



It's Our Brexit Too:

Children's Rights, Children's Voices

Summary Report 10th November 2017



ombudsman
do leanaí
for children





A summary

In November 2017, around 120 young people came together in Newry to take part in a conference called 'It's Our Brexit Too: Children's Rights, Children's Voices. This was organised and run by a group of young people from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland with support from the Ombudsman for Children and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young people. This is a summary of the views participants expressed, a full report is also available.





Key messages

1. **Brexit will have particular, profound implications for people in Ireland, North and South, and these should be given special consideration during the negotiation process**
2. **Brexit will impact on children and young people more than any other group, as we will have to live with the implications for longest. So talk to us about it and listen to our views.**
3. **We have come too far from the violence and divisions of the past. We don't want to see regression to a hard border and conflict.**
4. **Protect all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement throughout the Brexit process and protect the right of young people in Northern Ireland to consider ourselves British, Irish or both.**
5. **Promote diversity and prevent deepening divisions, particularly in relation to hostility towards migrants.**
6. **Ensure that the EU/UK border on the island of Ireland is a soft border. Protect our freedom of movement across the border.**
7. **We are very concerned that Brexit could limit our opportunities in the future for work, travel and study. Protect these opportunities and support us to avail of potential new opportunities through Brexit.**
8. **Maintain equivalence of standards and cooperative agreements across the island of Ireland in relation to key areas such as health care, education, policing, safety and child protection.**
9. **Allow children, young people and their families to continue to access services and facilities on either side of border, for example in relation to health, education, sports and cultural activities. The UK government should also commit to continuing membership of the EEA to ensure retention of the EHIC card.**
10. **The money that the UK government previously paid to the EU should be used to fund improved health services and compensate for the loss of EU funding previously provided to Northern Ireland.**





Recommendations

Freedom of movement

- ▶ A hard border must be avoided and freedom of movement maintained across the border. It is critical for disruption to be minimised as young people do not want to go back to the border of the past. Government should look at other examples of soft borders, and there may be technological solutions to allow for easy travel, such as special forms of ID cards / passes or number plate checks on the border.
- ▶ Ease of travel on public transport across the border must be maintained and data roaming charges should not be reintroduced between the two parts of the island.

Health and disability

- ▶ Governments must ensure that Ireland-wide cooperation in relation to the provision of healthcare services is maintained post-Brexit. People should continue to be able to access health services closest to home, irrespective of whether this is on the other side of the border. Specialist services should continue to be planned and delivered on an all-island basis where this delivers the best outcomes for patients.
- ▶ Far from accepting that Brexit will limit cooperation and access to healthcare services, governments should seek cooperative arrangements with other countries.
- ▶ The UK should stay in the EEA to allow the EHIC arrangements to continue in place. In the absence of the EHIC arrangement continuing, a similar arrangement should be put in place for the island of Ireland.
- ▶ Ambulances must not be delayed when needing to cross the border and should be able to bring patients to the closest hospital, irrespective of what side of the border it is on.
- ▶ Any changes to immigration policies must ensure that healthcare workers from other countries can continue to work in the UK and that there is continued recognition of their professional qualifications.
- ▶ The NHS should receive more resources as promised during the Brexit referendum campaign.
- ▶ Governments must assess and mitigate the potential impacts of Brexit on young people with disabilities.





Education

- ▶ **Maintain cooperative arrangements to ensure continued access for children and young people to schools on a cross-border basis. No child should have to move school because of Brexit.**
- ▶ **Protect children and young people's freedom of movement across the border so that they attend school unhindered, including continuing to provide school buses across the border. When other decisions are being made in relation to Brexit, particularly in relation to the border, negotiators must consider the impact on children and young people's access to education to prevent unintended negative consequences.**
- ▶ **Continue to support cooperation between schools in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland.**
- ▶ **Access to Further Education colleges and Universities on a cross-border basis should not be restricted and an arrangement put in place to prevent tuition fees being increased for cross-border students.**
- ▶ **Young people in Northern Ireland should continue to be able to avail of the opportunities provided by the Erasmus + programme post-Brexit.**
- ▶ **Recognition must be given to the particular circumstances of people on the island of Ireland to take up opportunities for placements and work either side of the border.**
- ▶ **There should be no change in the cross-border recognition of academic and vocational qualifications.**
- ▶ **The UK government should seek agreement with the EU to ensure that, post-Brexit, young people from Northern Ireland can continue to travel to EU countries for study visits and have the freedom to live, study and/or work in other EU countries.**
- ▶ **A review of the level of EU funds provided for education in Northern Ireland should be undertaken and the UK government should replace this funding during the transition from the EU.**
- ▶ **The UK government should either seek to reach agreement that UK universities can apply for EU research funding or should replace these funding sources.**



Child protection

- ▶ It is vital that the issue of maintaining cross border and EU cooperation in relation to child protection isn't overlooked in favour of more prominent issues such as trade, agriculture or the economy.
- ▶ Given the EU's role in child protection and anti-trafficking, Brexit negotiators must consider how they will minimise major changes to child protection. Relevant structures must be in place to ensure child protection services are fit for purpose before leaving the EU and that subsequently there will be regulatory equivalence to maintain these arrangements.
- ▶ Maintaining relevant agreements in relation to matters such as data sharing and the European Arrest Warrant will be important. The UK and Irish Governments must continue with existing police co-ordination structures (such as Europol and Eurojust).
- ▶ When determining how the regulation of movement across the border is addressed, the UK and Irish governments must ensure that robust systems are in place to prevent child trafficking and to ensure that traffickers may be more easily apprehended by law enforcement agencies.
- ▶ The transition period should be used to review the current cross-border and EU child protection systems so as to maintain what is working well and improve this where possible.


Standard of living

- ▶ Some of the £350 million per week that pro-Brexit campaigners claimed the EU cost the UK should be used to replace farm subsidies and the various funding programmes currently provided by the EU to Northern Ireland.

Identity and non-discrimination

- ▶ The Good Friday Agreement guarantees equivalence of rights North and South of the border. Governments must ensure that this principle is protected during and after Brexit.
- ▶ A hard border should be avoided to maintain good relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Equality guidelines across UK and Ireland should be standardised.
- ▶ In addition to considering the impact of Brexit on nationality, it will be important to consider how people of different ethnicities may be affected.



- 
- ▶ A specific strategy should be developed to deal with discrimination in Northern Ireland and legislation brought forward to protect: women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ people and to allow immigrants to report crimes without fear of deportation. There also were suggestions for more progressive legislation in relation to recognising the rights of intersex people.
 - ▶ Governments should run campaigns and fund public awareness programmes on diversity and non-discrimination. The media should promote diversity and provide information on issues relating to discrimination.
 - ▶ Minorities should be ‘given a platform’ to address discrimination and personalise the issues through telling real stories. People who have experienced discrimination should be involved in educating others about inequality. There needs to be a balance between freedom of speech and the importance of avoiding hate speech so as to avoid the promotion of bigotry, racism and homo/trans phobia.
 - ▶ Education on discrimination and diversity should be rolled out across society. This should include education for young people in schools and education delivered by young people to the older generation. The police were also identified as an important group to be educated in relation to discrimination and diversity.

Non-EU children needing extra protection

- ▶ The UK government must take action to address intolerance towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, including through education, raising awareness through the media, legislation and a post-Brexit agency to monitor and protect the rights of migrants. A ‘Charter’ to enshrine and protect their rights should be considered.
- ▶ Throughout the Brexit negotiations, political representatives must keep in mind the rights and best interests of non-EU children, in addition to EU and UK children.
- ▶ Children’s right to family life must be protected after Brexit – this includes refugee, asylum seeking and migrant children. Separated children must continue to be reunified with their families through the EU, or alternative, procedures.



ItsOurBrexitToo



**ombudsman
do leanaí
for children**

Ombudsman for Children's Office

Millennium House
52-56 Great Strand Street
Dublin 1, D01 F5P8, Ireland
T: 01 865 6800
E: oco@oco.ie
Ceisteanna as Gaeilge:
ombudsmandoleanai@oco.ie
W: www.oco.ie
Twitter: [@OCO_ireland](https://twitter.com/OCO_ireland)

**This is a summary version of the full report,
please contact the offices for a copy of this
or view it on their websites.**



PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF
CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

Equality House
7-9 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DP
T: 028 9031 1616
E: info@niccy.org
W: www.niccy.org
Twitter: [@nichildcom](https://twitter.com/nichildcom)
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/
nichildrenscommissioner](http://www.facebook.com/nichildrenscommissioner)
Instagram: [niccy_yp](https://www.instagram.com/niccy_yp)