

UNISON remain EU

Migration and the EU referendum campaign

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 taken a position – guided by our membership - to advise support for a Remain vote in the upcoming EU referendum.

While there are those within the union who take a different view, UNISON is united in its condemnation of the tactics employed by the official “Vote Leave” campaign.

It is not racist to be concerned about the effects of immigration on public services, jobs and pay. However, the divisive anti-immigrant tone of the leave campaign is clearly designed to turn worker against worker rather than making real arguments about the EU.

They have nothing to say about employment rights, and make no guarantees around maternity/paternity leave, anti-discrimination or the working time directive. Likewise they have no explanation for how they are going to deal with potential post-Brexit skills shortages or economic shocks.

The biggest price for this divisive campaign will be paid by those who are demonised by campaigners for their own personal political ends.

Although UNISON encourages a Remain vote, it's clear that there are arguments for leaving the EU. Vote Leave deserve our unreserved condemnation for ignoring those arguments in the pursuit of attacks and fear mongering with regard to immigrants that diminishes their case and this entire debate.

The impact of EU membership on public services, jobs and pay: key facts

Leave campaigners say that EU migration places a strain on the NHS and other public services. The key facts are that :

- Workers from other European countries make a huge contribution to staffing the NHS and other public services. CIPFA have pointed out that 10% of all NHS and social care professionals come from other European countries. Without them services would be stretched to breaking point.
- Migrants from Europe contribute billions to public finances - HMRC and OBR show that they pay in more than they take out. The greatest pressures on public services are caused by austerity and its impact on economic performance - and the government's overall priorities on taxation and expenditure, not immigrants.
- Membership of the European Union is a two-way street. So while is the case that migrants from other European countries do have access to services in the UK, it also has to be acknowledged that millions of UK citizens living and working in other EU countries have equal access to services in the countries in which they reside. We all have the right to live and work in other EU countries.

Leave campaigners say that EU migrants are taking British jobs and keeping wages low. The key facts are that:

- While the number of EU migrants working in the UK has grown, so has the overall number of jobs. The Office for National Statistics show that although the number of EU workers in the UK has risen by 700,000 since 2013, they are outnumbered by the extra one million UK citizens who have gone into employment in the same period. The number of British citizens working in the UK labour force is now at the near-record level of 28 million. That compares with three million foreign nationals.

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- Studies show that areas of the UK with large increases in EU immigration did not suffer greater falls in the jobs and pay of UK-born workers. The big falls in wages after 2008 are due to the global financial crisis and a weak economic recovery, not to immigration.
- While some studies have shown a small negative effect of migration on the wages of low-skilled workers in certain sectors in certain parts of the country, particularly care workers, shop assistants, and restaurant and bar workers, this is because of unscrupulous employers and, in the case of social care, callous spending cuts by the government.

What others are saying

Jeremy Corbyn MP, Labour Party Leader

“Some communities can change dramatically and rapidly and that can be disconcerting for some people. That doesn’t make them Little Englanders, xenophobes or racists. More people living in an area can put real pressure on local services like GPs surgeries, schools and housing. This isn’t the fault of migrants. It’s a failure of government. The coalition government in 2010 abolished the Migrant Impact Fund; a national fund to manage the short term impacts of migration on local communities. By abolishing it, David Cameron’s Coalition undermined the proper preparation and investment that communities need to adapt. We are clear, we would restore such a fund.

We cannot and should not want to close the borders. Not for European citizens wanting to come here, tens of thousands of whom work in our NHS. And not for British citizens who want to take advantage of opportunities elsewhere in Europe. But we do have to make sure that public services are able to sustain the communities we have here, part of that is through a Migrant Impact Fund, but partly too it is about reversing the damaging and unnecessary austerity policies that this government continues to impose on our communities and our country.”

Joe Mullhall, HOPE not Hate

“Leave campaigners have crossed a line, and whatever the outcome of the EU Referendum they or others within the political mainstream may well be tempted to try and build a political constituency based on fear of the other and hatred of the unknown.

HOPE not hate will not sit by while our political centre is dragged into this gutter. That’s why we will be launching a new initiative trying to build strong inclusive communities within areas characterised as ‘Middle England’. We’re determined that those politicians who seek to build their political careers on the basis of mainstreaming racism and bigotry should be challenged by the very communities of ‘Middle England’ whose fears they are seeking to exploit.”

UNISON’s EU remain campaign

UNISON will continue to campaign throughout the campaign on the issues that matter to its members, their families, friends, neighbours and communities – putting workers rights, jobs, pay, the economy and public services at the heart of our arguments. These are the issues at stake on 23 June. UNISON will also work alongside its allies against all forms of racism and xenophobia.

Get involved

- UNISON activists and members have a vital role to play in the EU remain campaign. Find out more from the campaign web pages unison.org.uk/EUvote
- 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.