strongly negative
<b>Strategic orientation</b>	Organisation	Movement	Mixed / encompassing
<b>Main risks identified in a UBI</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social insurance</li> <li>- Politically divisive</li> <li>- Skill segmentation</li> <li>- Gender divide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opportunity cost</li> <li>- LM flexibilisation</li> <li>- Cuts on services / benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work disincentives</li> <li>- Lower protection to NSR</li> <li>- higher taxes &amp; lower wages</li> <li>- End of Ghent system</li> </ul>
<b>Preferences for a UBI</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Low</b>

Table 9: three union types leading to different preferences for a UBI.

Besides the peculiar case of the Swiss union SYNA, which was covered earlier, three countries do not clearly fit with this classification: Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy. Belgian unions situate half-way between the first and the third group. They share most of the characteristics with the social partnership countries. However, the Ghent system provides these unions with stronger resources to affect public policies, and motivates a stronger reluctance towards a UBI. The two remaining cases are more problematic to disentangle. Dutch unions show higher degrees of openness to a basic income than the country's socio-economic and welfare characteristics would predict (low unemployment, low poverty, inclusive unemployment benefit system). Furthermore, the industrial relations context is not dissimilar from that of other Continental countries. As mentioned by the Dutch interviewee, a partial explanation may relate to the high levels of employment insecurity, and the high share of temporary and part-time contracts in the Dutch labour market (H2). Secondly, in the last decade Dutch unions have shown a discrete interest for the "outsiders", making substantial efforts to organise marginal segments of the workforce (including low-tier service workers, transport and food industry workers), which may reflect an outsider-oriented strategy (H5).

The Italian case is likewise puzzling. Italy is in the third place in Europe for unemployment rates (Eurostat, 2019) and in the fifth for the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat, 2019). In addition, the Italian welfare system lacked a minimum income scheme until 2018, failing

to provide adequate protection to the least well-off (Durazzi et al, 2018; Tridico, 2015). In the last decade, unions have had few opportunities to intervene in national policy-making. These characteristics, coupled with the “adversarial” logic of action typical of Mediterranean industrial contexts, would predict a positive appreciation for a UBI. Nonetheless, Italian unions have been vehemently hostile not only to a universal basic income, but to any form of income support.

In the following, I briefly cover the Italian case study, testing the channels identified above in the concrete policy realm. The purpose is to disentangle this puzzle, identifying which of the four mechanisms stimulate a negative judgment of a UBI. The occasion I choose to grasp is the discussion on the recently introduced “Citizens’ Income” - the first minimum income scheme in Italian history. To do this, I make use of the five interviews with the Italian respondents and two expert interviews. Furthermore, I avail myself of relevant literature, as well as press statements and other documents. First, I describe the main features of Italian unions and their role in the industrial landscape. Then, I evaluate the social policy background, and the recent evolutions that led to the introduction of the “Citizens’ Income”. Lastly, I analyse trade unions’ positions towards the scheme, singling out characteristics that may explain their hostility to a UBI.



## **7. Italy: a hybrid case in the industrial relations literature**

### **The industrial relations context**

Italian trade unions present peculiar characteristics, sharing elements with both the contestative and the social partnership models. Workers are organized in three peak confederations: CGIL, CISL and UIL, that represent 12.5 million people in total (Namuth, 2013). Excluding the retired, that account for half of the unions' members, the three confederations enjoy a relevant density rate (35%). This figure places Italy among the countries with the highest density rates in the OECD, right behind Ghent system countries (Visser, 2015). CGIL is the largest union, and the third largest organisation in Europe after the German DGB and the English TUC (Leonardi, 2017). The union has its roots in the Communist tradition. The two smaller confederations, CISL and UIL, cultivated close ties with the left-wing Christian Democracy and the Socialist Party before 1992. While CGIL has its stronghold in the manufacturing industry, CISL and UIL are stronger in the service sector.

Unions are widespread in the Italian territory, and rely on extensive coordination among organisational levels (Brugiavini et al, 2001). Small and medium enterprises dominate the Italian economy, with 90% of the Italian firms employing less than 16 workers (Namuth, 2013). To reach a diffuse network of small and medium firms, Italian unions promote collective agreements at the sectoral and enterprise level, with high degrees of coordination between the two. The vast majority of the agreements are discussed at the sectoral level; however, thanks to a juridical custom, agreements are then extended *erga omnes* to the whole sector. As a result, 80% of the workers are covered under collective bargaining arrangements (Visser, 2015). At the municipal level, unions coordinate service providers called "patronati", that operate on a semi-Ghent system fashion (Baccaro, Pulignano, 2011). These offices give assistance to the public in a number of domains, including bureaucratic issues, social security and retirement practices. Thanks to the encompassing coverage, the high levels of coordination and membership, and the "patronati", unions count on good "power resources" to affect social and labour market policies (Regalia, 2012).

Since 1998, unions have devoted substantial efforts to organise the atypical workforce. Soon after the introduction of atypical contracts and temporary agency work, the confederations created specific associations to organise the "new work identities" (Durazzi et al, 2018). Today, each confederation has its atypical workers' sector: Nidil (CGIL), Felsa (CISL), and UILtemp (UIL). This move has determined a landmark course of action for the unions' future. As emerges from the interviews, the attention to non-standard forms of work is a reason of pride for Italian trade unionists. The officers emphasise trade unions' efforts to guarantee decent jobs not only to the "standard" workforce, but also to marginal groups of the labour market - such as migrants, on-call workers, bogus self-employed and platform workers.

### **Historical routes and reforms (1990-2019)**

Until the early 2000s, trade unions exerted a strong influence on national policies (Baccaro, Pulignano, 2011). In 1994, they contributed to blocking the pension reform promoted by the Berlusconi government (Regan, Culpepper, 2014). Three years later, in 1997, they imposed key adjustments in the labour market reform advanced by the center-left, securing more convenient

provisions for atypical workers in terms of employment security (Johnston et al, 2011). Their collective strength was given by the capacity to coalesce among confederations, as well as that to organize unitary strikes mobilizing hundreds of thousands of workers (Ebbinghaus, 2011). In only two occasions (2002 and 2009) trade unions split along organisational lines, with CISL and UIL signing national agreements without the participation of CGIL. These divisions weakened the workers' movement, leading to sub-optimal outcomes in policy terms (Regalia, Regini, 2018).

The last decade (2009-2019) has seen the marginalisation of Italian unions from the national policymaking. Starting from the Monti technical cabinet in 2011, it has been suggested that “times of crisis are incompatible with the rites of social concertation” (Regalia Regini, 2018). This custom has been adopted by all the following governments. Unions have suffered important losses in membership and public legitimacy, losing their ability to retaliate on governments through industrial action (Regan, Culpepper 2014); for this reason, they would have been sidelined from major reform initiatives, and forced to operate as mere lobby groups. Moreover, Leonardi (2017) highlights a mismatch between the power resources the three unions formally dispose of (high density, high collective bargaining coverage, widespread presence on the territory), and the rather scant results achieved in terms of wages, employment, and social protection in the last decades.

### **Culture of work in Italian trade unions**

Italian unions are characterised by a solid work ethic, with important feedback effects on current strategies (Morini, 2017). The Italian sociologist Chiara Saraceno, who closely followed the first attempts to introduce a minimum income in the 1990s, recalls the words of the historical CGIL leader Bruno Trentin: “Not a single *lira* [the former Italian currency] without an hour of work”. Examples of similar declarations are recurrent in the press. On several occasions, the former CGIL secretary Susanna Camusso described work as a “condition of dignity and freedom for the individual”, stressing that “the Italian citizenship is founded on labour” (Today, 2018). Likewise, the former CISL leader Bonanni highlighted that “humans were not born to laze [...] humans' desire to improve their working conditions contributes to give force to the engine of history” (Bonanni, 2019). As a confirmation, all the interviewees to this study remark the centrality of the “good” and “decent” work in their platforms. The UIL interviewee clarifies that “we belong to a tradition that places work at the center”, and that “work cannot be created by decree”; for the officer, welfare policies cannot function properly if jobs are missing in the first place. Despite fixating employment policies as a priority, two respondents (CGIL, Nidil) acknowledge that their unions' platforms have been too narrowly focused on work. They recognise that there has been a certain delay in their strategies, motivated by the exclusive pursuit of the “good” and “full” employment.

### **The missing safety net and the Five Stars' “Citizens' Income”**

Since 1986, all projects for introducing a minimum income guarantee in Italy have been unsuccessful. This unfortunate record placed Italy among the only two European member states without a social assistance scheme in 2017 (Durazzi et al, 2018; Saraceno, 2018). Already in 1997, the Onofri commission recommended the implementation of a minimum income to the center-left government, following the French model of the Revenu Minimum d'Insertion (Colombino, Nazarani, 2013). The pilot of a Reddito Minimo d'Inserimento (RMI), started in 1998, was nonetheless stopped in 2001 by

a center-right government. Only in 2013, the rapid electoral growth of the Five Stars Movement brought a minimum income back on the public agenda. Pressured by a harsh electoral competition with the Five Stars Movement, in 2018 the Gentiloni government implemented a means-tested benefit called *Reddito d'Inclusione* (REI). The measure guaranteed income support to 379.000 Italian households and more than 1 million people (INPS, 2019). The REI project was sketched out by a working group called “Alliance Against Poverty”, which included associations from civil society, charities, researchers, and the three union confederations (Durazzi et al, 2018).

While the Alliance Against Poverty envisaged the progressive expansion of the REI, the turnover in government accelerated the reform process, leading to the abrogation of the REI and the introduction of a new scheme called *Reddito di Cittadinanza* (“Citizens’ Income”). Originally, the idea of a Citizens’ Income was comparable with that of a universal basic income. In the past, the Movement’s founder Beppe Grillo strongly championed the Citizens’ Income as a means to redistribute wealth on a more equal basis, and to give away with the Italian fetish of labour (Dire, 2018; Grillo, 2018). Nonetheless, the policy priorities soon shifted away from a universal and unconditional income support to a more traditional minimum income guarantee. As stated in the first formulation of the law proposal in the Senate, “The ideal level, future and desirable, corresponds with the realisation of a universal, individual and unconditional basic income”; nonetheless, the MPs clarify that they will be “able to achieve that outcome only after a radical reform of the social and fiscal system” (FSM, 2013).

The Citizens’ Income was eventually approved by the League-FSM Government in early 2019, and the first allowances will be administered in May 2019. Compared to the REI, benefit and coverage levels have increased substantially (from a maximum of 187 euros to 780; from 1 to 5 million people covered). Furthermore, the current policy has virtually no time limit, unless a month of “gap” every 18 months of reception (Cremaschi, 2019). Despite the name may recall a universal basic income, the Citizens’ Income is similar to the REI on several accounts (means-test; activation, job-search and training; allocation on both individual and family bases). According to some experts, however, the Citizens’ Income would entail stricter obligations than the REI, including: the acceptance of a job offer on the whole national territory after the refusal of two offers; 16 hours of unpaid work per week for the municipality; and more punitive charges in case the terms and conditions were disregarded (Ciccarelli, 2019).

### **Citizens’ Income: trade unions’ assessment on policy design and objectives**

Italian trade unions have been strongly critical of the Citizens’ income. In February 2019, the three confederations signed a joint document on the occasion of a Senate hearing, pointing out a series of potential drawbacks (CGIL, CISL, UIL, 2019). Among the criticisms, unions mention the “overlap” of active labour market policies and anti-poverty measures; an inadequate “scale” for benefit allocation; the excessive severity of obligations and restrictions; and the lack of coverage for some groups, including temporary and undocumented residents. These remarks are reiterated in the interview phase. Most respondents place great emphasis on the separation between anti-poverty policies on one hand, and active labour market policies and unemployment benefits on the other. For the CGIL respondent, the theoretical framework behind the Citizens’ income assumes that poverty derives from the absence of a job; the mash-up of different schemes would thus create a “short circuit”. Mr. Cristiano Gori, former president of the Alliance Against Poverty, likewise contends that

the Citizens' Income is anchored to an outdated definition of poverty: "before 2007, if you had a wage-earner in the household, you were safe; today it is not the case anymore". According to the expert, the policy would be "against poverty in its target, and against unemployment in its remedies". In addition, respondents from CGIL, CISL and UIL underline that poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, that should be addressed with specific interventions at the community level. Moreover, three interviewees (CGIL, CISL, UIL) contest the allocation criteria, stressing that the benefit coverage may result uneven. As a result of flaws in policy design, the scheme would penalise some low-income households, as well as families with children and people with disabilities (CGIL). Moreover, the requirement of at least 10 years of continuative residence on the national territory to receive the benefit would exclude the near totality of non-resident migrants, violating the constitutional right of equal access to social protection (CGIL, CISL). These findings are somehow contradictory, pointing out the hybrid character of Italian trade unions. On one hand, unions envisage the extension of the policy to excluded groups (children, disabled, migrants), which may reflect an outsider oriented-approach; in that case, it should stimulate a higher degree of openness towards unconditional and universal policies as a UBI. On the other hand, they call for a stricter distinction of social insurance and social assistance programs, a feature that is typical of insider-oriented organisations.

### **The policy-making process and collective bargaining**

During the months preceding the introduction of the Citizens' Income, unions have been barely consulted by the government. This is in clear contrast with the previous practice of involving unions in economic and social policies. For the CISL respondent, the process with the new government "has been all but corporatist, and indeed a lot of things we have asked have been left out". According to Mr. Gori, all the actors gravitating in the center-left of the political spectrum were caught unprepared by the momentum imposed by the Five Stars Movement, and the unions' exclusion from public policy-making would explain their political disorientation. This cognitive dissonance would motivate the CGIL's tones, "incomprehensibly harsh" for a scheme that allocates seven billion euros to the fight against poverty. The UILtemp expert partly confirms Gori's hypothesis. He describes their difficulties to keep pace with recent evolutions in the political landscape: "with the 'stretch' operated by the Five Stars Movement, we *have had* to open a discussion on minimum income". Likewise, for the Nidil respondent the introduction of anti-poverty policies on the public agenda has urged "a diversification of unions' very role and function". These interviews suggest that unions did not necessarily mean to broaden their perspectives to new forms of income guarantees; however, they were forced to do so to respond to the recent changes in the political landscape, and to cope with their marginalisation from the policy-making process.

### **Culture of "welfare dependency" and conditionality**

During the 2018 national elections, political opponents attacked the generosity of the FSM proposal, framing it as a tool of mass dependency (Ciccarelli, 2019; Saraceno, 2018). Providing for high replacement rates, the policy would have discouraged employment levels and severely impacted the Italian economy. To silence these criticisms, governments' representatives strongly enhanced the activation programmes related to the policy. The Labour Market and Social Policy Minister Di Maio publicly assured that the citizens' income would not give free money "to those *who sit on the sofa*"

(Vita, 2019). On the contrary, the Citizens' Income would include "anti-sofa" policies to make sure people would still seek paid work.

As the idea of welfare dependency spread in the public opinion and talk shows, unions felt compelled to take a stance on unconditionality. The issue of laziness and conditionality is controversial among the interviewees. Whereas all trade unionists disavow the language, they differ in their views towards policy requirements. On one hand, the CGIL maintains that policy approach is "punitive", imposing disproportionate sanctions and requirements on its recipients. This finding is consistent with the CGIL's egalitarian discourse and tradition. The expert says that the "logic" would be that of "looking at poor people as they were in that condition for their own fault; as they surely want to cheat you somehow". On the contrary, the CISL expert *welcomes* the introduction of conditional measures in the policy framework, suggesting that unconditional benefits could create a too strong disincentive for labour market participation. A similar stance is taken by the UIL interviewee.

Moreover, trade unionists' positions differ on benefit generosity. The CISL interviewee is critical of the amount of the allowance, judged as "too high" for a minimum income. A benefit set at a high level, and without any time limit, risks to discourage employment rates. The CGIL interviewee disagrees with this view, arguing that "the problem is not that the Citizens' Income is too generous, but that the average wage in many regions and sectors is still *too low*". The UILtemp interviewee is in line with the CGIL expert, contending that people should not be at the fault for their joblessness. While condemning policy requirements, he expresses a rather favourable view towards the amount of the benefits, arguing that "most of the unions' criticisms towards the Income are a bit contrived; we should analyse the value of the policy in itself". According to the interviewee, his position is more or less shared among atypical workers' organisations.

These insights confirm two trends. First, in line with what I find in the quantitative section, cultural attitudes influence preferences for universality and conditionality. The UILtemp trade unionist, who considers that the unemployed are *not* responsible for their own joblessness, is strongly opposed to conditionality and appreciates the generosity of the policy (H1). Secondly, atypical workers' unions (Nidil, UILtemp), as well as more progressive unions (CGIL) are more likely to back generous and unconditional income guarantees, coherently with the needs and desires of their grassroots base (H5).

## Discussion

This short analysis helps to explain Italian unions' hostility towards a UBI. First, there is clear evidence for the attachment of Italian unions to the culture of paid work (H1). Their work ethic is particularly evident, echoing in most of these interviews. In two cases over five, respondents even express some form of disapproval towards the idle, or welcome conditional provisions in the Citizens' Income to make sure that people do not fall into long-term unemployment. Secondly, trade unionists express preferences for a sharper separation between measures targeted at poverty, and schemes for who is temporarily unemployed. As Palier and Thelen recall (2010), the institutional separation of social assistance and social insurance can be used as a device to guarantee protection for market insiders, and enshrine the contributory principle. However, Italian unions are far from disinterested of the "outsiders". On the contrary, the three organisations make significant efforts for organizing the most vulnerable groups. These actions result in substantial gains in legitimacy before the public,

silencing accusations that would blame Italian unions as insider-oriented. The commitment towards non-standard, atypical and very precarious work constitutes an alternative channel through which the three confederations try to bridge gaps between the “ins” and the “outs” (H5). As additional evidence of the importance of membership composition, there seems to be a cleavage along organisational lines. Organisations that cover atypical workers (Nidil, UILtemp), and organisations that emphasise a stronger egalitarian and social function (CGIL), have more favourable views towards unconditionality and generosity of benefit provision. All these elements suggest that Italian unions’ work ethic, and their capacity to cope with non-standard forms of work with other strategies, discourage unions to support a basic income.

## PART 3

### 5. Recommendations and conclusions

The Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) locates in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium. Barely 40 km North-West from the BIEN's home, in the Brussels business district, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) puts its headquarters. Their proximity is ironic, for two movements that disseminate their actions all over the world. Despite the few kilometers of distance, however, the two entities struggle to find some common ground. In all but a few cases, workers' representatives reject UBI for cultural, economic and political reasons. As the ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow put it, "UBI is a visionary idea - but when 75% of the world's people have no social protection [...] the question is one of priority" (Gray, 2018).

In this thesis, I have demonstrated that trade union leaders are not necessarily averse to the idea of a universal basic income. In Liberal and some Mediterranean countries, trade unionists share the main tenets of UBI, fixing them as a "North Star" towards which to address their long-term strategies. In their daily work, however, trade unions cannot afford "beautiful utopias". In many countries, unions operate on the ground to promote a better future for the workers. They face strong institutional constraints and tolerate harsh competition. Recent changes in the world economies have substantially reduced unions' room for maneuver, placing them in a difficult position to affect public policy-making. Any occasion for welfare reform could entail a double-edged sword, risking to jeopardise the accumulated rights. In light of these changes, the UBI is rarely seen as a viable solution, rather prioritizing social security extensions, stricter regulations and labour market policies.

Thanks to a mixed-methods approach, I have illustrated four channels for unions' attitudes to a UBI. A first channel is the existence of a demand for income security. In societies characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment, precariousness, and social exclusion, the hypothesis of a UBI appears more attractive to union leaders. Secondly, and in close connection with the latter, welfare systems can be successful at mitigating high levels of social malaise. In other words, it is not the demand for income security *per se* to increase leaders' preferences, but its interaction with welfare generosity. In countries providing decent levels of income security to the least well-off, union leaders neglect the UBI, and support the expansion of existing schemes. Third, unions are not aseptic or bureaucratic machines. On the contrary, they are heirs of a long cultural tradition, placing decent work at the center of their platforms. Unions' attachment to the "labour contract" has a dramatic influence on preferences for a UBI. Finally, unions' role in the industrial relations landscape, and their degree of inclusivity, explain the likelihood to endorse a UBI. Strong and institutionalised unions perceive UBI as a threat to their position, reducing their opportunities to affect social and economic policies. As these unions usually orient their strategies towards the core workforce, a UBI is seen as detrimental to their members. Conversely, less institutionalised and weaker unions address their strategies to the broader society, which explains a higher degree of openness to a UBI.

This study contributes to filling a gap in the basic income research. In this treatise, I have tried to enlighten not only *whether*, but also *why* unions are often skeptical of a UBI. As demonstrated, unions' justifications for a UBI are far from obvious, and subject to significant variation across industrial relations and welfare regimes. Nonetheless, a number of research routes remain unexplored.

First, I took countries as units of analysis. Differences among individual organisations in the same country have emerged only in a couple of cases (France and Switzerland). However, union platforms are likely to be affected by cleavages of political, cultural and religious nature. This is particularly evident in contestative (France, Italy) and social partnership contexts (Belgium, Netherlands), where unions split along political and religious lines. In the Italian case study, I find that the expert from CGIL, which cultivated strong ties with the Communist Party, has more favourable attitudes towards unconditionality and universality. Future studies should try to look at inter-organisational differences *between* and *within* organisations, assessing whether these divisions stimulate different preferences for a UBI. Secondly, parties' attitudes could influence unions' appreciation for a basic income. In some countries, unions work in close contact with social-democratic and left-wing parties. This avenue deserves further investigation, bridging studies in this domain (for instance Ceron, Negri, 2017; Jacoby, Behrens, 2016) with the basic income literature. Third, a limitation of my study is that it looks at unions at a fixed point in time. As basic income has been long discussed in some countries (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, US), it could be appropriate to look at the development of unions' positions towards a UBI throughout the years.

As this thesis has shown, unions are not “institutional dinosaurs” (Durazzi et al, 2018), and many of them demonstrate a certain longing for renewal. Union leaders and basic income advocates may find some points of contact. A global coalition of UBI and labour organisations could strongly benefit societies around the world, promoting workers' rights and the extension of adequate income security to the whole population. To this aim, I put forward three recommendations:

- **The case for a progressive UBI:** the fight for a basic income is, first and foremost, a fight for a just society and a fair economy. Unlike other BI projects, the BIEN has explicitly adopted a progressive platform (Yamamori, 2016). Residual versions of a UBI, and schemes that aim at replacing existing benefits, are not in line with this perspective. In the empirical analysis, 46% of the survey respondents worry that a UBI could be used to deregulate the economy and dismantle the welfare state. Furthermore, I find that experts from Ireland, Spain and UK are not necessarily against a generous UBI, but fear that right-wing forces could seize this opportunity to jeopardise the hard-earned labour and social rights. For this reason, drawing a stronger demarcation between neoliberal projects and a genuinely progressive UBI would avoid confusion, and reduce the level of hostility between the two organisations. This initiative would be successful at creating new connections with unions, and sidelining “treacherous” opponents from the BIEN coalition.
- **Common proposals for a new society:** BIEN leaders justify a basic income as a social and economic right. They suggest that technical discussions should *follow*, and not *precede*, the fixation of the UBI as a priority on the public agenda (Van Parijs, Vanderborght, 2017). While UBI activists emphasise on ideal objectives, trade unionists concentrate on more concrete issues, such as effectiveness, equality, public legitimacy, implementation and financing. However, the polarisation between UBI “dreamers” and trade union “realists” has been detrimental for both fronts, obfuscating commonalities and impeding them to merge their demands. After singling out neoliberal advocates, trade unionists and UBI proponents should try to identify a set of shared proposals, and build new political coalitions aimed at their achievement. In the short- and medium-term, both movements could jointly support a number



of policies, including: a reduction in working time; increases in minimum wage levels; expansion of social security adequacy and coverage; reduction of obligations linked to unemployment benefits; stronger regulations; controls against workplace abuses; extensions of collective bargaining coverage.

- **A renewed attention for vulnerable workers:** Since their early times, unions have devoted great efforts for the empowerment of precarious workers. In many countries, however, atypical workers tend to be underrepresented in trade unions. As described previously in this thesis, unions face substantial difficulties in reaching these groups. Conversely, BIEN activists have worked closely with non-standard workers, arguing that a basic income would give them shelter against market distortions and welfare deficiencies (Standing, 2013). To offset the decline in membership, unions should craft new strategies aimed at improving their coverage beyond the traditional workforce. To this purpose, a collaboration with the BIEN could be strongly beneficial, helping unions to repair the links within an increasingly segmented working class. Some encouraging examples presented in this thesis can be used as benchmarks, and promoted in cooperation with UBI groups at the national level. Good practices may include: strategies for the extension of collective bargaining coverage to non-standard workers; use of legal action to equalise the rights of traditional and atypical workers; better recruitment practices among non-standard forms of work; creation of specific sectors or units for atypical workers.

## 6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## 7. ANNEXES

welfare clusters	Nordic	Response	CEE + Balkans	Response	Mediterranean	Response	Liberal	Response	Continental	Response
	Sweden	In favour	Bulgaria	Strongly in favour	Portugal	In favour	Israel	In favour	France	In favour
	Finland	Strongly against	Czech Republic	Against	Spain	In favour	United Kingdom	Indifferent	France	Against
	Iceland	Against	Albania	In favour	Italy	Against	New Zealand	Indifferent	Belgium	Against
	Finland	Against	Montenegro	In favour	Greece	In favour	Canada	Strongly in favour	germany	Strongly against
	Finland	Against	Macedonia	Strongly in favour			Canada	In favour	switzerland	Against
	Denmark	Against	Moldova	In favour			Ireland	In favour	Netherlands	In favour
	Finland	Strongly against	Estonia	In favour						
			Hungary	In favour						
			Latvia	In favour						

Annex 1: detailed responses to question on UBI support (“Are you in favour of, or against, this idea?”) across five clusters: Nordic; CEE + Balkans; Mediterranean; Liberal; Continental.

UBI would create a disincentive to work, rewarding who sits on the sofa. [N=38]	Q1
With UBI, human activity ( <u>labour</u> ) would be freed from market constraints. [N=35]	Q2
UBI would protect people from economic fluctuations, non-cyclical unemployment, automation, precariousness, or poverty traps. [N=36]	Q3
The introduction of UBI would imply a reduction in wages, easily translating into a “subsidy” to employers. [N=38]	Q4
Receiving a UBI independent from wage would make it easier for workers to join strikes or protests and voice discontent. [N=38]	Q5
UBI would reduce trade unions’ bargaining power to negotiate with employers, industry associations, governments, etc. [N=38]	Q6
UBI would benefit more those who are NOT affiliated with trade unions, while producing zero or negative effects for unions and their members. [N=38]	Q7
The UBI proposal is financially costly, unfeasible or ineffective with respect to existing cash benefits. [N=36]	Q8
UBI is the only protection against "new social risks" - as the working poor, NEETs, unemployment of women, youth and low-skilled, etc. [N=37]	Q9
UBI could make the economy more flexible or deregulated, and contribute to dismantle the “welfare state”. [N=37]	Q10
Introducing UBI could serve as a strategy to include less unionized groups (e.g. women, young people, non-standard or precarious workers, migrants) in the workers' movement. [N=38]	Q11

Annex 2: Question set to part 2 of the questionnaire. Middle- and high- income countries.

nordics	Country	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11
	Sweden	Disagree		Agree	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Agree	Neutral
	Finland	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Strongly agree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly agree	Strongly Disagree
	Iceland	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
	Finland	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Finland	Agree	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral
	Denmark	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
	Finland	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Disagree

Annex 3: detail of union preferences to part 2 of the survey. Nordic cluster.

CEE + Balkans	Country	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11
	Bulgaria	Neutral	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
	Czech Republic	Agree	Neutral	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral
	Albania	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
	Montenegro	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Neutral	Agree
	Macedonia	Neutral	Neutral	Agree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	Moldova	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Neutral
	Estonia	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree
	Hungary	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Disagree	Neutral
	Latvia	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral

Annex 4: detail of union preferences to part 2 of the survey. Central and Eastern Europe + Balkans cluster.

Southern Europe	Country	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11
	Portugal	Neutral	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
	Spain	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Italy	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Neutral	Neutral	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree
	Greece	Strongly Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral

Annex 5: detail of union preferences to part 2 of the survey. Southern European cluster.

Liberal	Country	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11
	Israel	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Neutral	Agree	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
	United Kingdom	Neutral	Neutral	Disagree	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Neutral	Disagree
	New Zealand	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Neutral
	Canada	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Neutral	Neutral	Neutrale	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Neutral
	Canada	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	n.a.	Disagree
	Ireland	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Neutral	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree

Annex 6: detail of union preferences to part 2 of the survey. Liberal cluster.

Continental	Country	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11
	France	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
	France	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Belgium	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree
	germany	Neutral	Strongly disagree	Strongly Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Strongly Disagree	Agree	Strongly Disagree
	switzerland	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Disagree
	Netherlands	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Annex 7: detail of union preferences to part 2 of the survey. Continental cluster.

1. What is your union's position on Universal Basic Income (UBI)?
2. What are your main concerns?
3. Do you feel that the idea of labour as a source of dignity and freedom is prominent in your organization?
4. Would you be open to the idea of an income independent from work?
5. What is your assessment on the current welfare system?
6. Do you think that UBI is more desirable than an encompassing welfare system based on social protection (contribution-related benefits, unemployment benefits, pensions, etc.)?
7. Economic reports often make reference to processes of automation and technological replacement, which lead to skill-based segmentation of labour markets. Do you think a UBI could remedy one or more of these problems?
8. Do you think a UBI may be beneficial for categories that are excluded or marginalized in the labour market (women, young people, low-skilled, etc.)?
9. Do you think a UBI could have consequences on trade unions' bargaining power?
10. What strategy has your union put in place to deal with non-standard forms of work?
11. Do you think that unions' skepticism or lack of interest towards UBI might be motivated by the fact that such scheme could benefit less union affiliates than others?

Annex 8: typical question set for the interviews. Disclaimer: this is a generic questionnaire. The questionnaire may have been subject to slight variations according to the interviewee.



Country	Union	socio-economic security	Welfare Regime	Work ethic	Social policy preferences	Institutional embeddedness	Industrial Regime	Interest orientation	Strategic target	Degree of UBI support
Argentina	1	Low	Liberal	Low	NA	Low	NA	Movement	State	High
Belgium	1	High	Conservative	High	Targeted; Conditional	High (Ghent)	Social Partnership	NA	Employer	Low
	2	High	Conservative	High	NA	High (Ghent)	Social Partnership	NA	Employer	Low
Canada	1	Medium	Liberal	Medium	NA	Low	Pluralist	Movement	State	High
Denmark	1	High	Nordic	High	NA; Conditional	High (Ghent)	Corporatist	Organisation	Employer	Low
Finland	1	High	Nordic	High	NA	High (Ghent)	Corporatist	Organisation	Employer	Low
France	1	Medium	Conservative	High	Targeted; Conditional	Low	Social Partnership	NA	Employer	Low
	2	Medium	Conservative	High	NA; Conditional	Low	Social Partnership	NA	Employer	Low
Germany	1	Medium	Conservative	High	Targeted; Unconditional	High	Social Partnership	Organisation	Employer	Low
Ireland	1	Medium/Low	Liberal	Low	Universal; Unconditional	Low	Pluralist	Movement	State	High
Italy	1	Medium/Low	Mediterranean	High	Targeted; Conditional	Medium	Polarized	Mixed	State	Medium
	2	Medium/Low	Mediterranean	High	Targeted; Conditional	Medium	Polarized	Mixed	State	Medium
	3	Medium/Low	Mediterranean	High	Targeted; Conditional	Medium	Polarized	Mixed	State	Medium
Netherlands	1	High	Conservative	Medium	Universal; Conditional	High	Social Partnership	Mixed	NA	High
Spain	1	Low	Mediterranean	NA	Universal; Unconditional	Low	Polarized	Movement	State	High
South Africa	1	Low	Liberal	Low	Universal; Unconditional	Low	NA	Movement	State	High
Sweden	1	High	Nordic	High	Targeted; Conditional	High (Ghent)	Corporatist	Mixed	Employer	Low
Switzerland	1	High	Conservative	High	Targeted; NA	Medium	Social Partnership	Mixed	Employer	Low
	2	High	Conservative	Low	Universal; Unconditional	Medium	Social Partnership	Movement	Employer	High
United Kingdom	1	Medium/Low	Liberal	Medium	Targeted; Unconditional	Low	Pluralist	Movement	State	Medium

Annex 9: union preferences across dimensions and countries. Mixed-methods elaboration.

## Public Policy Master Thesis Series

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### ***Looking for a North Star?* Trade Unions' Positions in the Universal Basic Income Debate**

Luca Michele Cigna

#### Abstract

In the literature, trade unions are said to be hostile to a universal basic income. However, most studies fail to sketch out the very justifications for which unions decide to oppose, or *vice versa* support, a UBI. In this study, I try to disentangle unions' positions towards a universal basic income, looking at the factors that may encourage trade unions' support for a UBI across countries, industrial relations and welfare regimes. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating results from 62 individual questionnaires with 27 in-depth qualitative interviews. Contrarily to what often stated, the picture of trade unions and basic income is far more complex than it might seem from the surface. I individuate four causal channels of unions' support for a UBI: high levels of socio-economic insecurity; poor levels of welfare generosity; low degrees of institutional embeddedness; moderate work ethic. Among the others, trade unionists from Liberal and Mediterranean countries are not necessarily opposed to the basic income's main tenets (universality, conditionality), fixing them as a "North Star" toward which to address their long-term strategies. However, they may be forced to renounce to these goals as a result of political and practical constraints.

#### Key words

Trade Unions; Basic Income; Welfare; Industrial Relations