

Carers and the potential impact of Brexit

Carers NI and Family Carers Ireland Briefing for Paul Brush, The Executive Office on the potential impact of Brexit on carers in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Context

The following is in response to a meeting held in NICVA on Thursday 27th April with Paul Brush from The Executive Office and Community and Voluntary sector representatives from the Joint Forum in Northern Ireland. At the meeting, several issues were discussed in relation to the potential impact of Brexit on citizens and the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland.

In the days and weeks after the EU referendum in the UK on the 23rd June 2016, Carers NI received a number of queries from carers and organisations supporting carers about potential impacts Brexit would have on distance carers who live/work on one side of the Northern Ireland - Republic of Ireland border but who care for loved ones on the other side of the border. Since then, the conversation around Brexit and caring has been bubbling quietly under the surface. At the afore-mentioned meeting with Paul Brush from The NI Executive Office, Carers NI offered to look into any potential impacts Brexit would have on carers here in Northern Ireland whilst also engaging with counterparts from the Republic of Ireland on the issue.

The summary report of the second plenary meeting of the All-island Civic Dialogue (http://www.merrionstreet.ie/en/EU-UK/Consultations/Second_Plenary_Report_FINAL.pdf) which took place in Dublin Castle on 17 February 2017 to discuss the impact of Brexit on the people of Ireland had little relevance to carers, however issues relating to social welfare and the reciprocal arrangements currently in place between Ireland and the UK are important to a cohort of carers who (i) either live or work across the border (ii). Receive welfare payments from the UK. The excerpt below (taken from the Compendium report http://www.merrionstreet.ie/en/EU-UK/Consultations/Dialogue_Report_on_Brexit_Compendium.pdf) provides a summary of the plenary session on 'Social Insurance, Social Welfare Rights and Entitlements and Social Welfare Pensions' hosted by the then Minister for Employment and Social Protection, Leo Varadkar TD.

Key Themes

- The key area of concern was the impact of Brexit on the current reciprocal arrangements for social insurance (which includes pensions) and social assistance (means tested schemes linked to residency rights) and child benefit between Ireland and the UK, including Northern Ireland; this included impacts on current rights and entitlements and concerns as to the possible erosion of rights accrued into the future.
- Concerns were also raised also with regard to the future direction of social welfare policy and the potential for dissonance with, on the one hand, Ireland moving forward as part of the EU27 and, on the other, having to negotiate and manage a relationship with the UK and Northern Ireland.
- Possibility of a hard border presents real and present hazards for people, impacting on the fabric and reality of daily life for cross-border and frontier workers, students, commuters and for families. Contributors evidenced current impacts with regard to, for example, living standards and the impact that currency fluctuations has had on British Retirement Pension recipients.
- Government focus must be on ensuring that these social welfare rights and entitlements, which currently exist for Irish and UK citizens moving within the Common Travel Area on the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain, can be safeguarded.
- The ‘interconnectedness of everything’ also presented opportunities across all of the different sectors but this will need strong Government-led communications, with clear and factual information provision the key. Opportunities exist to deepen existing alliances and build new ones given Ireland’s very good track record at EU level in the area of social policy and social security while preserving and developing our strong attachments to the UK; in addition, there is potential to attract more talent acknowledging the pressures that this could mean for social services generally.
- Calls for Government to be joined-up in its thinking and approach and to be very clear that the social dimension remains to the fore during the negotiations: Ireland should be advocating that there is explicit articulation of social rights, entitlements and responsibilities in any agreement with the UK.

Key Concerns raised by Carers:

At a roundtable, cross-border event organised by Family Carers Ireland during Carers Week on the 16th June 2017, carers both North and South were asked **How do you think Brexit will affect carers north and south of the border?** Over 100 carers took part in the discussion with their main concerns highlighted below.

Things to consider in relation to Health care:

- Brexit will affect the cross border health care arrangements (Cross Border Healthcare directive) that are currently in place and so may lead to patients not being able to access cross border treatments which will impact on waiting lists.

- Impact on people's ability to access healthcare across the border or in the UK. For people from Northern Ireland it will have an impact on whether they can access healthcare in other European countries.
- Impact on transplant patients where operations are carried out in the UK and on special blood tests that are sent to the UK for analysis.
- Possibility that care products and appliances will become more expensive if import duties are levied. For example many incontinent pads are manufactured in the UK.
- E11 form won't be accepted for UK citizens and travel insurance will be required after Brexit (this will also have a financial impact as it adds to the cost of short breaks or travel for healthcare for carers)
- European E11 medical card won't be applicable in Britain once Brexit is in place – what will carers from the Republic of Ireland do for medical cover if travelling to the UK?
- Will we be allowed to take medications across the border?

Things to consider in relation to Social care:

- In border areas home helps may suffer from restrictions (or delays) in their freedom of movement which will have a devastating impact on service delivery. This will add to the difficulties currently experienced in the recruitment of healthcare professionals on both sides of the border.
- UK residents who move to Ireland but need care – what is available to them?
- Who's paying for the care of a person in NI if they are being looked after by a person from the ROI?

Things to consider in relation to Welfare benefits

- Brexit will impact on carers living north or south of the border when their loved one lives across the border – how will this affect their access to Carers Allowance or access to information?
- Reciprocal arrangements between NI and ROI regarding health and welfare benefits e.g. cross border directive so we can access services on either side of the border.
- Impact on people caring across the border and the complications of claiming benefits, pensions etc.
- May affect carers access to social welfare payments due to the Habitual Residence Condition if the Common Travel Area is changed.

Things to consider in relation to Carers crossing the border

- Family members crossing the border to care may be held up at border control which could have a significant impact on individuals/those needing care but also to, for example, working carers who do not have the time to spare.

Things to consider in relation to Lobbying

- Irish government needs to be proactive not reactive in the Brexit negotiations and consult with the national carers organisations with regard to the issues that will impact on carers. FCI (Family Carers Ireland) and Carers NI need to be seen as a representative body linked to these discussions.
- Representative carer support organisations should lobby for the discussion on an all-Ireland basis.
- We need an all-Ireland Carers group lobbying together to ensure carers aren't adversely affected by Brexit.
- Protect healthcare north and south so carers can avail of services regardless of which side of the border they live.
- Will any European carer positive policies be adopted by NI/UK or considered e.g. work life balance policies?

Things to consider in relation to Passports and travel

- Issues relating to getting an Irish passport for carers in NI.
- Extortionate costs of getting a passport.
- Will the bus pass/free travel scheme still work cross-border? Several carers were concerned that if they were offered short breaks across the border would they have to pay additional travel costs once they reached the 'other side'.

Things to consider in relation to Other Issues:

- Fear of the unknown

Concluding points:

This feedback from carers does not claim to be totally representative of all the issues that could potentially face carers on both sides of the Border, it does provide a snapshot of the general feeling around the issue. Clearly concerns around the Cross-Border Healthcare Directive and reciprocal Social Welfare arrangements were of importance to many of the carers who attended the Cross-Border event. Just as important to them though were concerns around financial implications in relation to buying products (eg incontinence pads imported from the UK) for their loved ones or the breakdown in existing travel and insurance arrangements and the potential increase in costs for accessing short breaks either side of the Border.

Whilst neither Carers NI, nor Family Carers Ireland want to scaremonger or cause alarm in relation to Brexit, it is clear from initial discussions held with these carers that there are potentially further complications to consider, the outcomes of which remain unknown. We would call on governments on both sides of the Border to consider some of these issues as part of the wider discussion around Brexit in the coming months and years.

Both Family Carers Ireland and Carers NI would be keen to further support discussions with carers and government officials around this issue if appropriate.

Contact us

Clare-Anne Magee
General Manager, Carers NI

Tel: (028) 90439843 Email: clareanne.magee@carersni.org

Carers UK is a charity registered in England and Wales (246329) and in Scotland (SC039307) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (864097). Registered office 20 Great Dover Street, London, SE1 4LX.