

2.4 IMMIGRATION: OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

OVERVIEW

The UK has to make a decision about what immigration system it wants for EU citizens who would like to come to stay in the UK after Brexit. There are four basic options:

- We could maintain free movement of people as it exists today.
- We could keep the principle of free movement, but introduce some restrictions.
- We could end free movement, but still make it easier for people from EU countries to come to the UK than for people from outside the EU.
- We could end the favourable treatment of people from the EU, so that people from all countries must meet the same rules if they want to move to the UK.

Whichever option we choose will have implications for people from the UK who would like to move to a country in the EU. If we end free movement for EU citizens who want to move to the UK, the EU will almost certainly end free movement for UK citizens who want to move to the EU.

The rules for people who want to move to the UK from outside the EU could stay the same. But the UK might decide to change these rules as well after Brexit.

OPTIONS FOR IMMIGRATION FROM THE EU

Let's look in more detail at the four basic options listed above:

1. **Option 1: Keep free movement as it is now.** If we keep the current system, firms will still be able to recruit the most skilled people from across the EU and UK citizens will still be able to move freely to EU countries to work, study, or retire. But many people voted for Brexit in the referendum because they want immigration to be lower. Keeping free movement would not help to achieve that.
2. **Option 2. Keep the principle of free movement, but add restrictions.** If we decide to stay in the Single Market and the EU agrees to that, we will have to allow free movement of workers. But it may be possible after Brexit to add some extra limits compared to now. We could require people to have a job offer before they come to the UK. We could create an 'emergency brake' to restrict immigration if it gets too high and puts too much pressure on the UK economy and society.
3. **Option 3. End free movement but continue to give people from the EU preferential access.** If we leave the Single Market, we will be able to end free movement. But we might decide we still want to make it easier for people from the EU to come to live and work in the UK than for people

from outside the EU. We could do this by requiring visas, but making it easier for EU nationals to get a visa than for non-EU nationals.

4. **Option 4. End favourable treatment of people coming to the UK from the EU.** If we take this option, people from the EU will be treated in the same way as people from any other country. They will need to apply for a visa and meet the same requirements.

How will UK citizens be affected?

The options above relate to immigration of EU citizens who want to come to the UK. The UK can decide what immigration rules it wants after Brexit. But the decisions we make have implications for UK citizens who might want to move to the EU. At the moment, UK citizens have the right to move to any EU country. The more we restrict immigration to the UK, the more EU countries are likely to restrict free movement for UK citizens too.

A note on Ireland

The UK has a special relationship with the Republic of Ireland that dates back to before we joined the EU. There is a 'Common Travel Area' between the two countries, which means that Irish citizens can come to live and work in the UK and UK citizens can do the same in Ireland. The UK and Irish governments have both said that they want this to continue after Brexit. So any restrictions on immigration from EU countries are not expected to apply to Ireland.

A note on short visits

The options above relate to the immigration system for people who want to come to live in the UK for more than a few months. Short visits for things like holidays or business trips are different.

At the moment, the UK allows people from some countries outside the EU – including the USA, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, and Australia – to come to the UK for up to six months without a visa. After Brexit, whatever we decide about immigration, we are likely to apply the same rules to people visiting from EU countries.

OPTIONS FOR IMMIGRATION FROM OUTSIDE THE EU

The UK already controls its own immigration rules for people who want to come here from outside the EU. We won't need to change these rules because of Brexit. But we could change them if we want to.

- Some people think immigration is good for the UK, but don't think we should favour immigrants from the EU. They think we should have the same rules for everyone. That would mean it would be harder than now for people from EU countries to move here, but easier than now for people from countries outside the EU. These people often also think we should have new schemes allowing unskilled workers into the UK to fill gaps in the workforce.
- Other people want immigration numbers to go down. They think we should keep the current rules on immigration from outside the EU. Some would prefer even tighter rules than we have today, though most economists think that would harm the economy.