

Dutch government confirms UK nationals will retain existing rights if UK leaves the EU without a deal

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News

The Dutch Government's guarantee to British residents in the Netherlands in the event of no-deal Brexit has been welcomed by a group championing EU citizenship rights.



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The prospect of a no deal is widely thought to have come a step closer after UK MPs voted down the withdrawal agreement between the EU and UK in a vote in the House of Commons on Tuesday night.

The outcome has also added to ongoing concerns about the legal status and rights of EU citizens in the UK and British nationals in Europe.

In an attempt to allay such fears, the Dutch government has confirmed that UK nationals living in the

Netherlands before 29 March 2019 will retain existing rights to live, work and study there if the UK leaves the EU without a deal.

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The bid to address concerns comes in a letter to British residents in the country.

There are an estimated 45,000 British adults in the Netherlands and the letter from the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) will, it says, serve as a temporary residence permit, in the event of the UK leaving the EU without a deal at the end of March.

British nationals, during a 15-month Dutch transition period, would receive a further letter inviting them to apply for a residence permit at a cost of €57, the standard cost for EU nationals. The guarantee applies to non-EU family members of British citizens.

The offer follows similar decisions from Italy and Germany while the French government has said it would guarantee the residence, employment and welfare rights of 160,000 resident British citizens living in France, as long as the UK made a reciprocal offer to French expatriates.

The Dutch announcement was greeted with relief by the Benelux branch of New Europeans, a Brussels based group campaigning for the rights of the 1.5 million Britons in Europe and 3.5 million EU27 citizens in the UK.

"The guarantee goes some way to reassure the 45,000 UK nationals in the Netherlands, but we now want the same guarantees to be given to British citizens living in Luxembourg, Belgium and everywhere else in the EU" **Bart Roelofs chair of the Benelux branch of New Europeans**

Speaking on Wednesday, Bart Roelofs, a Dutch student and chair of the group's Benelux branch, told this website "the guarantee goes some way to reassure the 45,000 UK nationals in the Netherlands, but we now want the same guarantees to be given to British citizens living in Luxembourg, Belgium and everywhere else in the EU."

A recent meeting organised by the group was attended by British citizens resident in the Netherlands as well as citizens from other EU member states.

Roelofs explained, "We want our British friends and neighbours to realise that this is not their fight alone. British citizens are still EU citizens and we want the rights of those who are living in the Netherlands or anywhere else in Europe to be protected."

Further reaction to the letter came from Anna Yeadell-Moore, a British citizen who has been living in the Netherlands for 20 years and is chair of New Europeans Groningen.

Reacting to the letter she told this site “there is still a lot of uncertainty for the British community in the Netherlands, particularly on issues such as cross-border business and dual nationality, but we welcome the recent efforts by the Dutch Immigration Service to reach out to us”.

Although there has yet to be an official announcement in Luxembourg, in a recent interview the country’s Prime Minister Bettel referred to UK citizens living in the country as ‘belonging to Luxembourg’.

“We need unilateral, comprehensive guarantees of the right to stay for all EU27 citizens in the UK and Britons in Europe, we need the #EUGreenCard to guarantee free movement and give a physical proof of status and we need this now” **Roger Casale, founder and CEO of New Europeans**

UK citizen Chris Garratt, from the Luxembourg branch of New Europeans, said “the Luxembourg government is making it clear they want to make it easy for UK citizens to stay.”

His comments echo the views expressed by the German government, said Brigitte Richter, a German citizen who lives and works in Brussels.

She said "Germany appears to want to make it easy for UK citizens to stay in the event of a no deal - that's something we should all fully support."

In Belgium, home of the EU institutions such as the commission and parliament, however, UK citizens are still waiting for clarity.

Roelofs also restated New Europeans' support for its “EUGreenCard” proposal, saying, "We urge the Dutch government to announce that they will get behind this scheme currently which is under consideration by the European Parliament. It would allow Britons in Europe to keep their freedom of movement, something they currently stand to lose even if there is a deal”.

The scheme, it is argued, would ‘ring-fence’ the existing rights of UK nationals in the EU and EU nationals residing in the UK and grant the ‘five million’ special recognition for having acquired residency before Brexit.

The “British in Europe” campaign group has argued for the rights of all citizens to be protected if the UK left the EU without a deal. “A no-deal situation is a disaster because unless the EU27 put in place legislation to give us status by 30 March 2019 our rights fall away,” said Jane Golding, the chair of British in Europe.

New Europeans also took part at the weekend in the annual meeting of the Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Europe.

Speaking on Wednesday about the latest developments, Roger Casale, founder and CEO of New Europeans said, "EU citizenship rights have become a human rights issue due to Brexit."

Casale, a former Labour MP in the UK, added, “You cannot leave five million people's lives in limbo with all the disruption that causes to personal and family life not to mention the high levels of emotional and psychological distress without this becoming a human rights issue.

“We need unilateral, comprehensive guarantees of the right to stay for all EU27 citizens in the UK and Britons in Europe, we need the #EUGreenCard to guarantee free movement and give a physical proof of status and we need this now.”

He said, “Nothing short of that is acceptable from any reasonable point of view.”

About the author

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