

UK “not ready” to stop free movement on Brexit day

Written by Martin Banks on 19 August 2019 in News
News

Campaigners have reacted with fury to UK plans to stop free movement on 31 October, the day the UK is due to leave the EU.



Photo credit: PA

Two separate citizens’ groups say the UK is “not ready” to implement such an “aggressive and abrupt” change in the system.

The groups were reacting to news that the UK government plans to end free movement for EU citizens on day one of a no deal Brexit – despite warnings of chaos and of people trapped in legal limbo.

Priti Patel, the new hard-line UK home secretary, is pressing for border restrictions to be imposed immediately on 31 October, even though no replacement system is ready.

Previously, UK ministers had intended to delay scrapping free movement until new rules are in place.

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Reaction to her announcement at the weekend was swift with Nicolas Hatton, head of *the3million* group of EU citizens in the UK, saying: "This will open the door to discrimination. There are no systems in place. This is a political gesture, but it will have a real impact on people's lives."

Hatton added, "How will they distinguish between the 'legacy people', those already here, and those who will arrive afterwards?"

The new approach is believed to be endorsed by UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his controversial chief advisor Dominic Cummings.

Further response to Patel's comments came from former Labour MP Roger Casale, of New Europeans, another group campaigning for post-Brexit citizens' rights.

Speaking on Monday, Casale declared, "Free movement is one of the greatest achievements of the EU - it is a tragedy that it will end for UK citizens on 31 October if Britain leaves the EU."

"Ending free movement will require a new system to be phased in and this will take time."

"This will open the door to discrimination. There are no systems in place. This is a political gesture, but it will have a real impact on people's lives" **Nicolas Hatton, head of the3million group**

"That is why we are so concerned about the Home Secretary's intention to end free movement overnight on 31 October."

He told this website, "We fear this will result in long delays at ports and airports for all passengers moving in and out of the UK."

There are over 3.4 million EU citizens in Britain and the UK government has promised to secure their right to stay through its settled or pre-settled status scheme.

But, even so, Casale asks, "What will happen at the border with EU citizens who are entitled to settled or pre-settled status but have not yet applied? Will they have to apply for this status before they will be allowed to re-enter the UK?"

The former Labour MP warns, "Free movement is a two-way street. British citizens may face additional checks when travelling to continental Europe."

He also addressed concerns of the estimated 1.5m UK citizens who live and work on mainland Europe,

asking, "How about Britons who are living and working in the EU? Their status may be jeopardised by the actions of the Home Secretary if EU member states fail to secure their right to stay before the 31 October."

"Without a physical proof of their status EU citizens in the UK and Britons abroad may face discrimination due to a misperception about their residency rights."

"That is why it is essential that the EU and UK agree an EU Green Card scheme as soon as possible."

"Free movement is one of the greatest achievements of the EU - it is a tragedy that it will end for UK citizens on 31 October if Britain leaves the EU" **Roger Casale, former Labour MP and head of New Europeans**

Casale goes on, "In practice, ending free movement will have to take place step by step as new measures to regulate the movement of people between the UK and the EU are brought in."

"To claim otherwise is nothing more than political posturing. To implement such a policy would be hugely disruptive."

"To pass the legislation above the heads of parliamentarians would be draconian. We strongly oppose the Home Secretary's proposal and urge MPs to do the same."

On Monday, a UK Home Office spokesperson said: "The home secretary has been clear in her intention to take back control of our borders and end free movement after 31 October."

"Ending free movement means we are no longer required to give unlimited and uncontrolled access to those from EU countries when they are coming here seeking to work."

The next important episode in the Brexit saga will be later this week at the G7 summit in France on 24-26 August, when Johnson will meet several EU leaders, as well as US President Donald Trump. Whether Brexit will feature in any way on the agenda is uncertain, however.

About the author

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[Public order, justice and rights](#) [9]

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