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UNISON Activist briefing

Exiting the EU: UNISON's equality and human rights objectives

UNISON's three main equality objectives of our Exiting the EU campaign are: protecting the legal rights of EU citizens in the UK, fighting racism and discrimination and safeguarding all existing EU equality and human rights protections.

1. Protecting the legal rights of EU citizens in the UK

EU nationals should not be treated as bargaining chips. Their rights should not be subject to negotiation nor made contingent upon the actions of other governments. EU nationals already in the UK should be guaranteed the right to stay in the UK once the UK has left the EU. Commitments must also be made to protect the legal rights they already have, including access to healthcare and non-discriminatory access to employment and education. Here are some examples of how UNISON's EU national members are making a vital contribution to public services in the UK:

- There are 55,000 EU nationals working in the English NHS alone that makes up 5% of its workforce. This includes 10% of doctors and 4% of nurses. In the past few years thousands of EU nurses have been recruited to cover gaps in staffing, and the NHS has become increasingly reliant on EU nationals to keep it on its feet.
- Social care is even more dependent on EU nationals, with 6% of the social care workforce in England alone being EEA migrants, equating to around 84,000 people. Of this number, 90% (78,000) do not have UK citizenship, meaning they could be at risk of changes to their immigration status following a UK exit from the European Union.

For more information on how to support EU workers, see UNISON's 'Organising, supporting and negotiating for EU workers' [branch guidance](#).

2. Fighting racism and discrimination

Hate crime against Black, LGBT and Disabled people has been on the rise in the UK since the EU referendum took place in June 2016. UNISON is calling on the government to:

- Take concerted action to monitor and curb this rise and to ensure it is more effectively investigated and prosecuted
- Endorse a zero tolerance on hate crimes and swift judicial action taken against perpetrators
- Ensure that hate crimes against disabled people, women and LGBT people are treated equally with racist hate crime
- Tackle far-right extremism

3. Safeguard all existing EU law equality and human rights protections

Equality

There are many EU laws that directly strengthen our equality rights, for example:

- A substantial part of UK maternity and parental rights are grounded in EU law
- EU law ensures that disabled people are given assistance, free of charge, when travelling by rail, plane, ship or coach throughout the EU
- Most LGBT protections have been won through EU case law or directives

There are also other employment rights granted by the EU that have a significant equality impact. The EU directives guaranteeing part-time, fixed term and agency workers a minimum level of equal treatment compared to full-time permanent staff have a significant impact on women and Black workers, who are less likely to be employed in full time permanent positions. UNISON is calling for the next government to ensure that all EU law equality and human rights protections are maintained through the 'Great Repeal Bill' or equivalent legislation. This includes protections directly effective in UK law, judgments of the Court of Justice of the European Union, and standards implemented through domestic regulations. This means:

- no regression in equality rights
- no changes to primary legislation without parliamentary scrutiny
- no watering down of secondary legislation

Furthermore, we are calling on the next government to commit to **improving** equality rights and at least matching future progressive developments in EU equality and human rights law.

Human Rights

After the UK leaves the EU, the Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act which enshrines it in UK law will be more important than ever. They will remain the most fundamental safeguard against abuses of human rights in the UK. However, recent Conservative governments have repeatedly threatened to repeal the Human Rights Act. Human rights apply to all of us and impact our equality protections. Rights protected under this legislation include the right to: marry, free elections, freedom of expression, freedom of religion and protection from discrimination.

UNISON is calling for the government to:

1. Retain and support the **Human Rights Act 1998**
2. Remain committed to the **European Convention on Human Rights**
3. Ensure that the **Great Repeal Bill** or equivalent legislation does not lead to any regression in the protection of human rights, including that the protective effect of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is retained

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