
EUROPEANS IN UK FEAR BREXIT

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Millions of Europeans living in the United Kingdom are experiencing uncertainty due to its decision to leave the EU. EURACTIV Czech Republics partner Aktuálně reports.

There are no official figures, but according to estimates, there are almost three and a half million EU citizens currently residing in the UK. Two million of them work there, while others are retired, are looking for work, or are students. The question now is whether they will lose their rights so far guaranteed by the EU after Brexit.

Discrimination on grounds of nationality

It is crucial that the people who lived there before Brexit continue to have their rights. These include the right to work there or to continue to be part of the local social security system, says the Czech Komunistická MEP Kateřina Konečná (GUE/NGL).

Travelling to work in another member state of the Union is one of the cornerstones of European integration. However, EU citizens are also entitled to the same working conditions, such as maximum weekly working time, minimum wage, paid holiday, protection against discrimination, etc. All this could be newly regulated by the UK itself. Rejecting a job applicant solely on the basis of his or her nationality might no longer be a problem for UK employers.

In the worst case, there is a risk that people from EU countries will no longer have free access to the British labour market, they will be limited by restrictions, and the ability to get a job in the UK will be significantly more complicated, believes Czech KDU-ČSL lawmaker Tomáš Zdechovský (EPP).

Hospitality industry to collapse without immigrants

According to ANO 2011 MEP Martina Dlabajová (ALDE), there is a good chance that those who are already working in the UK will not lose their rights. Prime Minister May has already declared that there will be restrictions on immigration to the UK, but the rights of those who came to its territory before the launch of Brexit will be maintained, she said.

It is mainly the local hospitality industry that depends on the work of immigrants in the UK. The British Hospitality Association stated some time ago that if the government did not allow EU workers to keep their jobs, it might take up to ten years to fully replace the employees, added the Czech legislator.

However, it is not just about work. EU citizenship also provides benefits such as participation in the pension system, the right to vote in local elections, the opportunity to study or to take out insurance or mortgages. There are already cases where British banks refuse to provide foreign citizens with a mortgage because they do not know what rules they will have to abide by in the future.

The future is unclear and open

There are currently hundreds of pages of analysis in the European Parliament, bringing lists of rights and laws and other regulations that will be affected by Brexit, says Konečná.

For Dlabajová, probably the best current way to secure their savings is to obtain British citizenship. The right to citizenship can be exercised by people who have lived in the UK for at least 5 years. For many of them this is now the only way to secure their investments and savings, she said.

What the future will look like for foreigners living in the UK and for those preparing to go to the British Isles will not be clear until after the negotiation of the relevant agreements. Officially, everything should be negotiated within two years, but it is possible that this period will be extended. The situation now is really unclear and open, added Dlabajová.

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