



Together Apart: Our Future after Brexit

Views of Young People
from Northern Ireland and
the Republic of Ireland



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FOREWORD

In the two years since the June 2016 Brexit referendum, debate has, understandably, focused on the high politics and economics of the UK's future relationship with the European Union. Media coverage and political discussion have been dominated by issues such as the future terms of trade, border regimes, and financial settlements. While all are crucial for negotiating a new accommodation between the UK and Europe, and have real-life consequences for all of us across the British Isles, there is a danger that the wider concerns of ordinary people are not receiving the same attention.

In particular, Co-operation Ireland, along with other organisations, has been concerned that the voices of young people are not being heard in the debate. Whether pro-Leave or pro-Remain, younger people have distinct hopes and fears around Brexit which need to be taken into account if the future UK-EU relationship is to work for all generations.

Recognising this need, we have worked with over 60 young people from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland over the past months to explore their priorities for a successful Brexit and to support them to develop their ideas and recommendations for the future UK-EU relationship. We believe these messages and proposals offer valuable insights and can contribute to finding sustainable solutions to the challenges created by the UK's withdrawal.

This report complements our wider work to raise awareness among policy makers of the potential impact of Brexit on the island of Ireland. While we do not take a position on the UK's decision to leave the European Union, we have been clear that it creates legitimate concerns for good relations and prosperity across the island. To address these concerns, we have emphasised the need for the final settlement between the UK and the EU to protect the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, to avoid a hard border, to maintain and strengthen North-South and East-West relations, and to ensure the future economic and social well-being of border communities.

I would like to thank all those who have supported us in delivery of the Together Apart project, including the leaders of our participating youth groups and colleagues in Youth Action Northern Ireland, Centre for Cross Border Studies, Children's Law Centre, NICVA, Brexit Law NI, and Dr Katy Hayward from Queen's University. I would also like to acknowledge the support of our funders, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Community Foundation Northern Ireland, Coca Cola Thank You Fund, and John Griffin. But above all, I want to commend the commitment and enthusiasm of the young people who took part. They are keenly aware of the significance of Brexit for their futures and have argued passionately for their views. Their messages in the following pages deserve to be heard.

Peter Sheridan

Chief Executive
Co-operation Ireland

INTRODUCTION

Young people growing up across the island of Ireland today stand to be among those most affected by the UK's decision to leave the European Union. The decision has raised many questions over the future choices and opportunities which will be open to the next generation. What impact will Brexit have on the economy and jobs? Will young people from Northern Ireland be able to work and study in Europe? What will Brexit mean for the border and relations between North and South?

While these are all issues of direct concern to young people, their views are not getting heard in the ongoing debate over the future relationship between the UK and Europe. Public conversation is being dominated by political and economic voices and, in Northern Ireland, debate has increasingly tended to divide along community lines.

In response, Co-operation Ireland created the *Together Apart* project to provide young people with a platform to get their voices heard and their concerns taken into account as the United Kingdom negotiates its withdrawal from the European Union.

Following an initial pilot – delivered with our Lurgan NI NCS Team in summer 2017¹ – we engaged and worked with six groups from across the island, five from Northern Ireland and one from the Republic. In total, over 60 young people participated. The following groups took part in the project:

- Amazing the Space Northwest Steering Group (Derry/Londonderry)
- Bishopstown Youth Project (Cork City)
- Colin Glen Youth Group (West Belfast)
- R City (North Belfast)
- Resurgam Trust Youth Initiative (Lisburn)
- Strabane Youth Council

Between October and December 2017, each group took part in a workshop in their local area which provided participants with background information on the Brexit process, explored their views of what Brexit might mean for their futures, and began to identify their priorities for the negotiations.

We then brought all the groups together in Armagh last February to share and discuss their views. We invited along academics and policy experts to inform the young people's discussions and to help them to identify possible solutions to their concerns. Based on these ideas, the young people developed a series of key messages and recommendations which they then took to Stormont to discuss directly with an invited audience of Northern Irish politicians and policy makers.

Participants highlighted concerns in a wide range of areas, including the implications of Brexit for their future opportunities, for the Irish border and North-South co-operation, for identity and citizenship, and for trade and EU funding. However, the key message emerging from the project is that young people want their voice heard. Most were too young to vote in the June 2016 referendum and they are angry that they have had no say in a decision which will shape many aspects of their future lives. As the UK negotiates its withdrawal from the EU, there is an onus on policy makers in Brussels, London, Dublin and elsewhere to listen to these concerns and ensure that the eventual agreement fairly balances the needs and interests of all generations and sections of society.

We have now prepared this document to take the young people's recommendations to a wider audience. The following pages provide an important insight into the hopes and fears of young people across the island of Ireland for the future relationship between the UK and the European Union. We trust that their voices will be listened to and that their ideas and proposals can make a valuable contribution to policy development.

SUMMARY OF KEY MESSAGES

Shaping the UK's Withdrawal from the EU

1. A second referendum should be held on the EU withdrawal deal, with young people aged 16 and over allowed to vote
2. A credible and trustworthy public information campaign needs to be delivered before any second referendum, ensuring that false claims and misinformation are successfully challenged
3. Youth-focused education programmes and initiatives should be developed before any second referendum to help younger voters understand the issues
4. All political parties in Northern Ireland need to co-operate with each other and with the British and Irish governments to ensure that the interests of everyone in Northern Ireland are represented
5. The Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive should be restored to provide a voice for Northern Ireland in the Brexit negotiations
6. A public consultation and dialogue should be held with people across Northern Ireland to gather their views and concerns around Brexit

The Irish Border and Cross Border Relations

7. The Common Travel Area between the UK and the Republic of Ireland should be protected, safeguarding rights to travel, study, work and access services across the border
8. Special arrangements should be agreed for Northern Ireland's future relationship with the European Union which would protect the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and avoid a hard border
9. North-South co-operation in the provision of health services should continue and both governments should ensure people in Northern Ireland and the Republic retain access to cross-border healthcare
10. Students from Northern Ireland and the Republic should continue to have access to third level education across the border, paying the same fees as home students and retaining eligibility for support grants
11. The UK and Irish governments should agree a replacement for the European Arrest Warrant

Young People's Futures

12. UK nationals should be allowed to continue to travel freely in the EU after Brexit. If restrictions are put in place, any visa scheme should be light-touch and user-friendly
13. If UK nationals no longer have the right to work in the EU after Brexit, an easily accessible work permit scheme should be agreed between the UK and EU
14. The UK and EU should agree continued mutual recognition of qualifications, with the UK remaining part of the European Qualifications Framework
15. The UK and EU should make an agreement that the UK can continue to participate in the European Health Insurance Card scheme
16. The UK and EU should agree that the UK can continue as a full programme member of Erasmus+
17. UK and EU students should continue to be entitled to home national fees when studying in each other's territories

Identity and Citizenship

18. The entitlement of Northern Ireland-born Irish citizens to EU citizenship needs to be protected and maintained
19. Clarity needs to be provided on how Irish citizens in Northern Ireland can continue to access and enjoy the rights and entitlements of EU citizenship post-Brexit

Economy and EU Funding

20. The UK government should allow continued free movement for EU citizens seeking work in sectors with demonstrated labour shortages
21. The UK government should replace any loss of EU funding for youth and community good relations activities after Brexit, including through the development of new funding schemes

SHAPING THE UK'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EU

Give Young People a Voice

The clearest message emerging from the young people was that they wanted a say in the outcome of the Brexit process. Nearly all participants had been under 18 in June 2016 and were therefore not eligible to vote in the referendum. There was anger and a strong sense of unfairness among participants that this decision – which would have a crucial impact on their futures – had been taken for them by others. They were keenly aware that older people had been more likely to vote to leave the European Union, with some feeling that older generations cared less about the implications of Brexit as they would be cushioned from its effects.

How Age Influenced Voting in the 2016 UK Referendum on EU Membership²

Support for leaving the EU increased with age, with young people aged 16-24 almost twice as likely to vote remain as people aged 65 and over (see Figure 1)

An estimated 71% of young people aged 16-24 voted to remain – with just 29% voting to leave

An estimated 64% of people aged 65 and over voted to leave – with just 36% voting to remain

They believed the only fair solution was to put the eventual withdrawal agreement between the UK and the EU to another public vote and, this time, allow young people aged 16 and over to take part. Participants pointed to the example of Scotland where young people 16 and older were allowed to vote in the 2014 independence referendum and can now vote in local government and Scottish Parliament elections.

An Informed Vote

However, holding a second vote would not, in itself, be enough. If people are to be given a meaningful choice, they must be provided with accurate and trustworthy information so they can weigh up the likely consequences of their decision. The young people felt strongly that the 2016 referendum campaign had seen a lot of misinformation. The claim on the 'red bus' that Brexit would allow an extra £350 million per week to be invested in the NHS was regularly raised.

The young people therefore called for a credible public information campaign to be delivered before any second vote. This needs to be accompanied by efforts to challenge 'fake news' and misinformation and to hold politicians and the media to account for false claims. They also called for youth-focused education programmes, including, for example, in schools, to help young people understand the issues and what they might mean for their lives.

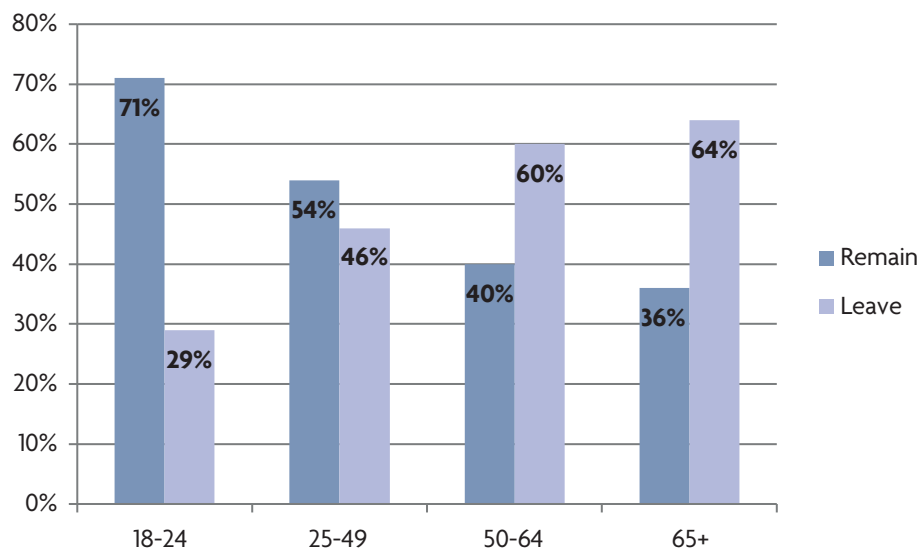


Figure 1: YouGov Estimates of 2016 EU Membership Referendum Voting by Age Group

Everyone's Interests in Northern Ireland Need to be Considered

The young people were concerned that not only were youth voices being excluded but the interests of Northern Ireland as a whole were not being properly represented in the Brexit negotiations. Northern Ireland faces specific challenges because of Brexit, being the only region of the UK with a land border with another EU state and continuing to deal with the legacy of the conflict. However, because of its small size, participants were concerned that its views were not getting a hearing in the wider UK debate. Also, with the suspension of the Executive, there is no one to formally represent Northern Ireland's interests. They doubted if policymakers in Britain making decisions about Northern Ireland had a full understanding of the issues.

The young people were also concerned at the divisiveness of the Brexit debate in Northern Ireland. Differing opinions on the UK's future relationship with the EU, and the best outcome for Northern Ireland, were deepening existing tensions between the Catholic and Protestant communities but also creating new divisions between young and old, between Remain and Leave voters, and between people born in Northern Ireland and migrants.

In response, the young people called on all political parties, including the DUP and Sinn Féin, to work together with the British and Irish governments to represent Northern Ireland's concerns. They called for the Northern Ireland Assembly to be restored and argued it was time to get beyond looking at Brexit as an Orange and Green issue. They also believed that there needed to be a wider dialogue and consultation with people in Northern Ireland about Brexit to ensure everyone's views are taken into account.

Recommendations

1. A second referendum should be held on the EU withdrawal deal, with young people aged 16 and over allowed to vote
2. A credible and trustworthy public information campaign needs to be delivered before any second referendum, ensuring that false claims and misinformation are successfully challenged
3. Youth-focused education programmes and initiatives should be developed before any second referendum to help younger voters understand the issues
4. All political parties in Northern Ireland need to co-operate with each other and with the British and Irish governments to ensure that the interests of everyone in Northern Ireland are represented
5. The Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive should be restored to provide a voice for Northern Ireland in the Brexit negotiations
6. A public consultation and dialogue should be held with people across Northern Ireland to gather their views and concerns around Brexit



THE IRISH BORDER & CROSS BORDER RELATIONS

Avoiding a Hard Border

The young people were very clear on the need to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland. They feared that any return to a hard border would lead to renewed tensions and conflict between communities in Northern Ireland, damaging relations and risking peace. They also spoke of how a hardening of the border would disrupt people's everyday lives, creating delays and limiting opportunities. For young people in the border region this was a particular concern, with fears raised about the impact on people who have to cross the border regularly for work or study. Any restrictions on movement across the border were seen by some as a denial of rights enshrined in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement.

The young people called for the Common Travel Area to be maintained. They also believed that given the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland, as a region emerging from conflict and – post-Brexit – the only region of the UK sharing a land border with the European Union, special arrangements should be agreed to keep the border open and protect the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. They argued special arrangements were also justified because a majority of Northern Ireland voters in the 2016 referendum had voted to remain.³

Movement across the Irish Border

The border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is 310 miles/499 km long, with an estimated 208 crossing points – the EU's eastern frontier, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, has just 137⁴

There are an estimated 110 million person crossings of the border per year⁵

Between 23,000 and 29,000 people are estimated to regularly commute across the border for work⁶

In 2015/16, 3,400 young people from Northern Ireland and the Republic were enrolled in higher education institutions in the other jurisdiction⁷

Access to Cross-Border Health Services

More broadly, there was a fear that Brexit would lead to greater distance between North and South, damaging relations and creating barriers to working together. The young people highlighted the benefits of co-operation in the health sector, with examples including the provision of cross-border cancer treatment at Altnagelvin hospital in Derry/Londonderry and the delivery of children's heart surgery for the entire island at Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Dublin. Co-operation was seen as especially important in the border region as it meant local people had access to a wider range of health services. Participants also noted that accident and emergency services are provided on a cross-border basis and were concerned that any delays due to controls at the border could put lives at risk.

To address these concerns, the young people called for an agreement to maintain access to cross-border healthcare and for both governments to continue to work together to provide health services. Protection of the Common Travel Area would also ensure that people still have rights to healthcare when they move across the border.

While participants hoped that the border would remain open, they recommended that – if controls are implemented – special provisions should be put in place to ensure there are no delays for emergency services crossing the border. Suggestions included the creation of unrestricted emergency lanes at the border to avoid queues and barriers.

Studying across the Border

The young people were concerned that, post-Brexit, it would become more difficult to apply to study across the border. Would they still be eligible to apply for support grants? Would they have to pay higher fees? If restrictions are introduced, young people across the island will have more limited education opportunities in future, including reduced course options to choose from.

In response, participants called for an agreement that young people from Northern Ireland and the Republic can continue to study in the other jurisdiction. This would include ensuring that students from across the border do not have to pay higher fees and remain eligible for support grants.

Cross-Border Crime

The young people feared that Brexit could impede cross-border co-operation between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána, leading to an increase in crime. In particular, they discussed how the UK's withdrawal from the European Arrest Warrant scheme could make it more difficult to arrest and return criminals who cross the border to evade justice.

They called on the UK and Irish governments to agree a replacement for the European Arrest Warrant and for the police services on both sides of the border to continue to work together.

Recommendations

7. The Common Travel Area between the UK and the Republic of Ireland should be protected, safeguarding rights to travel, study, work and access services across the border
8. Special arrangements should be agreed for Northern Ireland's future relationship with the European Union which would protect the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and avoid a hard border
9. North-South co-operation in the provision of health services should continue and both governments should ensure people in Northern Ireland and the Republic retain access to cross-border healthcare
10. Students from Northern Ireland and the Republic should continue to have access to third level education across the border, paying the same fees as home students and retaining eligibility for support grants
11. The UK and Irish governments should agree a replacement for the European Arrest Warrant



YOUNG PEOPLE'S FUTURES

Travelling and Working in the EU

Throughout the project, the most common questions raised by the young people concerned the impact Brexit would have on their futures. In particular, participants from Northern Ireland wanted to know if they would have the same opportunities to travel and work in Europe as previous generations. The situation is currently unclear. When the UK departs from the EU, it will become a third country for travel purposes and is likely to join a list of 60 countries whose citizens can travel to the EU without a visa.

However, the EU is currently developing an electronic system to track travellers from third countries within the Schengen Area – the European Travel and Authorisation System. This will require nationals from visa-free countries to register and receive security clearance before travelling. It is unclear if the UK will be required to participate in the scheme.

The young people hoped that they would be able to continue to travel freely in the EU after Brexit but, if restrictions are put in place, they called for any visa/travel management scheme to be simple and user friendly. They cited the example of the US ESTA scheme which was seen to work well.⁸

European Travel and Authorisation System (ETIAS)⁹

The ETIAS scheme is currently being developed by the EU to enhance security within the Schengen Area. The scheme resembles the US ESTA scheme in that it requires nationals from third countries who do not need a visa to visit the EU to receive prior approval before travelling. Citizens from these countries can travel within the Schengen Area for up to 90 days for purposes of business or leisure. Applicants will be required to provide a range of information about their background and travel plans which will be assessed to determine if they pose a security risk. Applications will be processed online and will cost a planned fee of €5.

Similarly, young people from Northern Ireland hoped that they would retain the right to work in the EU after Brexit. They recognised that the ability to work anywhere in the EU provided them with greater career options and access to wider employment opportunities than those available at home. However, if this is not possible, they called for an accessible and flexible work permit scheme to be put in place, including for working holidays. Successful schemes from around the world were again cited, including examples from Canada and Australia.

The young people highlighted how their opportunities to gain employment in Europe were supported by the current mutual recognition of qualifications between the UK and the EU. They discussed how having UK education awards recognised in EU countries widened their career options and increased the value of their qualifications. They called on the UK government and EU to agree ongoing mutual recognition of qualifications, with the UK remaining part of the European Qualification Framework (EQF)¹⁰. They noted that non-EU countries such as Norway and Switzerland also participated in the EQF, suggesting this should also be possible for the UK after Brexit.

In order to support UK citizens travelling and working in Europe after Brexit, the young people also called for the UK to be allowed to continue to participate in the European Health Insurance Card scheme. They were very aware of the benefits of the scheme, which provides access to public healthcare when travelling in participating countries, and saw it as especially important for young people who might not otherwise be able to afford treatment. They called for the UK and EU to make an agreement which would allow their citizens reciprocal access to healthcare when in their territories. They noted that some non-EU members, including Norway and Switzerland, already participate in the EHIC scheme and believed this set a precedent for the UK to continue to take part post-Brexit.

European Health Insurance Card¹¹

The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) entitles citizens of European Economic Area countries (EU member states and Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein) and Switzerland to free or reduced cost medical treatment in each other's countries. The scheme covers any medical treatment necessary as a result of an accident or illness which occurs while travelling. It provides access to state-run medical services, with holders treated the same as citizens of the country which they are visiting.

Studying in Europe

Participants also felt strongly that they should continue to have opportunities to study in the EU, including through the Erasmus programme. They highlighted the value of student exchange experiences in helping to develop language skills and allowing young people to experience different cultures. This not only benefited individuals but was also good for the economy, with strong language and cultural skills needed by firms looking to export to EU markets. They also highlighted how the presence of foreign exchange students in UK universities enriched college life for all, introducing home students to other cultures.

Outside Erasmus, the young people also highlighted the benefit of having easy access to third level education in other EU member states. This provided students with a greater choice of courses and opportunities to study for qualifications which might not be available in their region.

Erasmus +¹²

The Erasmus + programme provides opportunities for young people across Europe – and beyond - to study, train, gain work experience and volunteer abroad. The current programme runs from 2014 to 2020, with a budget of €14.7 billion. At its core, the scheme supports third level students to study abroad for periods of between three and 12 months. The programme also supports youth exchanges, sports projects, and initiatives to support the transition of young people to employment, and provides opportunities for teaching and youth work staff to develop their skills and experience. All EU member states are full programme countries – meaning they can participate in all actions – along with Norway, Iceland, Turkey, Macedonia, and Lichtenstein. Other states in Europe and beyond can also participate in some actions as partner countries.

However, it is currently unclear what opportunities will exist for UK students to study in the EU after Brexit. The UK government has committed to participating fully in the Erasmus programme until the end of 2020 but it is not known what will happen after this point. More broadly, students from the UK are currently treated as home nationals when studying in another EU country. They cannot be required to pay higher fees than nationals of the host country and are eligible for any grants to cover course fees available to nationals of that country. Fees for non-EU students are usually significantly higher. Again, it is unclear what level of fees UK students will be required to pay post-Brexit. Several participants in the discussions outlined how uncertainty over future fees had already led them to reconsider their university plans.

In response to their concerns, the young people called on the UK government to recognise the value of participation in Erasmus, both for individuals and wider society, and to make an agreement with the EU to allow continued participation in Erasmus post-2020. They believed this was a realistic demand as a number of European countries from outside the EU are already full participants in the programme, including Norway, Iceland, and Turkey. They also called on the UK and EU to agree that UK students would continue to be entitled to home national fees in European universities (with EU students entitled to similar treatment in the UK).

Recommendations

12. UK nationals should be allowed to continue to travel freely in the EU after Brexit. If restrictions are put in place, any visa scheme should be light-touch and user-friendly
13. If UK nationals no longer have the right to work in the EU after Brexit, an easily accessible work permit scheme should be agreed between the UK and EU
14. The UK and EU should agree continued mutual recognition of qualifications, with the UK remaining part of the European Qualifications Framework
15. The UK and EU should make an agreement that the UK can continue to participate in the European Health Insurance Card scheme
16. The UK and EU should agree that the UK can continue as a full programme member of Erasmus+
17. UK and EU students should continue to be entitled to home national fees when studying in each other's territories

IDENTITY & CITIZENSHIP

Under the terms of the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, people in Northern Ireland are entitled to identify as British or Irish, or both, and to hold both British and Irish citizenship.¹³ Those who choose to hold Irish citizenship will nominally remain EU citizens after Brexit.¹⁴ However, the young people were concerned at the practical implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland-born EU citizens. Would they remain full EU citizens or would restrictions be introduced? Would they still be able to access EU citizenship rights while living in Northern Ireland?

EU Citizenship¹⁵

The rights of EU citizens include:

- The right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States
- The right to protection from discrimination on the basis of nationality
- The right to vote and stand in elections to the European Parliament and in local elections in their Member State of residence
- The right to diplomatic protection and consular services of other EU members (when in a country outside the EU where their own country has no embassy or consulate)
- The right to petition the European Parliament and to bring a complaint against EU institutions and bodies to the European Ombudsman
- The right to contact EU institutions in any treaty language and receive a reply in the same language

The young people were also aware of the potential of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union to create differential citizenship entitlements in Northern Ireland, with Irish citizens potentially enjoying greater rights (in an EU context) than those who choose to hold British citizenship only. They worried that this could lead to tensions and create further divisions between communities.

In order to address these concerns, the young people called for the entitlement of Irish citizens in Northern Ireland to hold EU citizenship to be protected. They also called on the EU and the British and Irish governments to clarify how Irish citizens in Northern Ireland would continue to access the rights and benefits of EU citizenship after Brexit. The extent to which other residents of Northern Ireland – the majority of whom are entitled to Irish and therefore EU citizenship – can continue to enjoy EU citizenship rights also needs to be clarified.

More broadly, some young people from a nationalist background discussed how they felt Brexit threatened their sense of identity as Irish nationals in Northern Ireland. Individuals spoke of being 'cut-off' from the rest of Ireland and of fears that, in practice, it would become more difficult to have their Irish citizenship recognised. For example, concerns were raised about restrictions being placed on the acceptance of Irish passports as a proof of identity. Individuals also raised concerns that human rights protections would be undermined in the UK after Brexit, with particular fears raised around workers' rights.

Recommendations

18. The entitlement of Northern Ireland-born Irish citizens to EU citizenship needs to be protected and maintained
19. Clarity needs to be provided on how Irish citizens in Northern Ireland can continue to access and enjoy the rights and entitlements of EU citizenship post-Brexit



ECONOMY & EU FUNDING

Trade and Investment

In general, the young people believed that Brexit would have a negative impact on the economy – in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. Participants worried that barriers would be created to trade - between North and South, Britain and Ireland, and the UK and the EU - and that Northern Ireland would no longer be an attractive investment location. There were concerns that existing businesses might leave, leading to loss of jobs. Young people from the Republic highlighted the reliance of some southern firms and sectors on the UK market and were concerned at the potential impact of any trading restrictions.

Individual participants saw potential opportunities in Brexit, with some believing it could lead to new trade agreements and more trade with countries outside the EU. Some argued that Northern Ireland could, if it retained easy access to the EU Single Market through special arrangements, actually become more attractive for investors. It could potentially have the best of both worlds as a conduit between the UK and EU markets.

Migration

The young people also discussed the likely impact of the end of freedom of movement for EU workers. The majority believed this would damage the Northern Ireland economy, with migrants seen to boost economic growth. They called for the right of EU citizens to seek work in the UK to be maintained, at least in sectors with demonstrated labour shortages. However, there were some dissenting voices who argued Brexit created opportunities to establish more control over immigration into the country. They believed lower migration from the EU could reduce competition in the labour market, leading to more job opportunities for people from Northern Ireland.

Cost of Living

Young people from Northern Ireland were also concerned about increases in the cost of living, with a weakened exchange rate leading to more expensive imports. Some feared that people would be less well off after Brexit and have a lower standard of living.

EU Funding

EU Funding in Northern Ireland 2014-2020¹⁶

The main sources of EU funding in Northern Ireland for the period 2014-2020 include:

- European Social Fund (€205.2 million)
- European Regional Development Programme (€308m)
- Common Agricultural Fund Direct Payments (€2.9 billion)
- Common Agricultural Fund Rural Development Programme (€228m)
- European Fisheries Fund (€23.5m)
- PEACE IV (€229.1 million + €41 million match funding from ROI and NI Executive)
- INTERREG VA (€240.3 million+€43m match funding from ROI and NI Executive)

EU funding has been a very important support for the economy and wider society in Northern Ireland.¹⁷ The agricultural sector, in particular, is very reliant on EU support, with an estimated 74% of farm incomes derived from direct payments under the Common Agricultural Policy in 2015/16.¹⁸ During discussions, participants identified a broad range of social and economic benefits from EU schemes, including job creation, business growth, infrastructure development, local regeneration, and, under the PEACE programme, support for initiatives to improve relationships between communities.

The young people were concerned that these benefits would now be lost. In particular, they wanted to know what impact Brexit would have on the future funding of peace building and good relations activities. Would Northern Ireland continue to receive PEACE funding? They were also concerned that jobs reliant on EU funding would be threatened.

In response, they called on the UK government to replace any loss of EU funding for youth and community good relations activities, including through the development of new funding schemes. They also called for funding for existing projects to be continued.¹⁹

Public services

Beyond EU programmes, some participants had wider concerns about the future funding of public services. If the economy does not do well after Brexit, will there be an impact on the amount of money available for education and the NHS? What impact would it have on funding for youth and community services? Others worried about the reliance of the health service on migrant workers, fearing that restrictions on freedom of movement could lead to difficulties in recruiting staff.

Individual participants believed, on the contrary, that Brexit could strengthen public services, with the UK able to save the money it had been paying into the EU budget and invest it instead in health, education and other areas.

Recommendations

20. The UK government should allow continued free movement for EU citizens seeking work in sectors with demonstrated labour shortages
21. The UK government should replace any loss of EU funding for youth and community good relations activities after Brexit, including through the development of new funding schemes



ENDNOTES

- 1 Some of the young people from our Lurgan NI NCS Team also went on to take part in the other stages of the project.
- 2 Figures taken from YouGov, 2016, How Britain Voted - <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/06/27/how-britain-voted/> These are estimated figures based on a re-weighting of YouGov's final pre-referendum poll to match the overall result.
- 3 The referendum result in Northern Ireland was 56% remain to 44% leave (See <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-36616830>)
- 4 Based on a joint mapping exercise conducted by the Department for Infrastructure (NI) and the Department of Transport (ROI). See <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/ireland-has-208-border-crossings-officials-from-north-and-south-agree-1.3474246>
- 5 Department for the Economy, 2018. *Background Evidence on the Movement of People across the Northern Ireland – Ireland Border*. Available at <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/background-evidence-movement-people-across-northern-ireland-ireland-border>
- 6 Border People, 2016. *The Referendum on UK Membership of the EU: Freedom of Movement*. Available at <http://borderpeople.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Briefing-5-revision15June2016.pdf>
- 7 Centre for Cross Border Studies, 2017. *Cross-Border Mobility in Third Level Education: An Update*. Available at <http://crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Cross-border-student-mobility-update-paper.pdf>
- 8 The Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA) requires travellers from visa-waiver countries to obtain prior approval before entering the USA. Authorisations are valid for up to two years and allow visitors to travel in the USA for periods of up to 90 days at a time.
- 9 See <https://www.schengenvisa.info.com/etias/>
- 10 The European Qualification Framework provides a common benchmark to enable comparison of educational awards across participating countries, supporting cross-border mobility of students and workers. Thirty-five countries, including seven outside the EU, have currently referenced their national qualification frameworks to the EQF. See <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf>
- 11 See <https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/az/t/travel-health/european-health-insurance-card.html>
- 12 See https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en
- 13 Belfast Agreement, 1998, Par 1 (vi) (Constitutional Issues) – ‘[the British and Irish governments] recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, and accordingly confirm that their right to hold both British and Irish citizenship is accepted by both Governments and would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland’.

- 14 Under Art. 20 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), 'Every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union'.
- 15 EU citizenship rights are enumerated in Art. 20 of the TFEU.
- 16 See <http://www.eurolink-eu.net/eu-funding-2/>
- 17 In the period 2007-2013, EU funding accounted for an estimated 8.4% of Northern Ireland's GDP – see Northern Ireland Assembly, 2015. *The Consequences for the Northern Ireland Economy from a United Kingdom Exit from the European Union*, Briefing Note (CETI/OU, 2/15)
- 18 DAERA, 2017. *Farm Incomes in Northern Ireland 2015/16*.
- 19 In October 2016, the Chancellor of the Exchequer guaranteed all funding contracts signed under EU schemes before the date of the UK's departure from the EU would be honoured, subject to value for money criteria and compatibility with domestic priorities - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/further-certainty-on-eu-funding-for-hundreds-of-british-projects>



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