

LEAVING THE EU: THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF FAITH COMMUNITIES AT A TIME OF TRANSITION

Introduction

Faith communities play a vital role in the lives of their members and also more widely within society. This is perhaps particularly the case at times of significant transition.

The Faith Communities Forum (FCF) of the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) (www.interfaith.org.uk) brings together national faith community representative bodies in IFN's membership. At a recent meeting it discussed faith communities and Brexit. It also discussed the pressing need for respectful modes of discourse that can bridge rather than divide.

This short note has been developed by the office of IFN in the light of discussion at the FCF and also of subsequent correspondence with the national faith community member bodies of IFN about Brexit. It highlights faith communities' trusted role in signposting information and as providers of community support and their vital work to unite communities, promote good relations and tackle hatred.

This is not a Government briefing. However, it has benefitted from information helpfully provided by officials of the Department for Exiting the European Union (DEEU) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). IFN is grateful to them for this and for their presentations to the meeting of FCF mentioned above.

Please note that information may be subject to change and it is important also to consult the main Government guidance on preparing for exit which can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/brexit>

31 October 2019

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1. Faith communities - trusted sources of information and community support

Information

Congregation members and other local residents may seek information about particular practicalities linked to Brexit, for example about living and working in the UK and travel. Links to up-to-date information can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/brexit>. A note on some relevant areas is at Annex A.

Support

The Government has said that it does not anticipate that leaving the EU – whether or not with a deal and regardless of date of departure – will bring shortages of supplies of food or medication and is working to ensure that these will not occur.

At a time of change, with some developments which will be affected by factors that are hard to predict, faith communities will naturally be engaging in contingency planning so as to be as helpful as they can be in a range of circumstances.

Where shortages of essentials occur – whether linked to Brexit or for any other reason - the most vulnerable people in society are likely to experience particular challenges. The support and advice that faith communities offer to their members and their local communities is very important – as is coordinating with other local faith and civil society bodies that provide services to the community to ensure that service users can be signposted to the most relevant sources of support, irrespective of where they first make contact.

Some examples of Brexit guidance and briefing produced in this context by national faith community bodies are: The Salvation Army's 'Brexit Toolkit' http://www.scpo.scot/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SA_Brexit_Solutions_Toolkit.pdf and guidance of the Board of Deputies of British Jews: <https://www.bod.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Brexit-Booklet-v10-updated.pdf> The approach and content differ.

There have also been some resources produced from a multi faith context. See for example: <https://bfn.org/brexit/>

Note: IFN is not responsible for content of documents or websites to which links are provided in this document.

2. Faith communities working for community unity, promoting good relations and tackling hatred

After the EU Referendum there was a spike in hate crimes, and across recent times there has also been an increasingly aggressive tone in some public discourse and online.

During and after Brexit, faith communities have a very important role to play in encouraging respectful and positive dialogue and positive relationships - even where people have profound disagreement - and counteracting prejudice and hatred.

8 possible actions for faith leaders.

1. Include in sermons and talks regular reflections on the importance of finding ways to disagree respectfully and to seek to find common ground, as well as encouragement to reach out to and support those who may be affected by prejudice and hatred.
2. Create and encourage the use of special prayers (see, for example, <https://ctbi.org.uk/brexit-and-the-churches-call-for-national-days-of-prayer/>)
3. Model and inspire good relations through being seen to engage positively and with common cause with members of other faith communities.
4. Encourage members to get involved with their local inter faith body and to work together with those of other backgrounds for good relations and to stand up against hatred. Details of local groups can be found at: <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/involved/groups> and a useful resource is <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/looking-after-one-another-the-safety-and-security-of-our-faith-communities-2017>
5. Find out from your local authority what other local initiatives may be working to bridge divides and encourage your members to become involved in these.
6. Encourage your members to report any suspected hate crime to their local police, through the on-line reporting site True Vision <http://www.report-it.org.uk/home>, or through third party routes such as <https://cst.org.uk/> and <https://tellmamauk.org>.
7. Be aware that children may suffer increased bullying relating to their religious and/ or ethnic identity at this time. Encourage members to find out about resources such as <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/types-bullying/faith-religious-bullying/>
8. Encourage your member organisations to work to ensure that their places of worship are as secure as possible. Useful links include:
 - Secured by Design www.securedbydesign.com/contact-us/national-network-of-designing-out-crime-officers
 - NaCTSO crowded places guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crowded-places-guidance>
 - Community Security Trust www.cst.org.uk
 - Faith Associates www.faithassociates.co.uk
 - Strengthening Faith Institutions www.sfitogether.org

The above possible actions draw on the work of faith communities and aim to share good practice:

Living and working in the UK

On 23 June 2016 a referendum took place where a majority of voters voted for the UK to leave the European Union. The UK was originally scheduled to leave the EU on 29 March 2019. The exact date of leaving has not at this time been agreed. Until such time that the extension ends nothing will change in the relationship between the rights of UK citizens and the rights of EU citizens in relation to residency, the right to work and freedom of movement.

This section provides links that may be helpful to communities seeking to support their members and other people locally on matters relating to right to live and work in the UK following such time as Britain exits the European Union. Please note that information may be subject to change and it is important also to consult the main Government guidance on preparing for exit which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/brexit>

Faith communities are not 'civil society' organisations in the general sense. However, there is useful basic information at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/five-ways-civil-society-organisations-can-prepare-for-eu-exit>

a) Immigration and the right to remain after EU Exit

Faith communities all have some members whose status as residents of the UK is affected by EU exit. Basic information about the right to remain and immigration rights is set out below and links are given to more detailed information.

i) Citizens of other EU nations, EEA and Swiss citizens

Citizens of other EU nations or those within the EEA (European Economic Area) or citizens of Switzerland who wish to remain in the UK after Exit and do not already have British citizenship or 'settled' or 'pre-settled status' need to apply for the latter by 30 June 2021, or 31 December 2020 if the UK leaves the EU without a deal. This process is free. For details see: <https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families/applying-for-settled-status>

Irish citizens in the UK will be treated as if they have permanent immigration permission to remain in the UK. They do not need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme but may do so if they wish.

Those who already have settled status can apply for citizenship of the UK. The deadline for this 30 June 2021, or 31 December 2020 if the UK leaves the EU without a deal. The details for application can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-citizenship-eea>

ii) Citizens of Commonwealth countries

Under certain circumstance citizens of Commonwealth Countries have the right of residence in the UK. For details see: <https://www.gov.uk/browse/visas-immigration/eu-eea-commonwealth>

iii) Applications for immigration to the UK after EU Exit

When the UK leaves the EU it will implement a points based immigration system. Further information is at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-future-skills-based-immigration-system> Until the UK leaves, the current rules will apply.

b) Travel from the UK to the EU

i) Travel within the EU

To visit Europe after Brexit there are a number of steps that will need taking, including: checking that all travellers' passports have at least 6 months left at the date of travel and that the passports are less than 10 years old (these conditions are not necessary for travel to Ireland where a valid passport is all that is required); obtaining travel insurance which covers travellers' healthcare; and checking that travellers wishing to drive have the right driving documents. Full details on requirements can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/visit-europe-brexit>

ii) The 'Common Travel Area'

The Common Travel Area (CTA) is a long-standing arrangement between the UK, the Crown Dependencies (Bailiwick of Jersey; Bailiwick of Guernsey; Isle of Man) and Ireland.

British and Irish citizens enjoy additional rights in Ireland and the UK. These include the right to work, study and vote in certain elections, as well as to access social welfare benefits and health services. British citizens and Irish citizens do not need to take any action to protect their status and rights associated with the CTA.

UK citizens and those with settled or pre-settled status or with a permanent residence document can freely travel in the CTA which includes the UK, Jersey, Guernsey, the Isle of Man and Ireland:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-travel-area-guidance>

The Common Travel Area, as can be seen from the link above, allows British and Irish citizens to:

- work in either country without the need for permission
- access all levels of education
- access social security benefits
- access health care
- access social housing, supported housing and homeless assistance
- register to vote in elections

As noted at (i) above, Irish citizens do not need to apply for the Settled Status Scheme, but may wish to do so.

c) Working in the EU, EEA and Switzerland

i) Working in the EU and the EEA

When the UK leaves the EU:

- For people currently working in the EU or EEA nothing will change immediately. Changes will come over time. See: <https://www.gov.uk/uk-nationals-living-eu>.
- People applying to work in EU and EEA nations will need to do so through the channel for the relevant nation(s).

Note that qualifications gained in the UK will not necessarily be recognised by individual EU nations or EEA nations.

Note that when the UK leaves the EU it will not automatically follow that the qualifications of a person accepted in an EU or EEA nation will be accepted in the UK.

ii) Working in Switzerland

When the UK leaves the EU:

- UK citizens will be able to work in Switzerland as a result of an already agreed reciprocal arrangement.

Please note that additional information may be released across the coming period.

You can sign up for regular updates from DExEU at: <https://www.gov.uk/email-signup/?topic=/brexit>

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