

# FREE MOVEMENT IS A TWO-WAY STREET

## Brexit would risk it all

### **Introduction**

The right to move from one country to another benefits us too, and UK citizens living in other EU countries also benefit from the right of all EU citizens to be treated equally without suffering discrimination on grounds of origin.

Brexit could put that at risk, potentially reintroducing visa requirements even for those who just want to travel or holiday in the rest of Europe (including Ireland.)

Over 1.2 million UK citizens are working, studying or retired abroad. While the chances of British citizens living in other EU countries being affected overnight are slim, the opportunity to reside abroad would be likely to be withdrawn gradually, and future generations could see the right ended altogether unless the UK accepted some form of reciprocal free movement as part of the exit negotiations

### **Rights to work, study and retire**

Being a member of the EU gives people the right to travel for work, study or vacation, including the right to retire to another EU country if you have the means to support yourself. These rights would be put at risk in the event of Brexit.

Our rights come with other advantages. Students studying outside the UK can have their degree recognised upon returning to the UK, something that will affect growing numbers of young people studying overseas to broaden their experience or avoid tuition fees, especially given the number of courses taught in English in various universities around Europe. There were some 15,600 students studying or working in other EU countries in 2013/14, according to the British Council, and the number is increasing.

The EU also guarantees unfettered access to the host country's labour market, with protections against discrimination on grounds of national origin. This means we can get a job, or work self-employed, in any EU country without needing a work permit. And it also means access to the

same benefits as native workers from the first day of work, including access to advantages not directly connected to employment such as reduced train fares, top-up pensions, educational grants, or unemployment benefits for the children when looking for their first job. Over 800,000 UK citizens are working in other EU countries.

The majority of British citizens living in Europe are pensioners. Around 400,000 pensioners in receipt of a DWP pension live in other parts of the EU (the most popular destinations are Ireland, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Cyprus, the Netherlands and Germany.) These pensioners can access healthcare services and benefits under the same conditions as local residents thanks to a system of mutual reimbursement where the host country bills the country of origin for the medical treatments provided.

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## CASE STUDY

*As an EU citizen studying at university in another EU country:*

- *you cannot be required to pay higher course fees than the local students;*
- *you are entitled to the same grants to cover course fees as nationals of that country; and*
- *even if you are not a national of the country where you want to study, if you have been living there for five years or more, you are entitled to a maintenance grant on the same conditions as nationals of that country.*

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## Conclusion

No one knows what the terms of Brexit would be and it would take years to negotiate them, but in the worst case scenario post-Brexit, visa requirements and work permits might be reintroduced; students would no longer enjoy the possibility to study and research abroad and senior citizens might be asked to pay directly for their own healthcare, or forced back to the UK, putting more strain on the NHS.

For more information go to [www.tuc.org.uk/euref](http://www.tuc.org.uk/euref)

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