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Challenging the justice of a basic income policy when focusing on the homeless population: A case study on Germany

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Abstract

In a given society, those who are least advantaged would allegedly benefit the most from receiving a basic income. However, the merits of such a policy are generally debated according to the effects on society as a whole, not specifically on the most marginalized; thus, the potential benefits of a basic income for marginalized groups is unclear. To address this gap, I identify homeless people in Germany as the least advantaged and assess how this group would be impacted by a basic income based on real libertarian, liberal egalitarian, and republican theories of justice. Specifically, I show how introducing a basic income would affect the homeless population in Germany in terms of income, self-respect, and power. While a basic income could increase most of the homeless population's income and improve communal relations, the stigma attached to homelessness will only decrease insofar as the basic income policy helps people exit homelessness. Moreover, a basic income would decrease power imbalances between the homeless population and state agencies, but the policy's effects on relations between homeless persons and fellow citizens, particularly landlords, are ambiguous. This article contributes to the theoretical discussion on a basic income, providing a new concern about whether such a policy is fair to the homeless population. Moreover, this article is relevant in practice, as the discussed effects may prompt avenues for designing future social policies that address the homeless population as the most vulnerable group in modern welfare states.

JEL classification: D31, D63, H55, I32, I38

Keywords: basic income, homelessness, public policy, social justice

1 Introduction

One policy that is often proposed to make society more just, especially for the most marginalized groups (McKinnon, 2003; Raventós, 2007; Van Parijs, 1997), is a basic income, a regular, unconditional, and individual payment made to every member of society (Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017). While the appeal of such a policy to improve the lives of the most disadvantaged is clear, the scholarly discussion on the effects of a basic income policy centers mostly on labor market participants with low income, low self-respect, and low bargaining power (Birnbaum & De Wispelaere, 2021; Henderson, 2023; McKinnon, 2003; Smith, 2021), thus ignoring people who are not in the labor market at all, namely homeless people. I argue that based on real libertarian, liberal egalitarian, and republican ideas of justice, this debate must include the homeless population, because this heterogeneous group is the least advantaged in terms of income, self-respect, and power. Providing a thought experiment on basic income effects in Germany, I show that while a basic income may effectively increase homeless people's income, the policy's effects on self-respect and power are ambiguous: hence, I question the policy's justness from a liberal egalitarian and a republican perspective.

Homelessness has multiple causes that vary with the personal social context, within which institutional, structural and individual factors are interdependent (Weishaupt et al., 2023).¹ Therefore, although homeless people all share a common symptom (not living in adequate accommodation (Amore, 2013)), they represent a highly heterogeneous group (Sonnenberg, 2021, pp. 25-28). For example, systematic differences exist in situations of homeless men, women, and queer people, and conditions are also different for homeless people of different ages, ethnicities, origins, residence status, and relationship status (Borstel et al., 2021; Brüchmann et al., 2022a; German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2022).

Introducing a basic income policy may affect homeless people's individual living situations, as well as systematic risks to becoming homeless and barriers to exiting homelessness. Because the social inclusion of homeless individuals has to be multidimensional, enabling access to income, employment, education, and health care (Benz, 2012, pp. 119, 136), the goals of a social policy addressing homelessness should be concerned with "social security, human dignity, communal recognition, and the freedom to decide autonomously"² (Fischer, 2023, p. 4). So far, this autonomy piece has been missing: The scholarship on homelessness lacks a discussion of how

¹Giano et al. (2020) provided a review on empirical studies identifying predictors of homelessness in the United States published since the 1970s. They found that the most often cited reasons for homelessness across time are (number of times cited): family instability (41), "mental illness (34), unemployment and poverty (33), substance use (31), unstable living arrangements (28), child maltreatment (20), (no) social support (17), and crime (14)" (Giano et al., 2020, p. 694). Piat et al. (2015) argued that from a social ecological perspective, identifying interactions and interdependence between individual and structural factors is critical to fully assess the "person-in-context" (Piat et al., 2015, p. 2369) and, hence, to design effective social policies. They found regional differences in individual factors that were multifaceted and interdependent, acting as pathways into homelessness. One structural factor contributing to initial homelessness is the transition between foster care and institutional settings.

²Original quote: "soziale Sicherheit, Würde, Anerkennung und die Freiheit, eigene Entscheidungen zu treffen" (Fischer, 2023, p. 4). Fischer (2023) identified these social policy goals drawing on the German Social Code Book.

homeless individuals generate income to sustain a living based on their own choices. Accordingly, this article fills two research gaps. First, it contributes to the literature on basic income, questioning whether a basic income policy, which are argued to be just because they benefit the least advantaged, fulfills its promise for the homeless population. Second, it contributes to the literature on homelessness by discussing how an individual payment may affect homeless people's living situations as well as the structural forces that influence the phenomenon of homelessness.

Basic income scholarship has only recently begun to discuss the issue of homelessness. In one of the first essays on basic income and homelessness, Kerman (2021) argued that basic income may reduce income exclusion, promote choice, facilitate workforce returns, and improve homeless people's health and well-being. Accordingly, gains from a basic income would be highest if combined with existing Housing First policies and support structures.³ In another piece, Clarke (2023) also favored a hybrid basic income scheme, where a basic income would be accompanied by an extensive social housing program and rent control. This reasoning was based on Titmuss's (2006) theory on the stigma-reducing effect of universal policies and a thorough case study on the structural forces driving homelessness in Australia, an example of a liberal welfare state. For the case of Germany, Fischer (2023) argued that current social security measures are ineffective in supporting homeless persons because they are centered on regaining employment rather than enabling participation in any reproductive sphere, be it family, society, or economy, whereas a basic income would promote participation without stigma.

The above-mentioned theoretical intuitions have only been supported by a few empirical studies examining the effects of basic income on homeless persons. In two studies, lump-sum transfers to homeless participants in Vancouver and personalized budgets to rough sleepers in London caused individuals to transit from rough sleeping to sleeping in shelters more often

³Housing First was initially implemented in New York City by a non-governmental organization called Pathways. The approach was a radical departure from the conventional staircase approach to homelessness. The staircase approach relied on self-responsibility of homeless persons, assuming that homeless people would transition from shelters to institutional to permanent housing step-by-step, if their development was accompanied by treatment. However, the staircase model did not fight homelessness but rather administered it, with most homeless persons entering only the first step of shelter accommodation, if any (Padgett et al., 2015, pp. 7-9). This observation was shared by Sonnenberg (2021, p. 71) concerning the German system. In contrast to the staircase approach, Housing First provided instant stable housing with optional off-site support services to reduce harm without strings attached (Padgett et al., 2015, pp. 12-13). In 1997, the approach was tested by a randomized control trial and found to be effective, with 80 percent of participants being housed stably compared to 30 percent in the control group, who were cared for conventionally. Moreover, the approach was cost-effective (Padgett et al., 2015, pp. 48-61; for more on this see Tsemberis, 2010). In 2011, Housing First Europe started a two-year-long experiment in five sites across Europe, offering "self-contained living units, [...], secure tenure, [...] (and) proactive support" (Padgett et al., 2015, p. 151), without any conditions on taking part in support programs or being in transitional housing before entering Housing First. After two years, evaluation in four out of five experimental sites was positive, with 79 to 97 percent of participants still being housed and only 23 of 335 dropping out. Successful experiments took place in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Glasgow, and Lisbon, while the experiment failed in Budapest (Busch-Geertsema, 2014, p. 19). In Germany, Housing First approaches are implemented in Berlin, Bremen, Düsseldorf, Nuremberg, and Stuttgart, among other places (Baptista & Marlier, 2019, p. 91; Bundesverband Housing First, 2023; Housing First Hamburg, 2023).

and additionally increased their net savings (Dwyer et al., 2023; Hough & Rice, 2010).⁴ In another study, individuals in Denver were paid a monthly basic income in an experimental setting. A mid-term evaluation of the experiment showed that 30 to 40 percent of participants had transitioned to stable housing and that formal employment increased (Brisson et al., 2023). Another study on providing a basic income to people experiencing homelessness in various locations in the United Kingdom is currently being evaluated (Hume, 2022). Further studies on unconditional cash transfers to youth experiencing homelessness or transitioning from foster care are on the way in the state of Oregon, in New York City, and in San Francisco (Morton et al., 2020; Oregon Department of Human Services, 2023; San Francisco Human Services Agency, 2023).⁵

My research supports the presented scholarship, building on existing theoretical and empirical evidence and applying it to the German case, thus contributing to the debate in three ways. First, I develop a different theoretical view considering basic income's effects on homeless persons. This study focuses on how the effects of a basic income policy on homeless persons strengthen or challenge the major ethical justifications for the policy. Particularly, I argue that the homeless population is the relevant group to consider when determining whether a basic income policy is just based on the maximin distribution rule. Second, I connect formerly separate strands of literature: in particular I use the theoretical underpinnings of a basic income and apply them to the particular group of homeless persons, evaluating the justice of the policy proposal. Finally, this article enriches the discussion on design options for the modern welfare state by providing a detailed case study on how the living situations of homeless people in Germany would change if social security went from a conditional to a basic income scheme.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In the second section, I give information on the phenomenon of homelessness in Germany, risks to becoming homeless, and barriers to exiting homelessness. Moreover, I introduce a specific basic income policy that was deemed feasible by the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) and describe how this would interact with the current support structure for homeless persons in Germany (Bach & Hamburg, 2023). In the third section, I introduce arguments in favor of a basic income from an ideal theoretical perspective, namely, the real libertarian, the liberal egalitarian, and the republican perspective, yielding the basis for a comprehensive discussion. In the fourth section, I analyze how introducing this particular basic income scheme would affect the homeless population in Germany, drawing on the presented theoretical approaches and empirical evidence and evaluating the effects accordingly. Finally, I conclude, reflecting on the justness of the basic income policy upon incorporating the results of the discussion and offering avenues for further research.

⁴The study in London was providing a personalized budget to one particular group of hard-to-reach homeless men: hence, the payment was targeted and conditional. The budget could only be used for goods and services that may contribute to an eventual exit from homelessness and was administered by a coordinator (Hough & Rice, 2010, pp. 10-13).

⁵An overview of basic income pilots in the United States is provided by the [stanford_basic_income_lab_guaranteed_2023](#).

Table 1: ETHOS light Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion developed by FEANTSA (2017)

Operational category	Definition
1 People living rough	Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
2 People in emergency accommodations	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation
3 People living in accommodations for the homeless	Where the period of stay is time-limited and no long-term housing is provided
4 People living in institutions	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing; No housing available prior to release
5 People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence
6 Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence

2 Homelessness in Germany and a basic income proposal

In March 2020, the German government passed a law, committing to collect data on homeless persons every two years (WoBerichtsG). The first national report was based on data from 2022. Data collection followed the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (FEANTSA, 2017), differing between six categories of homelessness as depicted in Table 1. Accordingly, the German Federal Statistical Office gathered information on persons using night shelters for the homeless population, belonging to categories two and three (German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2022; German Federal Statistical Office, 2023).⁶ Information on homeless persons living on the streets or with third parties, belonging to categories one, five, and six, were gathered by an additional key date study (Brüchmann et al., 2022a).⁷ The following discussion also draws on findings of a preceding study in the most densely populated German state, North Rhine-Westphalia (Brüchmann et al., 2022b), and a qualitative study on homeless persons living in Dortmund, the ninth biggest German city, situated in the center of North Rhine-Westphalia (Borstel et al., 2021).

⁶This account excluded individuals who were in shelters for reasons other than homelessness (German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2022, pp. 9-13).

⁷This study was the first to systematically gather information on homeless individuals living on the streets or with acquaintances on the national level in Germany. The authors drew a representative sample on three levels, first selecting municipalities, then institutions in selected municipalities, and finally homeless individuals connected to selected institutions (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 18-21).

2.1 Homelessness in Germany

In Germany, 262,600 people were homeless on the 31st of January, 2022, making up 0.25 percent of the German population.⁸ Overall, 14 percent (37,400) of homeless persons in Germany were without accommodation, 19 percent (49,300) lived with acquaintances, and the biggest proportion was living in shelters. Homelessness in Germany represents a long-term living situation: 60 percent of individuals living in shelters had stayed there for at least a year, and the average length of stay was two years and eight months. Half of the individuals living on the streets or with acquaintances had been homeless for more than a year (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 37-38; FEANTSA & Abbé Pierre Foundation, 2023, pp. 25-26; German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2022, pp. 9-10).

Homelessness is more prevalent in metropolitan regions than in rural areas, as shown in Figure 1. The figure shows how many individuals lived in homeless shelters on the key date according to regional districts. The numbers varied from districts sheltering less than 20 homeless individuals (light blue) to those sheltering more than 440 (dark blue) (German Federal Statistical Office, 2023).⁹ The prevalence of homelessness in metropolitan areas was also found for individuals living on the street and with acquaintances; only the relation between the two groups changed with increasing population density. In municipalities with less than 100,000 inhabitants, more homeless individuals lived with third parties than on the streets, but in municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants more lived on the streets than with third parties (German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2022, pp. 61-64).

In general, the homeless population in Germany is diverse in terms of gender, origin, age, relationship status, and residence status. According to the report, a little less than two-thirds of homeless individuals were male, one-third was female, and two percent identified as diverse. Among the population living in shelters, one-third was German and two-thirds were immigrants, either non-German citizens or stateless. Half of the shelter population was made up of families with children, some of them single parents. Hence, one-quarter of individuals in temporary shelters were minors (German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2022, pp. 9-10). In contrast, among individuals living on the streets, two-thirds were German, one-third was immigrants, and only three percent were minors. Three-quarters of homeless individuals living outside of shelters were single (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 31-36). Among adults, more men than women lived on the streets, and more women than men lived with acquaintances. More than half of the women living with third parties were younger than 30 years old. Individuals living on the streets were the oldest group, with an average age of 44 years (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 31-33; German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2022, pp. 9-10).

Homelessness has multiple interdependent individual, structural, and institutional causes

⁸When comparing Germany to other European countries, Germany was second in the relative amount of homeless persons, only surpassed by France (0.31 percent) (FEANTSA & Abbé Pierre Foundation, 2023, p. 120).

⁹The figure also illustrates that more homeless persons stay in shelters in West than in East Germany. While this fact is not relevant for the presented discussion, it prompts an interesting avenue for further research on the structural causes of homelessness.

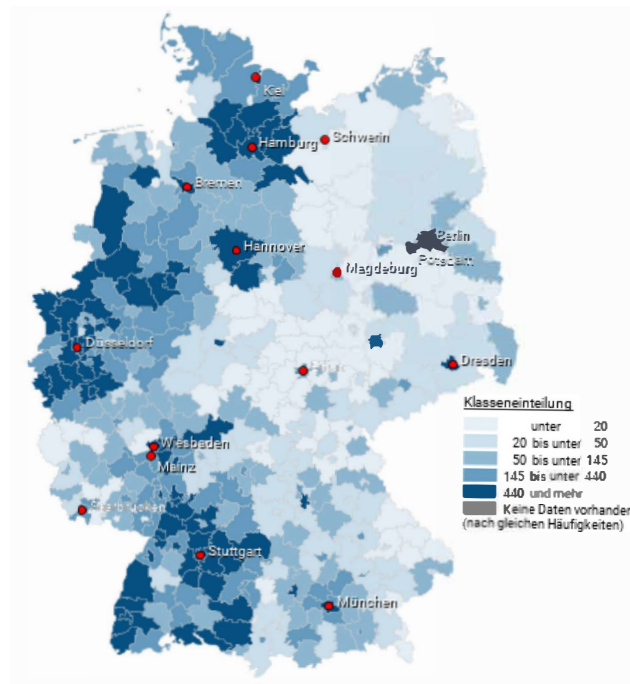


Figure 1: Number of homeless persons living in shelters by German regional districts on the 31st of January 2022 (German Federal Statistical Office, 2023)

(Weishaupt et al., 2023). To identify these causes, most studies rely on self-reports of homeless persons, so individual factors are more salient than structural factors, potentially causing structural factors to be underestimated (Piat et al., 2015). Nonetheless, on the individual level, becoming homeless depends not only on the actual occurrence of a personal crisis, but also on the existence of adequate coping strategies. Hence, to counter homelessness, one must identify factors that increase the likelihood of crises and that inhibit ways to cope with them (Weishaupt et al., 2023, p. 2). Yet, most studies have concentrated on identifying causes but not pinpointing contributing factors or corresponding ways people have dealt with them. In the following, I summarize reported individual, structural, and institutional causes of homelessness in Germany.

On the individual level, eight percent of the homeless population reported being homeless following divorce or separation (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 40-42). In Dortmund, homeless individuals were often exposed to unstable living conditions before homelessness, such as unplanned and spontaneous moving or migrating. They also reported that individual crises led to long-lasting psychological problems, which then led to homelessness. Finally, homeless persons mentioned that an overarching reason for being homeless was lack of a social safety net to support them in dealing with these crises (Szczepanek, 2021, pp. 81-84).

The risk of becoming homeless also increases when transitioning between different institutions. Youth living on the streets had almost always had contact with youth welfare services prior to homelessness (Sonnenberg, 2021, pp. 39-41), and the transition from school to the formal labor market represents a critically vulnerable time for this group (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2020, p. 86). Another reason for becoming homeless, named by nine percent of partici-

pants of the national study, was incarceration (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 40-42).¹⁰ Overall, these transitions represent individual crises and become a risk factor for homelessness when combined with their accompanying institutional structure (Weishaupt et al., 2023, pp. 5-6). For example, for people receiving unemployment assistance that become incarcerated, even for short sentences, they no longer receive rent payments by job centers, as these become covered by local agencies. This switch requires administrative efforts that are often difficult for the convicted to meet. Moreover, once sentences are served, inmates have difficulties securing new housing before being released. Before renting property to prospective tenants, landlords often require confirmation that a job center will cover the rent, but job centers usually decline to issue this confirmation for inmates before release (Hrast et al., 2023, pp. 46, 64).

One structural factor contributing to homelessness is the housing market. With increasing rents in the private housing market and low provision of public and social housing, fewer flats are available for low-income groups (Butterwegge, 2023; Szczepanek, 2021, pp. 83-84; Weishaupt et al., 2023, pp. 3-5).¹¹ One empirical indicator that the housing market is a structural factor increasing the likelihood of homelessness is the positive correlation between the number of homeless persons living in a city and rent levels (German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2022, p. 65). Moreover, in the 2022 report, almost half of the individuals living on the street or with acquaintances cited rental arrears as one reason for being homeless, and half of the participants who were homeless due to rental arrears did not ask public institutions for support when they were in debt (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 40-42). Along these lines, Szczepanek (2021) argued that due to the complexity of the administrative system, people at risk of homelessness may be unable to comply with rules and eventually lose social welfare entitlements, which would increase the risk of eviction. Hence, rental arrears contributed to homelessness even though institutional support structures existed that were designed to prevent homelessness due to debt.

The studies I examined also identified certain systemic barriers to exiting homelessness. On the individual level, one barrier to exit could be the behavioral adaption that seems necessary to

¹⁰The number of homeless persons who are imprisoned because they use public transport without paying for it, being a criminal offense in Germany, was assessed as above average (Hrast et al., 2023, p. 35).

¹¹Housing costs are high in Germany, in relative and absolute terms. In 2021, low-income households paid 43.8 percent of their disposable income for housing, and these costs had increased by 2.6 percent compared to the previous year. The average European household paid 37.7 percent (plus 2.2 percent) of its income for housing (FEANTSA & Abbé Pierre Foundation, 2023, p. 108). A household is defined as overburdened by housing costs when costs amount to more than 40 percent of disposable income (Eurostat, 2023), which was true for 41.7 percent (plus 5.5 percent) of German low-income households. On average, the monthly cost of housing for households at risk of poverty amounted to 572 euros. Only in the Netherlands and Denmark, did low-income households pay more for housing in absolute terms (FEANTSA & Abbé Pierre Foundation, 2023, pp. 109-110). However, only 1.2 percent of German households lived in deprived housing conditions, meaning that the accommodation is unsanitary, overcrowded, or difficult to heat, and the number of people in deprived housing conditions decreased by 43 percent from 2010 to 2020 (FEANTSA & Abbé Pierre Foundation, 2023, pp. 52, 55). Moreover, despite high costs, comparatively few German households were confronted with arrears on mortgage or rent (4.5 percent, plus 9.8 percent), and utility bills (6.5 percent, minus 5.8 percent) (FEANTSA & Abbé Pierre Foundation, 2023, p. 111). The current work does not incorporate these outcomes because it focuses on those least advantaged in the housing market, irrespective of how small this group may be.

Table 2: List of risks to becoming homeless and barriers to exiting homelessness

Level	Risks	Exit barriers
Individual	Separation	
	Migration	
	Mental health	
	Transitions	
Structural	Rental arrears	Behavioral adaption
		Missing social net
		Housing market
Institutional		Bureaucracy

survive being homeless. For example, for someone used to sleeping in places with easy escape routes in case of danger, sleeping behind a closed door may be unbearable. Moreover, even though the homeless community is unstable and unsafe, leaving this community may increase one’s risk of social isolation (Sonnenberg, 2021, pp. 58-61).

On the structural level, the housing market systematically discriminates against various sub-groups, inhibiting reintegration, and the homeless population as a whole is subject to group-focused enmity (Hövermann et al., 2015; Küpper & Zick, 2014). Even outside the context of homelessness, a representative study by the German Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (2024) showed that 15 percent of respondents had experienced discrimination due to ethnicity or origin when trying to rent a flat. Hence, discrimination on the housing market on intersectional grounds is probable. Further related barriers to exiting homelessness include the requirement that renters have positive debt reports from the credit rating agency (SCHUFA) (Busch-Geertsema, 2017, p. 78) and that their prospective rent must be deemed appropriate by local agencies providing unemployment and social assistance (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2020, p. 91), such that the housing market barriers are also intertwined with barriers related to institutional structures.

On the institutional level, Sonnenberg (2021, p. 71) characterized the current social welfare structure tending to homeless individuals as rather administrative than curative and rather normalizing than individualized. Moreover, they mentioned that the rehabilitation of homeless individuals has been hampered by German bureaucracy, which is highly complex. Without professional assistance, most homeless people were not able to apply for social welfare because they did not know their rights and entitlements (Sonnenberg, 2021, pp. 54-55), and they were missing relevant documents or lacked the infrastructure to use online appointment systems or applications (Sonnenberg, 2021, pp. 61-62). A summary of these risk factors and exit barriers is given by Table 2, with a missing social net, the housing market, and bureaucracy constituting both risks of becoming homeless and barriers to exiting homelessness.

I contend that any discussion on a policy’s justness based on how it affects the least advantaged persons of a society must consider the homeless population. In Section 4, I further argue

that the diverse group of homeless persons in Germany faces significant disadvantages in terms of income, self-respect, and power. By presenting a hypothetical scenario on the effects of a basic income in Germany, I demonstrate that while the policy may indeed enhance homeless individuals' incomes, its implications for their self-respect and power remain uncertain. Consequently, I raise doubts about the justice of the basic income policy. In the next section, I introduce social support structures for homeless persons in place and a concrete basic income policy that might act as a complement.

2.2 Present support structures and basic income

Social support measures addressing homelessness in Germany, particularly support according to §§ 36 and 67 to 69 SGB XII, include covering debts to secure accommodation and providing counseling services. Moreover, the constitution of Germany grants the state the duty to house homeless persons if homelessness is involuntary, because being homeless threatens one's rights to a dignified existence and to physical integrity (Art. 1 I, 2 II GG; Ruder, 1999, pp. 22, 29–30).¹² According to the principle of subsidiarity, the municipal governments are responsible for helping people realize these fundamental rights by providing temporary accommodation. This responsibility does not depend on the nationality of homeless persons, but on their main location. Responsibility for homeless youth lies with the municipal youth welfare office: only responsibility for asylum seekers lies with the nation state (Ruder, 1999, p. 37-42, 181–183).

However, to date, these support structures vary considerably between regions. In 2018, only two-thirds of counties were equipped with counseling offices despite legal requirements. Moreover, no national qualitative standards are in place to secure the right to emergency accommodation (Baptista & Marlier, 2019, pp. 79-93; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2020).¹³ Fischer (2023, p. 5) further criticized the system for ineffectively securing employment and accommodation for homeless persons for three reasons: Homeless individuals do not apply for support, administrative measures and individual needs do not match, and affordable accommodations are not available.¹⁴ To address the first two issues, Fischer (2023) proposed a basic income policy.

Present social support measures for the homeless population would be untouched by the

¹²While juridically homeless persons themselves are treated as behaviorally responsible (*verhaltensverantwortlich*) for their living situation, this definition does not entail culpability (Ruder, 1999, p. 91).

¹³While preventive measures in Germany are extensive compared to in other European countries, municipal support was evaluated to be rather “heterogeneous and confusing” (Baptista & Marlier, 2019, p. 116), with both non-governmental organizations and local authorities providing counseling on existing social security measures (Baptista & Marlier, 2019, pp. 79, 88, 92, 93). Three measures were proposed to fight homelessness in Germany more effectively. First, provide more affordable housing for low-income groups. Second, implement ways to measure homelessness, which was accomplished by the law on counting homeless individuals in 2020 (WoBerichtsG). And finally, introduce “uniform forms and standards for homeless support at municipal level, in which all actors are involved cooperatively” (Baptista & Marlier, 2019, p. 121), which will be difficult due to the German federal system.

¹⁴Empirical evidence on this intuition was provided by Dwyer et al. (2023), showing no difference in a range of outcomes, like housing stability, employment, and well-being, between homeless persons provided with support via coaching and workshops and control groups.

Table 3: Social security measures that could be replaced by a basic income scheme in Germany, based on Bach & Hamburg (2023, p. 9)

Social security measures	
Unemployment assistance	<i>Bürgergeld</i>
Social assistance	<i>Sozialhilfe, insb. Grundsicherung im Alter</i>
Housing subsidies	<i>Wohngeld</i>
Child benefit	<i>Kindergeld</i>
Supplementary child allowance	<i>Kinderzuschlag</i>
Child support advance payment	<i>Unterhaltsvorschuss</i>
Parental allowance	<i>Elterngeld</i>
Higher educational support	<i>BAFög, Stipendien</i>
Mandatory unemployment insurance	<i>Arbeitslosenversicherung</i>

introduction of a basic income policy as deemed feasible by Bach & Hamburg (2023).¹⁵ Accordingly, every adult living in Germany would be eligible for a regular payment of 1200 euros per month, every child younger than 18 for a payment of 600 euros per month. No regional differences would apply, and basic income would be paid unconditionally and without a means test. The following discussion focuses on the revenue-neutral proposal of a basic income which would be financed by a flat rate tax on income of 60.5 percent, the elimination of reduced value-added taxes (except for on food and public transport), and a carbon price of 250 euros per ton.¹⁶ In addition, certain social security measures would need to be replaced (Bach & Hamburg, 2023, pp. 9-12, 16 ff.). A complete list is given by Table 3, and the measures are explained in more detail in the Appendix.

Section 3 discusses three ways to justify a basic income policy in ideal theory. Scholars have put forth the proposition that for a society to be considered just, it must adopt a basic income system because such a system would improve the living conditions of the most disadvantaged individuals. In the midst of this debate, I argue that any discussion on this matter must consider the impact of basic income on the homeless population. This diverse group faces significant disadvantages in terms of income, self-respect, and power. To illustrate this point, Section 4 discusses a hypothetical scenario that examines the effects of basic income in Germany. While the discussed basic income policy may indeed enhance the income of homeless individuals, the implications for their self-respect and power remain uncertain. As a result, I cast doubt on the justice of a basic income policy.

¹⁵Studies by the German Ministry of Finance and the Leibniz Institute for Economic Research were more critical concerning the feasibility of a basic income policy (for more on this see Advisory Board to the German Federal Ministry of Finance, 2021; Blömer & Peichl, 2021). One reason could be that the simulation model used by Bach & Hamburg (2023, p. 13) did not consider the behavioral consequences of a basic income introduction.

¹⁶In the beginning of 2024, German tax-payers were subject to a progressive income tax scheme with a top tax rate of 42 percent. Moreover, reduced value-added taxes for various goods and services and a carbon price of 45 euros per ton were also instituted. Despite increases in these burdens accompanying a basic income scheme, Bach & Hamburg (2023) showed that the proposed basic income policy would increase the net income of 60 percent of the population, while inequality and poverty risk would decrease.

Importantly, ideal theory differs from the specific basic income policy as discussed, in that it is not fully universal.¹⁷ Concerning the current social security in Germany, different eligibility criteria apply for asylum seekers who are entitled to benefits according to a special law (AsylbLG). Another special case are citizens from European member states who are allowed to enter Germany due to freedom of movement. Yet, after three months, their permission to stay in Germany needs to be justified, for example, by employment. Hence, EU citizens without a justified status of residence are not entitled to German social security benefits, besides limited social assistance as interim aid. The same is true for undocumented immigrants (§ 23 SGB XII; Brüchmann et al., 2022a, p. 36). Bach & Hamburg (2023, p. 8) suggested that similar criteria could be applied when introducing a basic income policy. Yet, using this eligibility criteria in the context of a basic income policy raises some concerns regarding justness, which I discuss in detail in Section 4.

3 Real libertarian, liberal egalitarian, and republican basic income

The basic income debate can be divided into three parts: discussions on the concept's core principles, its effects on the capitalist society, and its relation to the state (Afscharian et al., 2022). This presented article mainly contributes to the scholarship on core principles of the basic income policy, while only touching on arguments that relate to the economic and political sphere. The discussion is based on three attempts to justify a basic income: the libertarian, the liberal egalitarian, and the republican approach (Birnbaum, 2020; Henderson, 2023; Sirsch, 2021; Svitych, 2024).¹⁸

I argue that all three justificative attempts rely on the maximin distribution rule as stipulated by Rawls (1999).¹⁹ The theory comprises two core principles for a society to be just. The first ensures equality of opportunity, and the second ensures the distribution of social primary

¹⁷Most scholars implicitly discuss a residence-based basic income policy because effects of a citizenship-based basic income policy do not conform with the underlying idea of a just society (Löffler, 2021).

¹⁸Another attempt to justify basic income is made by scholars drawing on Marx. I refrain from including this approach because it contributes similar arguments as proposed by the three theoretical approaches discussed. For example, Kandiyali (2022) argued that basic income would contribute to the realization of a left libertarian version of communism. Moreover, Manjarin & Szlinder (2016) favored basic income because it would increase the power of workers, as do republicans. An avenue for further research is given with the Marxist-feminist account of basic income by Zelleke (2022). Besides Marxist ideas, approaches to justify basic income focusing on “relationality and interdependence” (Svitych, 2024, p. 43) pose interesting avenues to extend the presented research. For example, Smith (2021) argued in favor of a basic income on the basis of “the theory of recognition put forward by Axel Honneth [...] which is modelled on the account of justice contained in Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*” (Smith, 2021, p. 846, emphasis in original). Moreover, Svitych (2024) combined “Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach with Karl Polanyi’s critical political economic account to develop a Polanyian capabalaritarian theory of basic income” (Svitych, 2024, p. 43). Nevertheless, I refrain from including these theories because the present article focuses on the most common justifications of basic income, which are centered on distributional justice and the individual.

¹⁹While real libertarians and liberal egalitarians favor maximin distribution explicitly, I argue in the following that republicans do so at least implicitly (see also Löffler, 2021).

goods according to the difference principle. The difference principle states that: “(s)ocial and economic inequalities are to be arranged so they are [...] to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged” (Rawls, 1999, p. 266). In particular, societal institutions should ensure a maximin distribution of social primary goods, which were defined as “things that every rational man is presumed to want” (Rawls, 1999, p. 54) to pursue their version of the good life. Real libertarian, liberal egalitarian, and republican justifications of a basic income rely on the assumption that basic income allows for a maximin distribution considering income, self-respect, and power, all constituting social primary goods.

These justificative attempts have been countered numerous times, one of the strongest objection being that a universal basic income violates the principle of reciprocity (Lister, 2020; Maskivker, 2018). Setting aside these criticisms, I argue that the theories do not adequately identify the worst-off individual, which is crucial when evaluating the justice of a basic income policy according to the underlying assumptions I present below. In particular, I find that theories concerning the least advantaged need to incorporate effects on the homeless population living in modern welfare states. Ideal theory only implicitly discusses the question of present structural disadvantages, and scholars have already argued that the debate on basic income has to incorporate perspectives on persons with disabilities (Rey Pérez, 2019), persons subject to racial discrimination (Nwogbo, 2021), and women (Pateman, 2007; Miller et al., 2019). Yet, few have considered the effects of basic income on homeless persons. To emphasize this gap, here I outline the mainstream theories, defining the social goods that need to be maximined accordingly.

3.1 Real libertarianism

Libertarians emphasize the efficiency of markets, but they may still argue in favor of redistribution in the form of a basic income for two reasons. First, individuals know better than governments when assessing their needs, so it is reasonable to redistribute cash. Second, governments are unable to identify desert, so it is reasonable to redistribute cash without posing conditions (Fleischer & Lehto, 2023, pp. 509-511). While Fleischer & Lehto (2023) provided a comprehensive overview of different libertarian arguments to reach this conclusion, here I concentrate on the idea of one of the most prominent basic income advocates, Philippe Van Parijs.²⁰ This particular argument in favor of basic income was characterized as left libertarian due to its emphasis on freedom (Fleischer & Lehto, 2023, p. 524). However, Van Parijs (1991), Van Parijs (1997), and Van Parijs & Vanderborght (2017) described their approach as real libertarian, arguing that a basic income would promote what they call real freedom.

²⁰An extensive examination of Van Parijs’s idea of a basic income, including its reception and main criticisms, was given by Sommer (2016). The article focuses on this particular libertarian theory because the presented critique does not attack the differing assumption made by libertarian scholars, but rather questions whether the consequences of basic income are satisfactory according to the conclusion drawn from these assumptions. This conclusion, namely that a basic income is the best way to redistribute in order to maximin freedom, does not differ between the libertarian theories as presented by Fleischer & Lehto (2023).

In a first step, Van Parijs (1997, p. 25) defined real freedom as being distinct from formal freedom. Formal freedom is a prerequisite and entails security and self-ownership.²¹ Second, individuals should not only be free from interference in the pursuit of their goals, but should have “access to the means for doing what [...] (they) might want to do” (Van Parijs, 1997, p. 5). Van Parijs (1997, pp. 18-19) emphasized that real freedom in a just society encompasses neutrality considering the life plans of its members. This includes the right not to work, or as in Van Parijs’s (1991) famous example: the right to live as a Malibu surfer.²² Therefore, in a just society, opportunities need to be distributed according to the maximin principle (Van Parijs, 1997, pp. 27-29). Van Parijs (2021) reasoned that “a maximin criterion provides an appealing compromise between distributive considerations and efficiency considerations, between the equalisation of the shares and the maximisation of the sum” (Van Parijs, 2021, p. 2).

Van Parijs (1997, p. 33) further stated that a uniform amount of cash paid to all would satisfy the maximin criterion in terms of real freedom. Van Parijs (1997, pp. 42-46) and Van Parijs (2021) argued in favor of cash because in a capitalist society, income would work best to enable individuals to pursue their version of the good life, buying consumption goods *or* leisure. Further, Van Parijs (1997) argued in favor of a uniform payment according to the criterion of undominated diversity. Based on Dworkin (1981b), Van Parijs (1997, pp. 61-86) stated that considering internal endowments of individuals, redistribution should be sensitive to arbitrarily assigned talents and abilities, but only if talents were dominated.²³ In short, domination means that all members of a society agree that the set of internal endowments of one person is strictly preferred over those of another, which Van Parijs (1997) rendered improbable.²⁴ Ultimately, this yields the conclusion that “if we are serious about pursuing real-freedom-for-all [...] what we have to go for is the highest unconditional income for all consistent with security and self-ownership” (Van Parijs, 1997, p. 33).

²¹The concept of self-ownership goes back to Locke (1698) and his theory of natural property rights. Accordingly, in the state of nature, there is no ownership of natural resources. Property rights are installed by appropriation through labor. The product of one’s labor is owned by oneself. Moreover, “(s)elf-ownership implies that an individual is not required to contribute her labour for the benefit of others” (Fleischer & Lehto, 2023, p. 512). In this case, redistribution is only justified if it secures property rights by enabling minimum subsistence consumption and compensates “those rendered worse-off by our system of private property” (Fleischer & Lehto, 2023, p. 515). However, there is a substantial scholarship debating whether any redistribution can be justified according to Locke. One of the first to argue in favor of a basic income based on the Lockean proviso was Zwolinski (2015), countered by Rallo (2019).

²²More critically this argument was framed differently: “He (Van Parijs, author’s note) denies the involuntarily unemployed persons any privilege over the voluntarily unemployed ones” (Merle, 2021, p. 8).

²³While redistribution should be insensitive to differences in tastes, as Dworkin (1981a) argued.

²⁴A different approach concerning the missing compensation for differences in abilities by the basic income policy was proposed by Henderson (2017). Henderson (2017) dismissed the criterion of undominated diversity, arguing “that there is no single criterion on which compensation for *unequal internal endowments* can be based” (Henderson, 2017, p. 4, emphasis in original). Instead, a basic income should be paid in addition to policy measures “enhancing the *capabilities* of disadvantaged individuals and of universalising *participatory parity*” (Henderson, 2017, p. 4, emphasis in original). Henderson (2017) based his argument on the works of Sen (2005), **robeyns_is_2003**, and Fraser (2001). Since the basic income policy discussed in this article is introduced in addition to most policies addressing homelessness in Germany, I do not take this theoretical discussion further. Nevertheless, possible trade-offs between introducing a basic income policy and dropping other policy measures, such as housing subsidies, are mentioned when appropriate.

To sum up, Van Parijs (1997) and Van Parijs & Vanderborght (2017) argued that in order for a society to be deemed just, it should adopt a basic income system. Such a system would increase opportunities as measured by the income of the most marginalized individuals. I contend that any discourse on this issue must consider the impact of basic income on the homeless community because this diverse group faces significant disadvantages in terms of income, as I discuss further in Section 4.

3.2 Liberal egalitarianism

Both the liberal egalitarian and the real libertarian approach to basic income are guided by considerations of freedom and neutrality (Sirsch & Unger, 2021, p. 213).²⁵ Yet, the liberal egalitarian perspective enriches the discussion by focusing on the effects of a basic income policy on the distribution of self-respect. According to Rawls (1999, pp. 386-388), self-respect has two components: first, a feeling of self-worth and, second, confidence in one’s own abilities to succeed. The feeling of self-worth is supported if an individual has defined their version of the good life and if this version is recognized as valuable by others. Communal recognition also contributes to individual confidence to pursue this version of the good life, hence, to the second component of self-respect. The relation is illustrated by Figure 2.

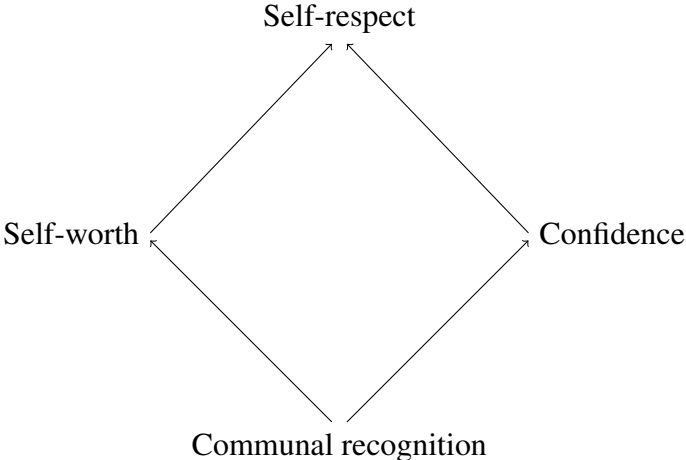


Figure 2: The relation between the components of self-respect according to Rawls (1999).

Most egalitarian basic income scholars argue in favor of the policy in addition to public good provision, explicitly contrasting effects of a basic income to those of conditional social security (Sirsch, 2021).²⁶ Fischer (2023) questioned whether payments should be conditioned on the

²⁵Similarities are evident since the real libertarian reasoning is based on liberal egalitarian theories. Despite that Rawls (1999) and Dworkin (1981b) discarded basic income (Bidadanure, 2019), there is a substantial scholarship arguing in favor of a basic income from the liberal egalitarian perspective. The connection to the ideas of justice as fairness by Rawls (1999) and equality of resources by Dworkin (1981b) is described in more detail by (Torry, 2023, pp. 206-208).

²⁶Public good provision is important according to liberal egalitarian theory because the negative externalities and collective action problems of private market provision would leave the least advantaged worse off otherwise (Sirsch, 2021, pp. 217-223).

willingness to be employed formally, because the provision of formal work depends on other forms of work, such as care work.²⁷ Other authors argued that means tests and willingness-to-work requirements of conditional schemes would cause feelings of shame due to necessary administrative intrusion in the personal lives of those deemed in need. Hence, these measures would decrease self-worth. Finally, the communal perception of those receiving a conditional minimum income as needy would decrease the bases of self-respect (Birnbaum, 2010; McKinnon, 2003; Sirsch, 2021). In contrast, universal and unconditional basic income would establish an income floor for the least advantaged without stigma. Further, basic income would enable communal participation by providing individuals with an exit option from degrading formal labor contracts (Birnbaum, 2010; McKinnon, 2003; McKinnon, 2006). To sum up, “(p)roviding people with access to (and not preventing them from taking part in) meaningful forms of participation, with opportunities for social recognition is, no doubt, very important if we want to promote social conditions for the development of a person’s *confidence in her abilities* and *lively sense of her own worth*” (Birnbaum, 2010, p. 502, emphasis in original).

Thus far, the presented arguments suggest that a basic income policy would increase the self-respect of those who are “in low paid, menial, exhausting work” (McKinnon, 2003, p. 148; see also Birnbaum, 2010), hence, in a formal employment relation. Extending this perspective, Fukuma (2017) argued in favor of a basic income “to guarantee institutionally both ‘the right to meaningful work’ and ‘the right not to work’” (Fukuma, 2017, p. 5). While agreeing that a meaningful activity lies at the core of the concept of self-respect, Fukuma (2017) reasoned that individuals would evaluate tasks differently concerning the additional value to their version of the good life (Fukuma, 2017, p. 5). Basic income would give people the chance to engage in meaningful work either in the formal sphere or outside of it. Relying on a similarly inclusive definition of work, Fischer (2023) argued that communal recognition could be received by being active in any reproductive sphere, be it within the formal labor market, the family, or another part of civil society, for example, providing volunteer work. Basic income would promote all forms of communal participation, while stigma attached to activities outside of the formal labor market would decrease (Fischer, 2023, pp. 8-10); hence, corresponding self-respect would increase. Extending the argument to the informal sphere has a further implication, namely that the worst-off individual of a society in terms of self-respect is not necessarily taking part in the formal labor market. Thereby, this reasoning adds relevance to the presented research, identifying homeless persons as least advantaged in modern welfare states.

To sum up, liberal egalitarian scholars put forward the idea that for a society to be considered just, it should embrace a basic income system due to its positive effects on self-respect. I argue that any conversation on this matter must consider the impact of basic income on the homeless community because this diverse group faces significant disadvantages in terms of their ability to

²⁷Pateman (2007) used a similar argument countering the claims for reciprocal contribution to be eligible for a minimum income because “neither mothers nor all those engaged in caring work demand an immediate reciprocal contribution from those for whom they are caring; their work is not conditional upon a contribution” (Pateman, 2007, p. 3).

formulate a meaningful life plan, their confidence to pursue this plan, and communal recognition of both, which relates to self-respect. Further evidence on this argument is given in Section 4.

3.3 Republicanism

The third way to justify basic income as discussed by this article is republicanism. Republicans define freedom as non-domination. An individual is free from domination when it is free from the possibility of arbitrary, hence, uncontrolled, interference horizontally from fellow citizens and vertically from the state (Casassas & De Wispelaere, 2016, p. 285; Raventós, 2007, pp. 62-64). An individual is controlled “when others are in a position of being able to interfere in any of those ways that gets me to behave according to their tastes” (Pettit, 2007, p. 4). This ability does not need to be acted on because when an individual is subject to control, every action that is performed without interference is performed with the implicit consent of the controlling entity (Casassas & De Wispelaere, 2016, p. 285; Pettit, 2007). This form of “(s)ocial power is arbitrary to the extent that its possible exercise is not externally constrained by effective rules, procedures, or goals that are common knowledge to all relevant parties” (Lovett, 2009, p. 821).

To ensure non-domination, socio-economic inequalities need to be decreased (Lovett, 2009, pp. 822-825). Power asymmetries favor relationships of dependency and pose the risk of exploitation. Hence, poor individuals are more likely to be dominated. This is true for relations with their fellow citizens as well as with state entities. For example, conditional minimum income schemes require public intrusion into the private sphere and, therefore, encompass a possibility of domination by the state (Casassas & De Wispelaere, 2016, p. 289; Lovett, 2009, pp. 824, 826). To address these inequalities, republicans advocate measures to establish an economic ceiling (Casassas & De Wispelaere, 2016, pp. 290–293; see also Neuhäuser, 2018) and basic income.²⁸

A basic income “provides a direct and resolute strategy for systematically and continuously preventing conditions of exploitable dependency and vulnerability to abuse throughout people’s lives” (Fleischer & Lehto, 2023, p. 591), due to regularity and unconditionality of the payment. This is especially true considering formal employees: Pateman (2007) argued that the employment relationship is inherently subject to subordination on the part of the employee because individuals can be laid off against their will. Hence, employment relations are “a vast area of hierarchy and subordination within supposedly democratic societies” (Pateman, 2007, p. 4). Basic income would at least enable individuals to exit their jobs without losing their means for subsistence consumption and without being subject to state intrusion, such as by checking eli-

²⁸The necessity of an economic ceiling is only implicitly related to basic income as an instrument to ensure non-domination. However, it may justify an increase in redistributive taxation to finance the policy introduction (Birnbbaum, 2020, p. 287). Arguably, taxation is a justified state interference because it is administered by democratic institutions (Pettit, 2007, p. 6; Raventós, 2007, p. 63).

gibility for welfare payments (Fleischer & Lehto, 2023, p. 593).²⁹ The same argument can be made for individuals exiting partnerships within which they financially depend on cohabiting (Pettit, 2007, p. 5; Raventós, 2007, pp. 70-72). To sum up, a basic income “would enable citizens to have the opportunity *not to be employed*” (Pateman, 2007, p. 5, emphasis in original) or to sustain a living on their own. Hence, a basic income sets the “preconditions for citizens to interact as equals” (Fleischer & Lehto, 2023, p. 594).

However, for republicans, basic income needs to fulfill certain conditions to contribute to freedom as non-domination. First, the amount of the basic income needs to be sufficient to enhance the individual’s economic bargaining power. Moreover, it needs to be implemented in addition to public good provision, so that basic income is not only used to cover necessary expenditures on health, education, and the like, but can effectively contribute to non-domination (Casassas & De Wispelaere, 2016, pp. 288-289; Lovett, 2009, pp. 826-828). Finally, the basic income needs to be embedded in a democracy and support active participation either in non-dominated formal employment or in informal ways of societal engagement such as unpaid care work (Birnbaum, 2020, pp. 289-294).

Despite that the republican theory may differ from concerns of distributive justice (Smith, 2021, p. 846), I frame the theory of non-domination as an account of distributive justice in line with Lovett (2009). Lovett (2009) explicitly defined justice as minimizing domination: “The political and social institutions or practices of any society are just to the extent that, in expectation, they will tend to minimize the sum total domination, counting the domination of each person equally” (Lovett, 2009, p. 820). While Lovett (2009) argued that non-domination should be distributed in a utilitarian sense, the basic income scholarship usually centers its reasoning on the most vulnerable members of society because “people who depend on others’ goodwill [...] are easier targets of control and domination” (Pettit, 2007, p. 6). Therefore, I argue that the goal of any just society in a republican sense must be to enable non-domination for the least advantaged, hence, to maximin power.³⁰

3.4 Similarities and differences

In the following, I distinguish the republican concept of justice more clearly from the liberal egalitarian and the real libertarian concepts because the similarities of the approaches are evident. First, non-domination can act as a prerequisite for self-respect (Sirsch & Unger, 2021, p. 1018). If a person is subject to domination, they may live in constant uncertainty due to the threat of exploitation and is, therefore, unable to formulate a life plan (Lovett, 2009, pp.

²⁹Birnbaum & De Wispelaere (2016, p. 66) pointed out that effective bargaining power for employees who wish to take part in the formal labor market can only be realized by a basic income policy when there are better alternatives available. Similarly, Breen (2017) argued that basic income is inferior to state regulations protecting the vulnerable employee and, hence, does not necessarily follow from the republican emphasis on non-domination.

³⁰Lovett (2009) himself argued that the distribution principle is not as important as the decision on the good that needs to be distributed, namely, non-domination instead of utility or primary goods. Further, he argued in favor of minimizing the sum of domination “on the grounds of its simplicity and directness” (Lovett, 2009, p. 822).

821-822). Moreover, a person may only be able to have non-subservient relationships, if they is free according to the concept of non-domination. However, in contrast to liberal egalitarian thought, the republican concept of non-domination stresses the relational instead of the individual or recognitional aspects of self-respect, pinpointing the importance of being free from interference on two fronts: the state and fellow citizens. Moreover, the republican focus “on asymmetries of power allows for the identification of vulnerabilities in the private sphere where *actual* interferences are hard to identify” (Sirsch & Unger, 2021, p. 1017). Second, while for liberal egalitarians, redistribution is inherently just and basic income functions to maximin primary goods, for republicans redistribution via basic income is only instrumental, serving to reduce domination (Sirsch & Unger, 2021, p. 1009).³¹ While income can be instrumental to power, republicans (in contrast to real libertarians) emphasize the distribution of power. This line of argument stresses that non-domination should be institutionally embedded *ex ante* (Casassas, 2007, p. 5). Hence, checking whether a basic income policy leads to a maximin distribution of power, enabling non-domination for those who are least advantaged, adds another facet to the presented discussion. In light of this argument, I maintain that the conversation must consider the effects of basic income on the homeless population, as this heterogeneous group experiences the greatest disadvantages in terms of power, and thus interference from both fellow citizens and state agencies, which is discussed in Section 4.

To sum up, the approaches to justify a basic income presented in this section evaluate the hierarchy of relevant social primary goods that are essential for a society to be just, where the definitions of just are different but rely on similar assumptions. Libertarians, liberal egalitarians and republicans all argue on the basis of freedom and neutrality. Libertarians further emphasize that in a capitalist society, income has the widest range of uses to increase opportunities of those who possess the least. Drawing on Rawls (1999), liberal egalitarians highlight the importance of self-respect, which can be maximized when combining public good provision with basic income. Lastly, republicans argue that the state needs to enable not only formal freedom, but also non-domination on the part of public and private third parties, hence, it needs to increase power of the least advantaged.

In Section 4, the presented theories are used to discuss the research question on how a basic income policy would affect the living situation of homeless persons, the risks to becoming homeless, as well as possible exit barriers to homelessness. The discussion follows the suggestion by Rawls (1999) that “(i)t is fairly straightforward to ascertain what things will advance the interests of the least favored. This group can be identified by its index of primary goods, and policy questions can be settled by asking how the relevant representative man suitably situated would choose” (Rawls, 1999, p. 281). Hence, the justness of the basic income policy depends on its effects on the homeless population, which I identify in the following to be least advan-

³¹Sirsch & Unger (2021, p. 1009) argued that these differences allow for a more unequal distribution when argued from a republican perspective compared to liberal egalitarian ethics because non-domination can be ensured by other means than redistribution (Breen, 2017, see also).

taged in terms of an index of primary goods. The index of primary goods as suggested by real libertarians, liberal egalitarians, and republicans consists of income, self-respect, and power.

4 Income, self-respect, and power of the homeless population in Germany

When attempting to identify those who are the worst off in German society, the question arises to whether the heterogeneous homeless population needs to be broken down further into distinct subpopulations. For example, differences exist between homeless individuals living on the street, with acquaintances, or in shelters. However, homeless individuals often switch between these forms of living day-to-day. Moreover, Sonnenberg (2021) emphasized that living in shelters or with third parties is not necessarily an improvement to being literally homeless because homeless people still depend on others in a way that inhibits them from living with human dignity in either form of homelessness (Sonnenberg, 2021, pp. 20-24). Empirical evidence supports the presented argument: A quarter of homeless individuals living on the street and almost half of homeless individuals living with acquaintances had never stayed in a shelter before. When asked why, three reasons were named by almost 40 percent of individuals: shelters accommodated too many people, were too dangerous, or were worse than existing living arrangements (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 43-45).³² Hence, I do not distinguish between homeless individuals' living situations when discussing whether they are the worst off in terms of income, self-respect, and power in Germany.

Another option would be to single out a group of homeless individuals according to socio-demographic characteristics. The phenomenon of group-focused enmity, a form of systematic prejudice, is prevalent for homeless persons in Europe in general and in Germany in particular (Hövermann et al., 2015; Davidov et al., 2011; Küpper & Zick, 2014). In addition, group-focused enmity can be based on immigration status, differing ethnic backgrounds, religious affiliation, gender, sexuality, and physical and mental disability (Küpper & Zick, 2014, pp. 245-247). Hence, it is plausible that intersectional discrimination may worsen the living situation of homeless individuals belonging to one or multiple of these subgroups.

This intuition is strengthened by two examples from studies on the homeless population in Germany emphasizing that homeless women and immigrants are particularly vulner-

³²Moreover, 26 percent of homeless individuals not staying in shelters stated that shelters were too dirty, 16 percent said that rules, like not being allowed to share rooms with partners and family (13 percent) or pets (11 percent), were too strict. Six percent had not known about existing shelters (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 43-45). Further reasons may be "misinformation, shame, or fear of stigmatisation" (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2020, p. 86).

able.³³Concerning women, 14.6 percent of households threatened with homelessness in 2018 were single mothers (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2020, p. 88). Among homeless women, 36 percent experienced sexual violence compared to three percent of homeless men (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, p. 52). Further evidence on homeless women being particularly vulnerable is given in the following section; however, I argue that focusing on homeless women alone would anticipate results of the analysis.

Concerning immigrants, the specific basic income policy I evaluate suggests keeping eligibility criteria for immigrants in place, such that it differs from ideal theory by not being fully universal as described in Section 2 (see page 20). This deviation is critical concerning the principles of justice as laid out by basic income advocates. Homeless immigrants are likely to be the least advantaged in German society, as most are denied social security benefits (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, p. 36; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2020, pp. 86-87). For example, in North Rhine-Westphalia, almost half of homeless households without German citizenship were without income, compared to 38 percent of German homeless households. Homeless persons originating from eastern or south-eastern European states were particularly poor, with 66 percent not receiving any income (Brüchmann et al., 2022b, p. 51). Yet, introducing the suggested basic income policy would not improve the situation of many homeless immigrants, and it may even worsen their relative position within the German homeless population. Therefore, a basic income that is exclusively paid to citizens and immigrants with a documented status of residency does not comply to the criteria posed for a society to be just as explored above (see also Löffler, 2021). Hence, I stress that the following discussion on the justness of the suggested basic income policy depends on whether this group would be included in the implemented policy. Nevertheless, I consider the following discussion to be relevant because much of the homeless population would be affected by the suggested basic income policy, and including the effects on the homeless population are critical for assessing such a policy, especially if they are considered to be the least advantaged members of society.

Next, I analyze the possible effects of a basic income for the heterogeneous group of homeless individuals. I draw on the presented case study and theory, identifying homeless individuals in Germany as least advantaged in terms of income. Then, I use empirical and theoretical literature to discuss whether a basic income policy as suggested by Bach & Hamburg (2023) would improve the income of homeless individuals in Germany and how it would affect income-related risks and exit barriers to homelessness. I proceed equivalently focusing on the social goods of self-respect and power. The discussion differs between different groups whenever specific ev-

³³Evidence also stressed that homeless individuals aged 50 or older were particularly vulnerable because disadvantages in connection to homelessness and old age reinforce each other when occurring simultaneously (Brem & Seeberger, 2009, p. 227). Life expectancy for homeless individuals is lower than for the average population. Homeless individuals living in shelters who are not addicted to drugs have the highest life expectancy among homeless people, with 60 to 65 years. Homeless individuals living on the street have a mean life expectancy of 50 years, and when they suffer from a drug addiction, their life expectancy decreases to 35 years (Brem & Seeberger, 2009, p. 229). Unfortunately, there is no recent or detailed evidence on this subject, which is why this group is not discussed further in the following section.

idence is available; particularly, I incorporate basic income effects on the power of homeless women.

4.1 Income

This section draws on the real libertarian idea of justice, identifying homeless individuals as least advantaged in terms of opportunities, which, in a capitalist society, are most effectively enabled by disposable income as argued by Van Parijs (1997, pp. 42-46) and Van Parijs (2021).³⁴ A study in North Rhine-Westphalia showed that 26 percent of homeless persons living on the streets or with third parties did not possess any regular source of income; hence, they solely lived on in-kind provision by non-governmental organizations or on what they earned from begging and collecting bottle deposits.³⁵ Loss of subsistence income occurred even though most homeless persons are entitled to either unemployment or social assistance. At the same time, 7 percent of the homeless population generated income from formal or informal employment, 52 percent received unemployment assistance, and 6 percent received social assistance (Brüchmann et al., 2022b, pp. 47-51). However, it is plausible to assume that in most cases neither income source elevates homeless persons above the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which is 60 percent of the median income and is equivalent to 1250 euros per month for a single adult living in Germany (German Federal Statistical Office, 2022). Overall, I conclude that homeless persons are the least advantaged group in terms of income in Germany. Therefore, here I discuss how a basic income policy would improve the living situation of homeless persons in terms of income as well as affect the income-related risks to becoming homeless and the exit barriers in place.

The simulation study by Bach & Hamburg (2023) showed that a basic income policy would increase household net income of the lowest income decile of the German population by 63 percent. Particularly, the amount of current social security transfers is lower for homeless persons than for housed persons because local authorities pay rent for the latter group. Hence, the basic income amount would most certainly exceed the amount of present cash transfers by unemployment and social assistance for homeless persons. Therefore, a basic income may enable individuals to generate savings while not having to pay rent, as was found by the experimental study on basic income for homeless persons in Vancouver (Dwyer et al., 2023, p. 3). Notably though, as part of the study in Vancouver homeless persons were paid 7,500 Canadian dollars as an initial lump-sum transfer and, therefore, effects on savings might differ between one-time and regular basic income payments.³⁶

³⁴For more on the real libertarian idea of justice, see Section 3.1.

³⁵Unfortunately, the national studies did not include information on homeless persons' incomes, which is why the study on North Rhine-Westphalia, the German state with the highest population density, is used as reference point.

³⁶Additional evidence for this intuition was provided by the evaluation of a basic income study in Kenya that did not specifically target homeless persons. While monthly cash transfers were more likely to improve food security, lump-sum transfers were associated with higher savings (Haushofer & Shapiro, 2016).

Concerning the income of subgroups, low-income families with children would profit the most from a basic income introduction (Bach & Hamburg, 2023, pp. 18-19). In contrast to the current system, families would be better situated than single parents for whom specifically designed policies, such as child support advance payment, would be cut. Nevertheless, on average, single parents would still be better off income-wise with basic income than with social security in place.

A basic income may be more effective in increasing homeless people's incomes because of three characteristics that distinguish it from the current social security system: salience, universality, and unconditionality. A basic income policy would be paid to almost everyone living in the state territory, so it would prevent loss of income due to missing information on applicable social security measures. Moreover, complex means tests to determine eligibility would not be needed to generate income which would reduce administrative measures and enable those who were previously deterred by the complexity of the system to secure a stable income. Finally, unconditionality would prevent income loss due to behavioral sanctions. As Birnbaum (2023) put it: "no lack of information or skills, no bureaucratic obstacles or complex rules would prevent people with a low income from passing eligibility conditions, or from actually claiming the benefits intended to prevent or alleviate poverty" (Birnbaum, 2023, p. 582). Empirical evidence of the Denver Basic Income Project strengthened this intuition, demonstrating that financial well-being of homeless participants receiving a regular payment increased, irrespective of the concrete amount (Brisson et al., 2023, pp. 19-22).

However, whether a basic income can increase the income of homeless individuals also depends on administrative details. While some homeless persons possess identification and non-profit organizations provide a registered address, which is needed to open a bank account, not all homeless individuals will meet these requirements. Basic income could be managed similarly to unemployment assistance, by requiring homeless persons to check in with the responsible local agency regularly to receive checks that can be cashed in. Alternatively, a refillable debit card could be distributed as in the Denver Basic Income Project (Brisson et al., 2023, p. 2). Although problems may still exist regarding lack of identification for some people and potential double payments if one's identification is not checked, this would not render the basic income policy unjust, because the justifications as presented in Section 3 are concerned with the policy's effects on the least advantaged. Double payments are permissible as long as feasibility of a basic income is not threatened by the practice. This is because homeless persons are better off with a basic income income-wise, irrespective of receiving it once or twice.

Concerning risks to becoming homeless, some income-related risks include separation, former incarceration, and transition from foster care (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 41-42). With an individual payment, the financial dependence resulting from cohabiting would be reduced, enabling separation without risking homelessness. Moreover, for former inmates, the reliability being reinstalled with an income directly after release may reduce difficulties in securing follow-up accommodation. The same is true for youth exiting foster care. However, in metropolitan

areas, where most homeless individuals live, rents are high and a basic income payment of 1200 euros will not elevate individuals from being at risk of poverty (German Federal Statistical Office, 2022). Moreover, in contrast to the current social system (see for example § 22 SGB II; §§ 4, 12 WOGG), a basic income would not give individuals additional reasonable living expenses that vary according to regional prices and household composition. Because the distributional effects of a basic income favor families over singles (Bach & Hamburg, 2023, pp. 18-19), whether a basic income would effectively reduce the risk of becoming homeless may still depend on one's living situation. In particular, a payment of 1200 euros may not decrease the risk of rental arrears for singles and single parents in metropolitan areas.

Concerning the interaction of individual crises causing rental arrears and the institutional support structure, a basic income may reduce rental arrears because a regular source of income enables regular rent payments. However, the current support system is basically designed to ensure that rental arrears do not cause homelessness (e.g., § 36 SGB XII). Yet, almost 50 percent of homeless individuals did not ask public institutions for support when they were threatened with homelessness (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 41-42). Hence, the real threat of homelessness in the current system is having rental arrears *and* not knowing about or not wanting to make use of support structures in place. In the national report on homelessness, it was suggested that to prevent homelessness, information on existing measures would have to be distributed more effectively (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, p. 42). In contrast, a basic income would be far more salient than current social security measures, solving the information problem. Moreover, it would be less intrusive due to universality, so it may reduce non-take-up for stigma-related reasons, as I discuss later in the context of self-respect.

Effects of a basic income on the housing market as a structural factor contributing to homelessness remain unclear. On the one hand, a basic income policy that increases the financial capacity of low-income families could increase pressure on the low-income housing market (Clarke, 2023, p. 871). With increasing household budgets and housing demand and without a corresponding increase in supply of affordable housing, rents could increase without solving the problem of an affordable housing shortage, as any increases in housing supply due to rising prices would considerably lag increases in demand. On the other hand, a basic income could relieve pressure on the housing market in metropolitan areas. If employment is no longer the main source of income, migration from urban to rural areas may be facilitated, as rural areas are more attractive due to lower prices. However, since moving is another risk of homelessness, such a development may lead to an increase in homelessness in rural areas if individuals fail to cope with the disruption of changing living circumstances. In addition, introducing a basic income policy may increase immigration of net beneficiaries, putting further pressure on the existing systems and the tax base from which a basic income that relies on income tax is financed (Löffler, 2021).

Similar arguments apply for income-related exit barriers. Bureaucracy would be simplified and support would be more easily attainable, possibly increasing the chances of exiting home-

lessness.³⁷ Moreover, reentering the housing market often requires deposit payments of up to two months' rents. Since a basic income would be paid without means test, homeless persons could save up to afford deposits (Kerman, 2021, p. 6). However, excess demand on affordable housing may inhibit individuals who do not conform to societal expectations from reentering the housing market despite sufficient income (German Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency, 2024). Renters could even be more hesitant to give flats to formerly homeless persons when rent payment is not managed by local agency but by individuals themselves. Hence, a basic income policy could even worsen exit barriers to homelessness, because access to affordable housing does not solely depend on income (Clarke, 2023), which is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

To sum up, homeless individuals in Germany are presently the worst off in terms of income. A basic income has the potential to effectively boost many homeless peoples' incomes because the policy is more prominent and less complicated. Moreover, the suggested amount is higher than the cash benefits provided by current social security measures in Germany. A basic income policy might also reduce the risk of homelessness due to income-related issues, as regular income can help prevent rental arrears. Furthermore, the ability to save money with a basic income could make it easier for individuals to exit homelessness. Overall, the homeless population's income may increase with a basic income policy, so the introduction of a basic income policy can be justified according to real libertarian ethics.

4.2 Self-respect

In this section, I use the concept of self-respect as defined in the liberal egalitarian tradition by a feeling of self-worth, having defined one's version of a good life, and confidence in the ability to pursue this life, both being supported by communal recognition (Rawls, 1999, pp. 386-388).³⁸ However, according to this definition, homeless individuals report to feel socially downgraded and left alone (Fischer, 2023, p. 4; Szczepanek, 2021, p. 80), and the homeless population in Germany suffers from mental and physical health issues. Among those living on the streets or with third parties, 54 percent reported that they are impacted mentally or physically, suffer from substance abuse, or experience a combination of the three. While men more often reported physical impairments or substance addictions, women more often reported suffering from mental health issues. Further, 20 percent of the German homeless population does not have access to tap water. In general, homeless persons stated that they feel significantly less healthy than the German average (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 45-47, 102, 111; German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2022, pp. 34-35). It is plausible to assume that

³⁷One empirical study on conditional welfare payments in France strengthens this intuition. In France, eligibility criteria for receiving minimum income (RSA) change at the age of 25, becoming a lot less restrictive. Locks & Thuilliez (2023) showed that when individuals receive RSA, homelessness is reduced by 20 percent among young formerly homeless individuals aged 22 to 27, emphasizing the relevance of financial resources when exiting homelessness.

³⁸For more on the liberal egalitarian idea of justice, see Section 3.2.

these issues inhibit building up the confidence to pursue their own version of a good life, thus, they inhibit building up self-respect.

Given that communal recognition is seen as the basis of self-respect, the homeless population itself is perceived as a rather unstable community (Sonnenberg, 2021, p. 27). The study in Dortmund showed that homeless individuals identify themselves as loners with loose social ties and relationships that are based on sharing a common fate rather than trusting each other: “The core of their common identity is the ever-present crisis of homelessness”³⁹ (Sonnenberg, 2021, p. 50). Moreover, homeless individuals are subject to prejudice, as they are perceived as a financial burden (Hövermann et al., 2015, pp. 412-413). The societal mainstream sees homeless individuals as “symbolic figures for existing problems like a stressed housing market, psychological problems, alcohol and drug consumption, broken biographies and gaps in the social welfare system”⁴⁰ (Sonnenberg, 2021, p. 53). Therefore, homelessness is argued to be “the most extreme form of social exclusion” (Leterme & Develtere, 2023, p. 35). Hence, being confronted with health issues, experiencing low communal cohesion, and being subject to prejudice, I argue that the homeless population is least advantaged in terms of their ability to be confident in their version of the good life and enjoying communal recognition, hence, in terms of self-respect. In the following, I discuss how a basic income policy would affect the living situation of homeless persons in terms of self-respect, as well as the self-respect-related risks to becoming homeless.

Empirical studies that have examined whether regular payments can help stabilize mental health and, thus, allow people to pursue a meaningful life have had mixed results. The study in London, providing rough sleepers with a personalized budget, reported improvements in participants’ mental health (Hough & Rice, 2010, pp. 16, 23). The qualitative report on the Denver Basic Income Project found that when homeless individuals received basic income payments, they were less stressed and more hopeful concerning their future (Westbrook, 2023, p. 9).⁴¹ However, the quantitative midterm report of the same project found only slightly positive and even negative effects (Brisson et al., 2023, pp. 23-27). The presented difference may result from the unmasked research design. Because participants knew that they would profit from regular payments in the upcoming year when they filled out the initial survey, which was used as reference point for the quantitative study, this may have positively biased their self-reports on mental health in anticipation of being part of the program (Brisson et al., 2023, p. 35). Yet, because survey and interview participation was optional, a selection bias could also have re-

³⁹Original quote: “die Krise als Mittelpunkt der Identität” (Sonnenberg, 2021, p. 50).

⁴⁰Original quote: “Sie werden innerhalb der Öffentlichkeit zur *Symbolfigur für die bestehenden Probleme*, eines überspannten Wohnungsmarktes, von psychischen Problemen, Alkohol- und Drogenkonsum, brüchigen Biographien und Lücken im Sozialsystem” (Sonnenberg, 2021, p. 53, emphasis in original).

⁴¹Strengthening the intuition of the qualitative report, a basic income study in Ontario showed that almost 80 percent of unemployed participants reported to be more hopeful concerning their future and more self-confident with basic income (Ferdosi & McDowell, 2020, pp. 22-23). However, the experiment in Ontario did not specifically target homeless individual; yet, being unemployed is a characteristic shared by most homeless persons in Germany, so effects may be similar.

sulted in a larger share of positively affected homeless persons reporting their experiences in the qualitative and the quantitative study. Hence, present empirical evidence on how a basic income would affect homeless people's mental health is inconclusive, so no indication can be hypothesized for the German case.

Moreover, one could argue that a basic income would worsen homeless people's potential for self-harm, by providing more funds to be spent on temptation goods. For this reason, some studies excluded homeless persons who were severely mentally impaired or suffered from substance abuse (Denver Basic Income Project, 2022; Morton et al., 2020). However, despite this apprehension being shared by the societal mainstream (Dwyer et al., 2023, p. 7), empirical evidence indicated that spending on temptation goods would not be different with basic income (Dwyer et al., 2023, pp. 3-6).⁴² In the pilot study in London, participants reported explicitly that they had reduced alcohol consumption. Further, while another participant stated that he initially sold items that he intended to use to exit homelessness on substances, after one year, he was abstaining from substance abuse after 20 years of previous consumption (Hough & Rice, 2010, pp. 16-17, 25, 53-54). Considering all studies, no empirical evidence suggests that a basic income will harm the health of the homeless population.

In fact, McKay et al. (2023) provided an overview on studies reporting that a basic income might have positive effects on people's health and well-being.⁴³ While this review did not include studies targeting the homeless population, participants from the London experiment also reported improvements in physical health, supporting them in learning basic living skills, like cooking (Hough & Rice, 2010, p. 16). Yet, a basic income's positive effects on health may depend on the regularity of the payment because the experimental study in Vancouver, initiating a lump-sum transfer, did not find significant positive effects on cognitive functioning, well-being, or substance use (Dwyer et al., 2023, pp. 5-6). Thus, it is questionable whether a basic income would positively affect mental and physical health of homeless individuals. Therefore, I conclude that the present evidence does not suggest that a basic income would improve the confidence of homeless persons in their ability to live a meaningful life, which is one aspect of self-respect.

Regarding the basis of self-respect, many argue that a basic income will positively influence communal recognition because the payments are universal and unconditional. Without means testing and work requirements, the stigma attached to welfare payments may diminish

⁴²Further evidence on this was found during the basic income trial in Ontario that did not specifically target the homeless population: 40 percent of the unemployed participants in Ontario reduced or quit smoking and half reduced or quit alcohol consumption when receiving basic income (Ferdosi & McDowell, 2020, pp. 18-22).

⁴³For example, Ferdosi & McDowell (2020) reported improvements of physical health and reduction of pain during the pilot. They also reported that employed individuals profited more from basic income payments compared to unemployed individuals. Yet, based on maximin considerations, as long as individuals who are worst off concerning their belief in a meaningful life, for example, due to bad health, are better off with a basic income payment, it does not matter if others profit, too. A review on health outcomes when providing unconditional cash transfers focusing on low- and middle-income countries also showed improvements in physical health (Pega et al., 2022).

(Birnbaum, 2010; McKinnon, 2003).⁴⁴ Yet, “it is possible that stigma would still attach to those [...] who lack the outward signs of personal wealth and affluence.” (McKinnon, 2003, p. 152). Moreover, the division between net beneficiaries and net recipients would remain and “some recipients may see themselves as more deserving of BI (basic income, author’s note) payments (e.g., retirees) than other groups (e.g., the homeless)” (Clarke, 2023, p. 867). Finally, if communal perception is related to the prejudiced view that homeless persons are a financial burden to society (Hövermann et al., 2015, pp. 412-413), this perception might be fostered by the universality of the payment, because the previous assumption that homeless individuals are beneficiaries of state money becomes a certainty. Hence, even with a basic income policy, the societal mainstream may still perceive homeless persons as subordinate because stigma will still be attached to being unhoused, and the stigma-decreasing effect of a basic income will only relate to no longer needing a targeted welfare payment. Moreover, intersectional discrimination on the grounds of *race*, origin, disability, gender, and sexuality will remain untouched.

Aside from the issue of stigma, basic income can still enable homeless individuals to spend more time on engaging in mutually beneficial communal relationships instead of trying to secure a living (Fischer, 2023, pp. 6-11). The qualitative study on personalized budgets for rough sleepers in London showed that participants engaged more in existing relationships and even built new ones. Three participants registered for courses in IT, art, and gardening.⁴⁵ Yet, some participants were negatively impacted by relocating to shelters with the help of the budget, for example, they increased their alcohol use, and, in one case, were imprisoned (Hough & Rice, 2010, pp. 8-9, 16). Moreover, some participants of the Denver Basic Income Project reported having to cut ties due to envy from those not receiving a basic income (Westbrook, 2023, pp. 7-8). While the problem of envy would probably be less significant with a widely applicable basic income, participants of the basic income experiment in Vancouver reported lower feelings of connectedness nine months after basic income payments, possibly due to changing of location and, thus, community (Dwyer et al., 2023, p. 6). Yet, the effect disappeared in surveys three months later, indicating only initial adaptation problems. Hence, moving may result in the formation of a more reliable social net that could strengthen homeless persons’ basis of self-respect and even prevent homelessness if crises occur in the long-term.

One subgroup that may particularly benefit from a basic income are families. The Denver Basic Income Project revealed that homeless caretakers spent more and better time with their

⁴⁴In addition, the stigma-relieving effect of payment universality was also found by Calnitsky (2016), who evaluated the Mincome experiments of the 1970s in Canada. Payments of these experiments were means tested and, nevertheless, reduced the socio-psychological cost of recipients in contrast to welfare. Calnitsky (2016, pp. 33-35) argued that social assistance is less stigmatized if it does not differ between deserving and non-deserving within the target group, if its payments are highly automated, and, finally, if it is framed as normal. Hence, future research should discuss whether means tested unconditional income schemes may work similarly to a basic income in improving homeless persons’ living situation. If so, advocacy in favor could gain acceptance more easily and, therefore, provide a more immediate improvement in homeless peoples’ living situation.

⁴⁵Further empirical evidence was provided by the Mincome experiment in Canada in the 1970s, paying an unconditional, but means tested, income to a community. It was shown that Mincome participants took part in community groups more often (Calnitsky, 2016, pp. 50-52).

children and grandchildren. Moreover, basic income was often used to buy presents for friends and families, strengthening relationships (Westbrook, 2023, pp. 7-8). In addition, families at risk of homelessness would be able to spend more time on unpaid activities such as child care without fearing homelessness (Kerman, 2021, p. 8). Hence, a basic income may improve leisure quantity and quality of homeless persons, as well as the conditions for unpaid work, supporting communal ties, and, thereby, improve the basis of self-respect (Kerman, 2021, p. 7; McKinnon, 2003).⁴⁶

Finally, a basic income might allow homeless people to more easily gain formal employment, which is a possible basis for self-respect, because such a universal income would remove disincentives to pick up employment due to welfare payment withdrawal (Birnbaum, 2020, p. 294; Kerman, 2021, p. 7). The midterm report of the Denver Basic Income Project strengthened this intuition, reporting that a basic income led to increases in participants' formal employment. However, the initial employment of participants in the Denver Basic Income Project was already quite high (they included part-time, temporary, and under-the-table employment), with only two percent of participants reporting to be unemployed at the beginning of the experiment (Brisson et al., 2023, pp. 19-22).

Looking at risk factors of becoming homeless, a basic income might have positive effects on psychological problems if it is able to reduce the stress related to sustaining a living and the stigma attached to welfare payments (Kerman, 2021, p. 8). While this would only be true if stress and missing communal recognition are causes and not symptoms of deeper psychological issues, a basic income can further enable individuals to seek support for individual psychological problems "on their own terms, without coercion, and without their personal problems being blamed for, or treated as the key to addressing, their homelessness" (Clarke, 2023, p. 873). The unconditionality of the payment could at least make it easier for individuals at risk of homelessness to access additional support services (Birnbaum, 2023, p. 583). Yet, evidence that a basic income can improve mental health is ambiguous.

Overall, I contend that the homeless population in Germany is currently least advantaged in terms of self-respect. The belief in one's ability to lead a meaningful life can potentially be positively influenced by a basic income policy if the policy improves mental and physical health. Yet, the empirical evidence on this topic is inconclusive. Moreover, the introduction of a basic income policy may reduce the negative perception associated with receiving welfare payments. However, for the homeless population, stigma may still be attached to living in poverty and being unhoused. Lastly, basic income has been found to have a positive effect on communal relationships, which is a fundamental aspect of self-respect. Hence, the effects of a basic income on homeless persons' self-respect are ambiguous, challenging the justness of the policy from a liberal egalitarian perspective.

⁴⁶Kerman (2021) based this argument on two studies. One scoping review showed that in Housing First pilots, homeless persons have difficulty in establishing communal relationships (Marshall et al., 2020). However, an experimental study with participants suffering from mental illnesses showed that unconditional cash payments are invested in relationship building and leisure activities (Topor & Ljungqvist, 2017).

4.3 Power

In this section, I argue that homeless persons in Germany are least advantaged in terms of power, defined as their ability to secure a position of non-domination by fellow citizens and state authorities, which forms the republican idea of justice (Casassas & De Wispelaere, 2016, p. 285; Raventós, 2007, pp. 62-64).⁴⁷ First, I consider the relation between homeless persons and fellow citizens. Homeless individuals are often subject to group-focused enmity (Sonnenberg, 2021, p. 57), which is based on “an institutional imbalance of power in favor of the economy” (Hövermann et al., 2015, p. 409) in contrast to family, friendship, religion, and politics. A so-called marketized mentality encompasses individualism, emphasizing individual success as decisive for moral evaluation. Therefore, homeless individuals who are presumed to be unemployed are perceived as a societal burden. This relation between marketized mentality and prejudice against homeless individuals was found to be positive and significant for Germany (Hövermann et al., 2015, p. 416; see also Davidov et al., 2011, p. 488).

Such prejudice may legitimize verbal and physical violence to sustain subordination of the homeless population (Küpper & Zick, 2014, pp. 243-247; Sidanius & Pratto, 2012). In Germany, almost 60 percent of homeless persons living on the streets or with third parties experienced violence. Homeless persons with physical or mental health issues and women were more often victimized than others. Particularly, almost 80 percent of women living on the street experienced violence, and one-third of all homeless women was subject to sexual violence. Of those who experienced violence, eight percent were exposed to commercial sexual exploitation (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 51-54; German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2022, p. 10). The study in Dortmund showed that undocumented sex workers, in particular, were mutually dependent on substances and clients to finance their consumption (Sonnenberg, 2021, pp. 44-48). Even if not subject to abuse, dependence on begging and collecting bottle deposits makes some of the homeless population dependent on others, at least income-wise (Brüchmann et al., 2022b, pp. 47-51). Therefore, as an interim result, I find that homeless persons in Germany are subject to domination by fellow citizens.

Moreover, homeless persons are subject to domination by state institutions. Local agencies check the eligibility of applicants in need and sanction possible misdemeanors. While the relation between those seeking support and those deciding on its provision is regulated by law, it is also one of perceived dependency (Weishaupt et al., 2023, p. 6). For example, 30 percent of homeless individuals with rental arrears had asked for support at job centers, the city, or at counseling centers, but did not receive it (Brüchmann et al., 2022a, pp. 40-42).⁴⁸ Hence, I conclude that homeless persons are least advantaged in terms of power facing both fellow citizens and state entities. Therefore, in the following, I discuss how a basic income policy would

⁴⁷For more on the republican idea of justice as considered in this article, see Section 3.3.

⁴⁸Here, while I will not weigh in on whether state power is used arbitrarily in this context, I focus on the perceived imbalance of power between homeless persons and state institutions. Moreover, actual abuse is not decisive concerning the concept of non-domination, entailing that the possibility of arbitrary interference is sufficient to be considered subject to domination (Casassas & De Wispelaere, 2016, p. 285; Pettit, 2007).

affect their living situation in terms of power, as well as how it affects the power-related risks of becoming homeless and exit barriers to being homeless.

The effects of a basic income policy on enmity concerning the homeless population are ambiguous. On the one hand, it is plausible to assume that enmity toward the homeless population would be reduced if a basic income would cause the economical sphere to be less dominant, mitigating marketized mentality. Advocates of the basic income argue that the policy would radically alter the societal structure by enhancing the value allocated to non-market activities (Henderson, 2023). Thereby, competing spheres to the market, like community and family (Fischer, 2023), friendship, religion, and politics (Hövermann et al., 2015), may gain importance. Moreover, empirical evidence showed that public support for policies targeting homeless persons is higher if policies benefit the society as a whole (Parsell et al., 2023, p. 16). Since basic income is paid to the population universally, the group of net beneficiaries exceeds the homeless population. Hence, the public's attitude toward basic income may be more positive than towards targeted social welfare measures (Clarke, 2023, p. 872; Dwyer et al., 2023, p. 7). To sum up, a less powerful marketized mentality and positive attitudes toward basic income may reduce prejudices placed on the homeless population. On the other hand, if the introduction of a basic income policy fosters the idea that homeless persons are a societal burden and prejudice is still attached to living unhoused, enmity and resulting violence could persist or even become worse. Hence, a basic income policy may affect homeless persons' power with respect to fellow citizens and the societal mainstream either way. Moreover, effects are intertwined with the discussion on stigma in the previous section and, therefore, with the effects of a basic income on self-respect.

Scholars have debated whether a basic income tends to foster either emancipation or persisting gender inequalities (Lenczewska, 2022);⁴⁹ yet, the effects of a basic income policy may differ substantially from the current debate when considering homeless women's power. In particular, Cameron et al. (2023) extracted three hypotheses from the literature on the effects of a basic income on gender-based violence. First, cash transfers could increase women's financial bargaining power, enabling them to exit violence-based relationships. Second, cash transfers could threaten male dominance within the household setting and, thereby, increase gender-based violence. Finally, cash transfers could decrease financial stress, which is a possible cause of gender-based violence (Cameron et al., 2023, pp. 17-18). A review on empirical studies by Wong & Forget (2024) showed that unconditional cash transfers were associated with decreases in physical intimate partner violence against women, while evidence on mental abuses was ambiguous. In addition, female participants had to prostitute themselves less often.

While there is no empirical evidence on the effects of a basic income on homeless women in particular, the presented results indicate positive effects on homeless women's living situation. Homeless women who live with third parties could reduce financial dependence on those

⁴⁹See also the special issue in *Basic Income Studies* 2008 3(3) (<https://www.degruyter.com/journal/key/bis/3/3/html>).

housing them, thus affecting the power imbalance in their favor. Moreover, for sex workers, in particular, a basic income may enable homeless women to reduce dependency on clients, thereby freeing up resources to counter a possible dependency on substances, eventually securing an empowered position.⁵⁰ Hence, while it is unclear whether a basic income would generally increase homeless people's power with respect to their fellow citizens, a basic income may indeed increase homeless women's power.

Concerning homeless people's power with respect to state agencies, universality and unconditionality of the basic income payment would reduce state agencies' power. Public officials could no longer evaluate eligibility, make behavioral demands, or decide on sanctions; hence, power imbalances of the current system may be reduced by a basic income policy. This intuition is strengthened by empirical evidence. Midterm results of the Denver Basic Income Project indicated that homeless persons with basic income reduced contact with service providers addressing basic needs of homeless persons (Brisson et al., 2023, pp. 29-33), but they increased contact with those aiding to secure housing (Westbrook, 2023, p. 12).⁵¹ This evidence suggests that with the security of a basic income, homeless persons prefer not to rely on service structures that help with immanent needs and are able to decide more autonomously on how to use the most effective support structures for their individual cases. Hence, a basic income may contribute to securing an empowered position for homeless persons with respect to state agencies.

A similar argument can be made concerning risks of becoming homeless and barriers to exiting homelessness. Individuals with rental arrears regain autonomy when they are able to pay rent on their own without being dependent on state institutions, for example, having to apply for housing subsidies. The ability to pay rent autonomously would have further effects on people's risk of becoming homeless and trying to exit homelessness when dealing with landlords. On the one hand, the universality of the basic income payment may reduce discrimination by landlords against those who formerly relied on state agencies for rent payments, since income is secured for everyone.⁵² On the other hand, housing discrimination may remain due to other characteristics of homeless persons, such as sexual orientation, *race*, origin, unemployment (German Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency, 2024; Kerman, 2021, pp. 6-7), or merely the fact of being homeless.

Moreover, without the security of rent payments via state agencies, barriers to reenter the housing market for homeless persons may become higher, because landlords may not trust formerly homeless persons to pay rent regularly. Further exit barriers may remain, like requirements on being debt-free and possessing positive credit ratings (Busch-Geertsema, 2017,

⁵⁰Recall that the study in Dortmund showed that undocumented sex workers, in particular, were mutually dependent on substances and clients to finance their consumption (Sonnenberg, 2021, pp. 44-48).

⁵¹Evidence from Ontario also showed that basic income participants, in general, visited doctors and emergency rooms less often (Ferdosi & McDowell, 2020, pp. 23-24).

⁵²For example, participants of the Mincome experiment in Canada reported to have fewer problems with landlords while receiving the unconditional payment (Calnitsky, 2016, pp. 50-52).

p. 78; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2020, p. 90). Therefore, while basic income “has the capacity to address the *income side* of the housing affordability crisis” (Clarke, 2023, p. 870), access to affordable housing remains a necessary condition to exit homelessness. To sum up, a basic income may improve the power of people at risk of becoming homeless with respect to state institutions, but these people’s power with respect to landlords may remain low, particularly for persons attempting to exit homelessness.

In conclusion, I contend that homeless persons are least advantaged in terms of power with respect to fellow citizens and state agencies. The introduction of a basic income policy may impact existing animosity towards homeless persons in different ways, depending on whether prejudice is presently based on being a welfare claimant or living unhoused. In the latter case, a basic income only improves power imbalances if it contributes to exiting homelessness. The particular groups of homeless women who live with acquaintances and homeless sex workers may experience positive effects from a basic income, as it enhances their financial independence. Additionally, individuals’ power may increase when dealing with government agencies that no longer assess eligibility for welfare payments. Yet, being able to independently pay rent without involving state agencies, may weaken the standing of persons trying to exit homelessness when it comes to landlords. Consequently, basic income can only partly secure an empowered position for homeless persons, making it unclear whether the policy can be deemed just from a republican perspective.

5 Conclusion

This article puts to the test the three main justificative attempts in favor of a basic income, namely real libertarianism, liberal egalitarianism, and republicanism. To do so, I discuss whether the basic income policy increases income, self-respect, and power of homeless persons in Germany, which represent the least advantaged group in society. Thereby, I challenge whether the policy satisfies the underlying demands on a just society as proposed by basic income advocates. The discussion is based on a policy proposal as analyzed by Bach & Hamburg (2023) and evaluates existing empirical as well as theoretical evidence. The results indicate that a basic income could effectively increase homeless people’s income, enable them to develop communal relations, and increase power with respect to state agencies, but critical issues remain. In particular, the stigma-decreasing effect of a basic income is questionable for homeless persons, as is its effect on homeless people’s power with respect to other citizens and landlords in the low-income housing market. Ultimately, the analysis emphasizes that the evaluation of the justness of the basic income policy depends on the underlying assumptions of basic income advocates, the identification of the relevant category of analysis, and, finally, the structural embedding of the basic income policy.

Thus far, the literature on basic income and homelessness has agreed that while a basic income may reduce homelessness, it only addresses parts of the underlying structural causes. To

end homelessness, additional efforts are needed, for example, on increasing access to affordable housing (Clarke, 2023) and on implementing support structures for mental illness (Kerman, 2021). In this article, I argue that for basic income scholars, the relevant question is not necessarily whether basic income ends homelessness but rather whether it improves the living situation of homeless people in terms of income, self-respect, and power. The approach shows that when focusing on the homeless population, the basic income policy can be deemed just from a real libertarian perspective, but requirements from a liberal egalitarian and republican perspective are more strict. Both self-respect and non-domination are concepts that deviate from the sole focus on the individual, emphasizing one's relational embedding. In future research, analyzing the constituency of stigma related to homelessness would be promising when attempting to develop policies countering stigma, thereby increasing self-respect. Moreover, the analysis stresses again that access to affordable and secure housing is a necessary condition not only in countering homelessness but also when improving the living situation of homeless persons because sufficient access may counter power imbalances between unhoused applicants and landlords.

Nevertheless, the provision of a regular basic income can also affect structural factors of the phenomenon of homelessness. In particular, homeless women may improve their bargaining position when living with third parties. Moreover, unconditional transfers decrease gender-based violence (Cameron et al., 2023; Wong & Forget, 2024). In general, a basic income can increase homeless people's power with respect to state agencies. Yet, the suggested basic income policy does not cover immigrants with unclear status of residence or asylum seekers, thereby worsening their living situation in relation to homeless persons receiving a basic income. While the status quo concerning income remains unaffected by the exclusion, self-respect and power may be even worsened (Löffler, 2021). The analysis emphasizes that a comprehensive assessment of a basic income policy needs a theoretical underpinning that includes an intersectional perspective. That way the policy may be more congruent with challenges faced by the modern welfare state.⁵³ One promising starting point of such a theory was provided by Nwogbo (2021).

Finally, the analysis shows that more empirical evidence is needed to add substance to an important debate. If the maximin distribution rule is at the heart of an intersectional theory of justice on basic income, the discussion cannot further neglect the policy's effects on the homeless population. Existing empirical evidence is promising, but it is scarce and in some cases still pending, limiting the applicability of the presented arguments. More evidence is needed on the effects of a basic income policy on persons who are homeless and who are subject to discrimination due to disability, *race*, origin, gender, or sexuality. The ambiguity of the existing results adds relevance to implementing further pilots. When designing these experiments, more attention needs to be paid to the particularities of arrangements and how these may affect results. This is especially true concerning the basic income amount and its

⁵³Empirical evidence on the relevance of intersectional disadvantages for economic security was provided, for example, by Maroto et al. (2019).

payment interval. The Denver Basic Income Project (Brisson et al., 2023; Westbrook, 2023) could act as a model, and it could be more promising to use the project as a starting point for developing a fidelity assessment of basic income experiments targeting the homeless population, as is already in place for Housing First pilots.

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Appendix

In the following, the social security measures that would be replaced by a basic income scheme are introduced in more detail. Higher educational support and mandatory unemployment insurance are in most cases not applicable for homeless persons, which is why they are not discussed further at this point. In general, the described measures differ from the basic income policy proposal in three main characteristics: the amount of payment, eligibility criteria, and corresponding conditions on behavioral aspects. The following descriptive account explores the specifics of these differences (in January 2024).

The most well-known social security measure is the German *unemployment assistance*. It contains of a basic payment (*Regelbedarf*, § 20 SGB II) plus payments according to special needs (*Mehrbedarfe*, §§ 21, 24-27 SGB II). The basic payment amounts to 563 euros for an adult living alone. The amount decreases to 506 euros for each adult living in a multi-person household. The amount increases for each child by 357 to 451 euros, depending on age (German Federal Employment Agency, 2023c). Moreover, costs for rent and heating are covered as long as they are deemed appropriate. Hence, the amount differs according to region and household composition and is directly paid to the renter (§ 22 SGB II). Further, in-kind benefits to enable societal participation for children and youth are provided (§§ 28-30 SGB II).

To be eligible for unemployment assistance, a person needs to be between 15 and 67 years old, able to work at least three hours per day, in need of help, and living legally in Germany for at least three months (§§ 7 I, 8 I SGB II). Whether an individual is in need of help depends on income and wealth of the person themselves and their community of dependence (*Bedarfsgemeinschaft*, §§ 7 II, III, 9, 11, 12 SGB II). Unemployment assistance is paid by job centers. From an administrative perspective, it is further necessary to informally apply for unemployment, providing information on income, wealth, personal identification, an address and a bank account. Without a bank account, a check is sent to the postal address that can be cashed in at the German Post Office and the associated German Post Bank (German Federal Employment Agency, 2023a, pp. 14, 52–53; German Pension Insurance, 2023). Moreover, the German Federal Social Court (2023, p. 3) recently decided that if a postal address cannot be provided, eligibility for unemployment assistance is given when a person inquires for their correspondence at the job center on a daily basis (see also § 7b SGB II). Further conditions on willingness to work apply (§§ 14-16 SGB II). If these conditions are not met, the amount of unemployment assistance is sanctioned up to 30 percent (§§ 31-32 SGB II). In December 2023, a proposal was discussed about whether long-term unemployed who repeatedly declined job offers could be cut off from the basic payment of unemployment assistance for two months.

The amount of *social assistance* is calculated similarly to unemployment assistance (§§ 27-39, 42 SGB XII). However, in contrast to unemployment assistance, a person needs to be older than 67 or unable to work for at least three hours per day to be eligible for social assistance (§ 41 SGB XII). If these conditions are not met, the provision of social assistance is decided on

a case-to-case basis (§ 19 SGB XII). While the administrative details that need to be provided as part of the application process are similar, social assistance is paid by a different local agency (*Sozialamt*) and cannot be reduced by sanctions.

The amount of *housing subsidies* differs according to household composition, household income, and amount of rent (§ 4 WOGG; German Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building, 2023). Appropriate rent differs regionally and according to household composition. In addition to rent subsidies, households are paid heating subsidies and a climate component when their flat is climate friendly, and, therefore, more expensive (§ 12 WOGG). Eligible households are only those that do not get unemployment assistance, social assistance, or higher educational support (§§ 7, 20 WOGG).

Child benefits amount to 250 euros per child that is younger than 18 years old and living with their parent in Germany or another state of the European Union. Child benefits can be paid up to the age of 25 if the child is not employed. Child benefits do not depend on individual or household income (§§ 1, 2, 6 BKGG). *Supplementary child allowances* are paid in the case of need and subject to a means test on income and wealth of the household. It needs to be applied for every six months and amounts up to a maximum of 292 euros per child (§ 6a BKGG; German Federal Employment Agency, 2023b). *Child support advance payments* depend on the age of the child and amount between 230 and 395 euros per month depending on the age of the child. It can be applied for in case of single parenthood for children younger than twelve and up to the age of 18 depending on parental income and on whether the parent obtains unemployment assistance (§ 1 UhVorschg; German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2023b). *Parental allowance* can be shared between parents for up to 14 months and depends on the income before birth. It can be between 300 and 1800 euros and is only paid as long as parents do not work more than 32 hours and do not earn more than 175,000 euros per year together.⁵⁴ Three variances of parental allowance exist, which can be mixed and matched according to household needs. However, different application processes for each variant of parental allowance apply (§§ 1-4 BEEG; German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2023a).

⁵⁴In December 2023, the law still allowed for a shared income of 300,000 euros; however, this position was up for debate due to cost-saving measures, with 175,000 euros being the discussed threshold at the point of writing this article.

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