



Fforwm Cymdeithas Sifil Cymru ar Brexit

Wales Civil Society Forum on Brexit

EVENT SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Forum hosted its second event on 24 July 2018 which saw representatives from around 30 organisations come together to discuss the implications of Brexit for the Welsh Third Sector. Three brief presentations were given:

- Glynne Jones, director of the office of the Secretary of State for Wales spoke about the UK Government's recent Brexit work.
- Swee Leng Harris of the Legal Education Foundation provided an overview of what to expect next on the Brexit timeline.
- Ruth Bergan of the Trade Justice Movement, spoke about the implications of the Trade Bill.

This was followed by a Q&A and a brief discussion on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund led by Phil Fiander from WCVA. Finally, the event saw delegates participate in a series of three breakout sessions on the topics of Brexit's impact on: Immigration and Migrant Communities, the Environment and Animal Welfare, and Human Rights and Equality.

Below is a summary of the discussions that took place. A complete event briefing can be [downloaded here](#).

[Brexit Legislation and Timeline](#)

- A definitive timeline for Brexit is difficult to establish due to the uncertainty of reaching a deal with the EU in October.
- Key upcoming moments include the motion in both Houses of Parliament to approve the Withdrawal Agreement, and the subsequent Withdrawal Agreement Bill.
- There are still opportunities for influence through MEP's, MP's, the Welsh Government and upcoming consultations.
- The Trade Bill and future UK trade policy raise several concerns in terms of potential lowering of standards, democratic process, transparency, and the UK's constitutional architecture with regard to devolved input into negotiations.
- There is little in the way of new information on replacing EU funding for the sector, the stakes are high however and there is still little formal dialogue between the Welsh and UK

Governments on this. There has since been an [early day motion on this topic](#) and a [written statement on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) shortly thereafter.

- The Welsh Government and third sector are seeking a partnership model for third sector funding based on need, but the lack of commitment by the UK Government to this is alarming the sector.

Human rights and Equalities

- Organisations argued that Brexit has heightened social cohesion issues characterised by discriminatory behaviours directed towards vulnerable minorities.
- Organisations remain highly concerned by the risks Brexit poses to Human Rights and Equality despite UK Government reassurances. They highlighted the need to remain cautious and proactive in identifying gaps.
- There was a call for further research to produce hard evidence of Brexit's impact in this area.
- Doubt was expressed as to whether the Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act (WBFGA) was a suitable framework to respond to the challenges of Brexit, despite the Welsh Government's position on this. It was acknowledged however that there is some disagreement within the third sector on the WBFGA.
- Organisations identified a need for information on possible responses in Wales to mitigate the negative impacts of Brexit, especially where legislation might be used.

Immigration and Migrant Communities

- The settled status scheme carries risks for groups of vulnerable individuals including: victims of trafficking, homelessness, labour exploitation, domestic abuse, as well as disabled individuals, children who are incorrectly thought to hold British nationality, and generally people who may be impacted by social exclusion.
- Concerns were raised regarding evidence requirements as some individuals may not have access to their documents, and it is uncertain how others may be required to evidence their vulnerable status.
- Significant attention was given to the immensity of the outreach operation that will need to accompany the settled status scheme.
- Participants reflected on third sector involvement in this operation and noted several challenges including: a lack of capacity with significantly more resources, the need for OISC registration to deliver advice and the fine line between this and the provision of information, access challenges even for third sector organisations and the lack of organisations in some parts of Wales.
- Participants also noted that Brexit has already shown signs of triggering an exodus of EU citizens within the workforce and reducing their influx. This creates sustainability risks for certain sectors, particularly, manufacturing, hospitality and health and social care.
- It was noted that future post-Brexit immigration policy would need to be designed to ensure that this problem is not aggravated, but that systems of temporary or seasonal visas risk reducing social cohesion and come with an enhanced danger of labour exploitation.

Environmental and Animal Welfare Rights

- Participants discussed using current regulatory standards as the baseline for post-Brexit policy to avoid both pressure on Wales to not implement higher environmental standards and the risk of deregulation.
- Concern was expressed about the Trade Bill and the need for amendments in the House of Lords to ensure that it does not negatively impact on environmental standards by triggering a 'race to the bottom'
- On the topic of post-Brexit governance, participants took the view that the suggested 'watchdog' does not have enough powers to ensure the same level of protection as that provided by EU. It was therefore felt that there is a risk of gaps emerging, particularly in compliance and enforcement.
- Finally, participants argued that there has been a lack of transparency and communication from the Welsh and UK Governments on how these issues will be addressed going forward under the intergovernmental agreement. Participants were surprised by the lack of momentum on these issues from the Welsh Government on topics such as where future policy and governance responsibilities would lie and how these would be codeveloped into the common frameworks.