



Media Release

Embargoed until 00.01 Thursday 8 Feb 2018

Third sector says UK must stay in single market and customs union

A **joint statement issued today*** by the national third sector bodies of devolved nations Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales details various measures they feel are essential to avoid or minimise the potential harmful impacts of Brexit.

The key recommendation from Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) is for the UK to remain in the Single Market and Customs Union, as well as other suggested measures such as sufficient transition period and no regression on rights and protections.

Third sector organisations across the UK and Ireland have serious concerns that leaving the European Union will exacerbate already difficult circumstances for charity and voluntary organisations - and the individuals and communities they seek to empower.

Representative bodies from across the devolved nations of the UK, along with colleagues in Ireland, have unique perspectives on EU withdrawal, the processes involved and future arrangements, which has led to the publication of the **joint statement***.

Lucy McTernan, Acting Chief Executive of SCVO, said: “Many of the people third sector organisations represent fear a weakening of the rights and protections they currently enjoy as EU citizens and worry their voices will not be heard in negotiations. We believe that the UK needs to stay in both the single market and the customs union, to keep the economy strong, ensure free movement of people, secure important funding, maintain hard won rights and allow us to continue building partnerships and learning from our friends and colleagues across the continent.”

Seamus McAleavey, Chief Executive of NICVA said: “This crucial next phase of the Brexit negotiations will have major implications for the lives of everyone in Northern Ireland and the over 30,000 people who cross the border daily to work, study, do business, and access health and other services. It is vital that solutions are found to ensure no hardening of borders on the island or with Great Britain and which do not undermine the peace, stability and co-operation brought about by the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts.”

Ruth Marks, Chief Executive of WCVA said: “Once the UK officially leaves the EU, it is important that principles are adhered to so as to preserve the rights and opportunities for learning and working abroad to which we are accustomed, as well as access to the single market, and funding to enable the UK to keep pace with developments in our neighbouring countries. Whilst each devolved nation will have its own domestic concerns over Brexit, it is important that we work together as a sector to better engage with and positively influence the crucial debates that lie ahead.”





***The statement is detailed below.**

Devolved Nations - Third Sector National Representative Bodies' Joint Statement on Brexit

The implications for devolution from Brexit are deep and wide-ranging. The outcomes of the current Brexit negotiations could have profound and potentially harmful impacts upon the third sector and on the wider society it serves in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As a consequence the National Representative Bodies for the Third Sector in the devolved nations believe the following measures are essential to avoid or minimise potential harmful impacts:

For the UK to Remain in the Single Market and Customs Union

By taking the decision to remain in the European Union Single Market and Customs Union, the UK will continue close regulatory alignment with the Republic of Ireland and prevent the need for a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland or between the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland and Great Britain. We believe that this outcome is vitally important for protecting the peace process and preventing the major economic and social impacts for people and businesses that would be presented by the creation of a hard border.

A Sufficient Transition Period

Figuring out what comes next will be incredibly complex and putting new processes and arrangements in place will need time. We call for a sufficient transition period, in order to minimise confusion and uncertainty. The Government should avoid arbitrary deadlines and prioritise getting it right in a smooth and orderly transition period. This may need to go beyond the government's stated aim of 24 months.

Ensure Transparency and Scrutiny

With so much of our daily lives closely linked to the EU, its institutions and regulations, there is a need to ensure decisions that affect us are made in an open, participative, democratic and transparent way. As part of this process, we believe that civil society must have a stronger voice and an active role in shaping decisions and informing debate.

No Regression on Rights and Protections post Brexit

We want the UK to maintain the highest possible standards in terms of human and environmental rights. EU regulations and legislation underpins many protections for workers, volunteers and service users. These rights must be protected. Many of these rights such as habitat and species protections, workplace rights and gender equality were driven by civil society. We must build on this and have no regression on current rights post Brexit. Nor do we wish the UK to remain 'frozen in time'. It must continue to enhance and adopt high standards of rights and protections.





Funding

Funds repatriated from the EU must continue to be ring-fenced for the key social policy themes such as social cohesion, combating poverty, social inclusion, rural community-led development, employability and the environment. Funding should be distributed based on need and respect the devolved nations. New funding streams should continue to follow long term cycles and be designed and delivered in true partnership with civil society organisations. There should be a UK-wide process, with full participation across the devolved nations, reviewing the financial and policy implications of the withdrawal, post 2020, of current levels and types of Structural Funds support across the UK and an equally inclusive process of assessing need and designing appropriate local, regional and devolved national domestic UK social, economic and environmental funding programmes.

Maintain EU Connections for UK Civil Society

The European Union is much, much more than a free trade area for civil society. There is a fundamental desire for, and are benefits from, close co-operation between European civil society. The UK Government needs to ensure that civil society's European connections and networks are underpinned by the right support mechanisms and investment if they are serious about no regression and addressing societal challenges in an increasingly interconnected and uncertain world. Fundamentally, civil society is an exporter of participative democracy. This extends from neighbourhoods to the global stage, where citizens can fully participate in and influence decisions that affect the world around them. Brexit must not diminish our European engagement and connections.

ENDS

For more information please contact Catrin Davies or Lynne Reynolds
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Notes to editors:

- WCVA is the national membership organisation for the third sector in Wales. Our vision is for the third sector and volunteering to thrive and improve well-being for all. We achieve this by influencing, connecting, and enabling.
- The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) is the national infrastructure body for the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.
- The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) is the national body





representing the interests of charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises in Scotland



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