

The Attitudes of Belgian Employers' Organizations towards Universal Basic Income

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Working paper to be presented at the 24th edition of the BIEN Congress – August 2025, Brazil

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Abstract

The idea of introducing a Universal Basic Income (UBI) has for years captured the interest of academics, policymakers, and activists worldwide. It has been widely debated, subject of various experiments, and is increasingly regarded as a potential reform to modern welfare systems. UBI scholars are now focusing on implementation challenges and strategies to make this idea a real tool for adapting welfare states in “turbulent times”. While substantial research has been conducted on public opinion on UBI and (quasi-) UBI experiments, the attitudes of key political and social actors towards UBI remain underexplored. Among these, employers’ organizations have notably been absent from discussions on UBI’s political feasibility. Yet, especially in neo-corporatist systems, this type of actors wields important institutional power and has been granted, alongside trade unions, a central role in the social dialogue on socio-economic policy. If one is to consider UBI as a potential welfare reform, the perspectives of employers’ organizations on the potential implementation of UBI are thus essential.

This paper addresses this research gap by examining the positions of major Belgian employers’ organizations on UBI. Using a qualitative methodology based on thematic analysis, the research is based on semi-structured interviews with some of their key representatives. The findings show that employers’ organizations generally adopt a cautious and sceptical stance towards the UBI proposal. Although they acknowledge some arguments presented by UBI proponents - such as administrative simplification, poverty reduction, and the need to address challenges posed by automation and digitalization -, they tend to favour alternative measures within the existing social protection system.