

# UNISON remainEU

## **The EU and public services**

On 23 June the people of the UK will take part in a referendum that will determine whether or not we remain in or leave the European Union (EU).

UNISON has weighed up the evidence and arguments and concluded that to leave would put the public services that our members and the public rely upon at significant risk (other fact sheets in this series highlight the implications of leaving the EU for workers rights, the economy and the NHS.)

UNISON is not an uncritical supporter of the EU. Far from it. But in addition to supporting the remain position on the grounds that to leave would put the economy, public services and our rights at work at risk, UNISON also believes that a more socially just world economy is best secured through working alongside sister unions in the EU.

## **What are the risks to UK public services of the UK leaving the EU?**

- Leaving the EU would mean less money for public services. Brexit would damage the UK economy, meaning less money for all public services, including local government, the NHS, education, and policing.
- Even under the best case scenario modelled by the government, public sector income would reduce by £24 billion a year by the mid 2020s. This would result in hundreds of thousands of job losses and the downgrading and, in some cases, closure of many of the services that our communities rely upon –the NHS, libraries, leisure centres, children’s centres, care for the elderly, class room support in schools, environmental health, community safety and ambulance services.
- Public services in the poorest areas of the UK stand to be hit the hardest. More than 60 Labour council leaders have signed an open letter pointing out that Brexit would harm “almost every area” of local authority work and that “it is our communities that will be hardest hit” by a vote to leave.
- The benefit that UK public services derive from workers that come from other parts of the UK would be jeopardised. According to figures from CIPFA, approximately 10% of social care and NHS professionals come from other European countries.
- Public sector pay and pensions would be squeezed further, which after a prolonged period of unjust pay restraint imposed by the Conservative government, would almost certainly lead to worsening recruitment and retention issues and further serious consequences for the quality of public services. Calculations based on the government’s own data suggest that across the complete pay scale public services pay could reduce by between £740 and £4,824 per annum. A cleaner could be £750 worse off and a nurse £1,200 worse off per annum. Pensions would be vulnerable

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because one third of public sector pension funds are invested in UK shares, which independent forecasters expect to fall in value if UK votes for Brexit.

## **Why Brexit supporters are wrong about the benefits of leaving for public services**

Supporters of Brexit claim that money going to the EU could be better spent on the NHS and other public services and free movement of labour in the EU puts too much pressure on public services. Some also claim that freedom from the EU would enable UK public services to escape procurement rules which ensure free access to competition across member states, meaning that UK suppliers do not get priority for UK tenders.

However, the suggestion that Brexit could see money that currently goes to the EU being spent on public services both exaggerates the amount that would potentially be available and ignores the consequences of Brexit for the economy, tax revenues and public spending. Claims made about the strain placed on services by immigration conveniently ignore the contribution that workers from other European countries make to the staffing of our public services, the fact that EU nationals are net contributors to public finances and the risk to reciprocal access to services that millions of UK citizens enjoy in other EU countries.

As for procurement rules, UNISON is strongly opposed to markets in public services. However, it's extremely unlikely that the terms of trade that the UK would end up adopting on Brexit would significantly change from the current situation. It's also highly likely Brexit would lead to a change of leadership in the Conservative party. Those at the front of the queue, such as Boris Johnson, are no friends of public services. Other leading figures in the Leave campaign – such as Michael Gove, Nigel Farage, Aaron Banks, Daniel Hannan and Douglas Carswell – have a track record of supporting greater privatisation.

## **Would Brexit safeguard public services from TTIP?**

UNISON has been an outspoken critic of TTIP from the beginning, including its potential impact on the NHS. However, outside the EU the UK would simply face the prospect of even worse trade deals, with much less voice to influence them. Post-Brexit the UK would seek a free trade deal with the US, which would involve the same problems that are currently found in TTIP. In many ways the real danger in TTIP comes from the way our own government has chosen to approach it. Regrettably, the UK government has continually pushed the deal further towards its current pro-privatisation form. Other countries, such as France, have adopted a different stance, and a number of countries have negotiated protections for their own healthcare services – something the UK government has failed to do.

## **Get involved in UNISON's Remain Campaign**

- UNISON activists and members have a vital role to play in the campaign. Find out more from the campaign web pages <https://www.unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/eu-referendum-23-june/>
- Talk with your branch about what you can do to highlight the risks to public services, workers rights, the economy and the NHS if the UK leaves the EU.