

Tánaiste Simon Coveney  
Iveagh House  
80, St. Stephens Green  
Dublin 2  
D02 VY53

06/12/2018

Dear Tánaiste

**Re: Implications of Brexit on cross border Social Work and impact on service users**

As Chairs of the professional bodies representing social work on the island of Ireland, we are writing to express our grave concerns about the potential impacts on our profession—and the individuals, families and communities our members support—resulting from the UK's decision to leave the European Union (Brexit).

Just as frictionless cross border travel is fundamental to the lives of many of our service users and their carers, cross border cooperation is central to the delivery of various key aspects of social work services. Worryingly, Brexit pays scant heed to the significance of established working practices, or to the freedom of movement enjoyed since the delivery of the Good Friday agreement.

To our knowledge, little planning has been undertaken to explore how the UK's departure from the EU will affect services, or to mitigate the potential impacts.

The following is a list of our members' key concerns regarding Brexit:

- 1) The European Commission notice on the recognition of professional qualifications explains that unless a transitional arrangement is agreed with the UK, as of the withdrawal date of 29 March 2019, Directive 2005/36 EC which governs the system of recognition of professional qualifications in the EU, will not apply to UK nationals.

Clarity is needed from both national governments concerning the ability of individuals qualified as social workers—or pursuing qualification—from a university in Northern Ireland, to register to work in the Republic of Ireland, and vice versa.

- 2) There is a complete lack of transparency around the future employment status of non-Irish EU national social workers living in the Republic of Ireland and working in Northern Ireland. The UK Government's proposals on a skilled immigration cap is very concerning for this group.

The salary cap set at £30,000 would appear to prevent non-Irish EU national social workers working below point 5 of the Agenda for Change (AFC) Band 6

pay scale in Northern Ireland. Currently AFC Band 5 and 6 social workers account for 62% of social workers employed by the Northern Ireland Department of Health.

- 3) Social workers in Northern Ireland are concerned about the staffing, post Brexit, of adult residential units which depend on low paid but highly skilled care workers, many of whom are from EU 27 countries.
- 4) The European Arrest Warrant has provided an effective measure to stop those who pose a risk to the public from using the border to avoid assessment and management. Our members are deeply concerned that following Brexit, current reciprocal arrangements for the issuing of arrest warrants, and cross-jurisdictional monitoring of offenders by Criminal Justice social workers in Northern Ireland, may cease to exist.
- 5) Brexit introduces complex unknowns for Looked After Children (LAC) in residential care or in kinship care arrangements on either side of the border. Currently, when children are placed on a different side of the border from their parents there are agreements in place between the responsible authorities to facilitate the process. At present there is ambiguity concerning how Brexit will affect these arrangements.
- 6) There are concerns about the immigration status of EU children who are looked after in Northern Ireland. Children born to EU citizens in the UK are not automatically entitled to British citizenship if they were born after 2000 when immigration rules changed. However, they can currently remain as EU citizens under EU law provided they are exercising a Treaty right.

Post-Brexit they will need to demonstrate that they have the right to be in the UK once they turn 18. For most young people this will turn on the rights of their parents, for LAC young people estranged from their parents the situation is far from clear.


- 7) There is concern among the social work profession about uncertainty over the continuation of EU INTERREG and PEACE programme funding post-Brexit, and the impacts on services which would result from cessation of funding.

One notable example of social work services funded by EU money is the €5 million EU INTERREG VA funded cross-border Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT) Multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences project. The project aims to help transform the lives of vulnerable families who are at risk from multiple adversities, through identification, early intervention and the provision of support within their communities.

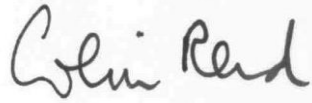
As we have demonstrated, the challenges facing the social work profession, North and South of the Irish border, are many and of critical importance. We look forward to your

response in which we trust you will assure our members that the interests of social workers, and their service users, will be afforded the attention they rightly deserve in the ongoing Brexit negotiations.

Yours faithfully



**Aine McGuirk**  
Chair, Irish Association of Social  
Workers



**Colin Reid**  
Chair, British Association of Social  
Workers Northern Ireland

*Cc: Simon Harris, Minister for Health, Charles Flanagan, Minister for Justice and  
Katherine Zappone, Minister for Children & Youth Affairs.*