

NI ROAD workshops Summary

Summary of key issues at three workshops held in February/March 2019.

First workshop was held in Cullyhanna Women's Group Co Armagh 06.02.19. Cullyhanna is a small village 2 miles from the border. 16 women attended.

Second workshop was held in Building Communities Resource Centre in Ballymoney Co. Antrim 14.02.19. Mixture of people from small towns and open countryside. 3 people in attendance from EU27 countries.

Third workshop was held in Cookstown Co Tyrone with Rural Community Network board members. Cross section of people involved in rural development from across rural Northern Ireland.

Maintaining links with Europe post Brexit

1. Links we would like to maintain with Europe

Cullyhanna

Essential that we retain links to Europe post Brexit. EU has brought investment in communities and in infrastructure. It has given communities and citizens a more global outlook and we are more outward looking as a region. We don't want to go back to a more inward looking region we have better quality of life now.

This isn't about going on holidays or travel for us – if it's a hard Brexit then "Europe" is two miles away across the Border (border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland) and it will impact so many aspects of our day to day lives. Lots of us have family connections, brothers, sisters, aunt, uncles etc. living on the other side of the Border. We don't want a hard border which makes it more difficult to visit our family. Lots of people in this area have their childcare provider on the other side of the Border – several nurseries and childcare providers in Castleblayney in Co Monaghan. This is reality of life for parents/grandparents (mainly mothers) they cross the border up to 4 times a day just to do childcare drop offs and pick-ups.

Our out of hours health service is in Castleblayney and we access acute services in Dundalk. Many times ambulances from the South answer emergencies in the North. As yet we have no indication as to how these services will be affected by a hard or no Deal Brexit. Even in the event of a deal or soft Brexit people are unsure if this type of cross border sharing of health services and resources can continue. Consultants work through different clinics North & South and that was facilitated through CAWT partnership between Health Service Executive (in the South) and Health & Social Care Board in the North have been working to deliver more integrated health services across border communities and has received considerable EU funding through INTERREG. Specialist cardiac services for all children on the island of Ireland are only provided in Dublin on an all island basis.

This is all inter-connected so many of these issues will impact in lives of women in the border region.

We want to ensure our children and grandchildren can continue to learn across Europe but particularly across the Border – many travel across the border for school or third level education. Dundalk Institute of Technology only 10 miles away and Dublin universities only 60 miles away. Educational links with wider Europe also important – brings knowledge/skills and experience – young people can study right across the EU in different countries which is very important in terms of cultural exchange.

We need to retain free movement of labour across the border – so many of our people work in the South and lots of people come from the South into the North for work.

Important that ease of travel to other parts of (continental) Europe is maintained post Brexit to enable us to learn from other European countries.

Research – lots of valuable research being done across a whole range of areas – especially in relation to mental health and well-being – we need to learn from that – our universities also benefitting from EU research funding and that creates new knowledge and in some cases new products/services/jobs.

Serious concerns expressed over what will replace single farm payment and importance of subsidy to support small farmers. Import and export charges on food and produce could have devastating effects – need to ensure any agreement supports jobs in the food industry on both sides of the Border and those jobs need to be protected.

General concern expressed about potential consequences on businesses of a no deal Brexit and a hard Border – businesses already under pressure and banks and other retail businesses closing in villages and smaller towns.

Concern over loss of EU funding to NGOs – impact on services, social isolation and most vulnerable people if more community/voluntary groups close.

Belfast and NI developing a reputation for creative industries and film & TV industry – based on Game of Thrones and a few other TV series and films. This seems to be a growth area that may be unaffected by Brexit.

What will the effects be on tourism? If European or other international visitors come to Ireland will they travel North post Brexit if it becomes more difficult to cross the border – will that reduce the number of visitors?

Will collaboration between NGOs become more difficult post Brexit? – North South co-operation between government departments may become more difficult to do – departments tend to operate in silos.

A German citizen expressed her concerns that despite living here for 40 years she would have to apply for settled status to remain and the position of EU 27 citizens in the UK hasn't been given much consideration – they have no influence and no one seems to be speaking up for them.

People agreed that they wanted the EU to protect the Good Friday Agreement – seems to have very little priority at Westminster. Vitally important that the peace process is not disrupted.

Will we need car insurance green card post Brexit – to show our cars are insured – how will that work and will it cost? We all travel over the border on an almost daily basis.

How will Brexit affect mobile phone roaming charges (which were a considerable expense for Border citizens until recently abolished by the EU).

Ballymoney

EU funding has been really important in the development of community/voluntary sector – Peace programmes & in Rural Development funding for rural communities. Erasmus also very important for young people and exchange of ideas/knowledge.

Concern on impact of No deal Brexit on the NI block grant – continued austerity and further cuts in public spending with knock on impacts on public services.

Farming is also very dependent on trade. Farmers here buy potato seed in Holland – its already difficult to import into NI due to paperwork required by our own Department of Agriculture and the concern is this will be harder outside the EU. Our concern is that we won't be able to grow the crop our buyers want without Dutch seed potato which has been developed to grow at this latitude and for relatively cold/wet soils.

Dairy farming is a cross border trade with milk moving both ways over the border from farms to processors and then back to shops/supermarkets for purchase by consumers. Livestock and meat trade also potentially will be seriously affected by a no deal Brexit if tariffs are introduced. Big frustration at the moment amongst farmers about the lack of direction/information from government as to what will happen post Brexit.

Farm support/subsidy – we have a large number of very small farms in NI and its vital we retain those farms – that won't happen without some type of subsidy but as yet unclear what future agriculture/environment policy will look like.

Lamb production in NI will be wiped out if no deal due to the high tariffs imposed on exports into the EU.

Food prices likely to rise in the event of no deal - impact on the poorest households and on food poverty and we already see a rise in food banks due to welfare reform impacts. People fear potential of rationing of some foodstuffs in most extreme scenario.

Peace funding from EU has been really important in NI and the Border counties. UK government would never have committed to that type of programme – the EU was crucial in making it happen and it helped bed down the peace.

The impact on community relations in NI of Brexit and its out-workings wasn't considered at all during the referendum and there is a huge level of ignorance amongst MPs of the issues surrounding the Good Friday Agreement, citizenship and how Brexit will impact in Northern

Ireland. Participants expressed their view that there was a widespread ignorance of NI issues amongst the majority of British people.

Point was made that it is contradictory for the UK to try and maintain links with the EU whilst trying to leave it – contradictory message for European partner countries. Impossible to satisfy Brexiteers and Remainers and all shades of opinion in between.

Travel is an area of concern as people are unclear how it will work post Brexit. Cross border travel in Ireland is important for family networks, and for employment with people moving both ways across the border in the North West.

Corrymeela (NI peace building charity) employs volunteers/interns from across EU in their peace building work – especially in summer time and it's unclear how Brexit will affect this type of arrangement. Volunteers from other parts of the world must apply for visas and work permits where required.

Potential negative impact on the economy and businesses if EU migration is severely restricted. Very unsettling time for EU 27 citizens who are resident in the UK currently – settled status application process has been established but unclear how this will work in practice and whether or not all applications will be successful.

Were we better off before we joined the EU? – people old enough to remember NI before EU membership said no. One participant stated that Malta applied to enter the EU in mid 1990s and a referendum rejected the proposal. Within 12 months the referendum was re-run and Malta entered. Malta found it incredibly hard to negotiate trade deals with larger partners when they found out the electorate had voted against joining the EU.

Cookstown

EU environmental designations have been important in protecting the environment. We need to retain some link to these designations post Brexit to cover environmental sites/assets in rural areas that straddle the Border. Example of Slieve Beagh ASSI an area of raised blanket bog and home to the endangered hen harrier. 1/3rd in the Republic of Ireland and 2/3rd in Northern Ireland. Wider point on Environmental policy and how we ensure we don't fall behind EU environmental policy post Brexit.

Ensure learning from rural development is maintained post Brexit. Rural development networks need to stay connected post Brexit whatever the policy and delivery structures look like. EU Peace and Reconciliation Funding in NI has developed links with groups on both sides of the Border in NI and those need to be maintained – not just about funding – relationships need to be maintained.

Ideally it would be important to retain ability of young people to continue to access third level education in any part of the EU. Crucial for developing young people and opening their minds to benefits of EU citizenship.

Reciprocal arrangements on health care and health provision important to retain. Enables waiting lists to be addressed for EU citizens where there are delays in treatment in their home countries due to skills shortages.

Need to retain links or at least a watching brief on what's happening with EU institutions; the European Parliament, the Commission and the Committees to be aware of evolving EU Rural development and farming/food/environmental policies. Especially important for NI who will share the only land border between the UK and the EU post Brexit. We need to try and align any future UK rural development policy with EU Rural development policy or at least ensure there are co-operation strands in both to enable rural networks to continue to work together after Brexit.

Also need to think about how we keep an eye on rural policy in EU and, if feasible, input into that.

Will NI Executive office in the EU be maintained after Brexit – suggested that is should?

2. Why is it important to maintain links with Europe post Brexit?

Vital to maintain links with Europe. Without these links we are far too parochial/insular in our thinking. We need to be proactive though and try to influence policy rather than be passive after Brexit. Examples given of EU targets set on recycling, water quality, nutrient management on farms etc. which originated in the EU and which has helped improve the environment.

Rights based appeal structure – access to that has been important for NGOs here progressing social or environmental justice. That will end with Brexit but still important to use EU jurisprudence to try and influence law and rights in the UK post Brexit. Concern raised about issues in relation to NI victims of the Troubles and their rights – need access to justice beyond the UK parliament. Not an impartial arbiter on Troubles legacy issues – EU provided that.

Concern expressed about the direction of EU policy and their longer term focus on Smart Cities and cities as the future engines of economic growth. Climate change mitigation and food production still essential public goods that need policy direction and intervention in rural development/rural communities. Need to work with European rural NGOs to counter this narrative in the EU.

Will NGOs/sole traders from here be able to access EU tender opportunities post Brexit? Particularly important in regard to the insights practitioners from NI can offer to other EU regions in relation to peace building and reconciliation work.

Issue raised in relation to Irish citizens born in NI who are now being told by the Home Office they are considered “British” citizens in contravention of the Good Friday Agreement commitments on the right of people in NI to identify as British, Irish or both.

UK government has already indicated that they are seeking to unpick human rights protections derived from the EU in the coming years post Brexit. Need to ensure we link with EU to lobby and force government in NI (if it returns) to find ways to maintain rights protections due to special circumstances of NI.

Transnational partnerships have the potential to be transformative

3. How do we maintain links with Europe post Brexit?

Cullyhanna

Another referendum?

Some people thought the vote would be different if the referendum was re-run as people are now much more aware of what might be at stake.

People also expressed confusion and said that it was very difficult to follow all the twists and turns of the negotiations and the intricacies of the issues.

One participant with extended family in England said that the view of people in that area, the majority of whom voted to leave, was that the EU was dictating many aspects of their life and that's why a majority voted no. Whether that was true is another matter but that was one of the key motivations for people in that area. Others stated their view that much of this was whipped up by the anti-EU media.

Suggested that organisations/groups develop links to the Dail (Republic of Ireland Parliament) and Southern political parties – as it has been very difficult for views of people who wanted to Remain in NI (majority Remain region) to get concerns across in the Westminster debates. The group was divided as to whether this could have any effect beyond sharing information. Decisions in NI can't be taken by Southern politicians who have no mandate here. The absence of a functioning Assembly here is very damaging in the run up to Brexit. There is no forum where the details of Brexit can be analysed as to what they might mean for citizens and businesses. The views of DUP MPs at Westminster are not representative of the range of views in NI which has a Remain majority.

Ballymoney

Globalisation can't be reversed – no nation can function by themselves – the global links that nations and economies have developed can't be cut. They need to be managed far better to tackle inequality but trade links are vital to maintain post Brexit. How we do it is another set of problems. NI example of Bombardier and its link with Airbus (who bought the company last year). If Brexit disrupts this relationship 3500 well paid manufacturing jobs are at risk with thousands more at risk in the Bombardier supply chain.

Erasmus – important that we retain links with European education for young people. We need to retain that exchange of information, knowledge and experience – fear is if we don't we will become even more insular as a society.

Brexit impact on Rights – lots of human rights, women's & employment rights that we enjoy in NI are based on/derived from EU law – concern was voiced that these will be eroded and we will regress. Concern expressed that Brexit will lead to more government centralisation to Westminster with a negative impact on rights.

Individuals also need to take responsibility in NI – who do we vote for and do we have enough understanding of the logical outcomes of political parties various positions.

If you believe in democracy and we vote the wrong people into power everyone is left to face the consequences.

We need to maintain cross border links on the island of Ireland – we have to maintain links as peace is a paramount consideration.

Cookstown

European Rural Parliament (ERP) is probably more important after Brexit for NGOs to maintain links with peers in Europe. Positive that ERP is broader than EU membership and includes European countries in the Balkans – we will have the same status vis-a-vis the EU post Brexit. ERP needs to consider how it can use its influence more with the EU institutions to shape policy for benefit of rural Europe.

Some participants argued that a case for Special Status for NI post Brexit be made to the EU and Westminster. This would be politically contentious in NI but UK government is slowly recognising that special circumstances apply here (hence the EU insistence on a backstop to prevent a hard Border on island of Ireland).

Suggested that we consider lobbying EU to allow NGOs and academic institutions to participate in some EU programmes. Example given of the EU Northern Peripheries Programme which includes non-EU member states.

NGOs here need to identify and evidence the difficulties/challenges for rural citizens post Brexit and lobby for programmes/funding to address these challenges in a positive way. Point was made that lots of farmers here voted to Leave – they are most likely to feel negative effects of Brexit first – farm families will need support.

Counter point was made that the majority of rural residents are no longer involved in farming. This has been a key message in our engagement with DAERA (as they are so focussed on farming) Range of issues for farmers – not just prices and subsidy support – whole range of issues around animal welfare, standards, traceability – unclear yet how UK food policy will go post Brexit – will standards be maintained or will it be a race to the bottom that will allow cheaper produce from around the world produced at lower standards to come in.

Issues of farm sustainability/viability and future survival of small farms in marginal areas – potential for a negative impact on communities and on the landscape/environment.

4. Who needs to maintain links to Europe post Brexit?

Cullyhanna

Key message to NI politicians is to get back to work. We have had no political voice of any significance in the negotiations except for hard Brexit DUP MPs who don't represent people in this constituency and who are ignoring the problems a hard Brexit/no Deal will cause due to their own ideological reasons for leaving the EU.

Stormont needs to come back but must be reformed/changed otherwise it will just collapse again at the next disagreement between SF and DUP.

We need someone to speak for us as we feel voiceless and powerless – its like a car crash unfolding but we are powerless to stop it.

Need for cross party government/consensus on an emergency plan to get past 29 March – no deal Brexit will be a disaster.

Politicians are key at the moment – it's a political process and how it unfolds will influence how hard it will be to retain links post Brexit.

Ballymoney

Government/politicians need to build the links with Europe post Brexit.

Doors need to be kept open between the EU, the UK, NI and the South of Ireland.

The Brexit vote in NI broke down on largely cross community lines – people were mis-informed during the referendum campaign and mis-led.

Politicians in NI need to get back to work and take their responsibilities seriously.

We (the electorate) are letting it happen (allowing politics to drift).

Orange and green politics is holding us back in NI.

Frustration was voiced with how slow the pace of change is – even in local government in NI to try and get things done and make change happen is frustratingly slow.

Politicians need to stop being petty and stop playing games – even at local government level – they need to find a way to work together to mitigate the effects of Brexit.

People are disillusioned so they aren't out on the street protesting – the way the Assembly was working before it collapsed led to apathy. People have a desire for change but don't think it can be achieved.

Cookstown

New Common Chapter project developed by the Centre for Cross Border Studies seeking to develop North South and East West co-operation across the UK & Ireland. Definitely a role for community organisations and citizens to influence policy from the ground up and make the demands on politicians for policy that serves the interests of rural citizens and communities.

Roles for:

- NGOs
- Political parties
- Civil servants/officials
- Local government and cross border local government networks will be important post Brexit. Need for deeper cross border co-operation between local authorities post Brexit?

Rural Development networks – LAGs will change North of the border and may change south of the border depending on how the rural development programme evolves. Need for cross border co-operation across many areas of policy and service delivery remains whatever structures/delivery vehicles emerge.

RCN as a regional rural Network needs to maintain links we have. Maintain relationships we have already developed, and look for partners in Europe and further afield. As an organisation we need to make a conscious effort to make this happen – takes time and resource and won't happen unless we value this work and invest in it.

Public Participation Network in the Republic of Ireland and Community Empowerment Act in Scotland are examples of legislation that enables engagement and participation but there are no similar frameworks or structures in NI.

NI Assembly opened its EU office in Brussels in 2010 staffed by a dozen civil servants. Purpose was to ensure key European and other stakeholders understood NI interests. Any decision on the future of this office post Brexit will be taken by a Minister and there are no guarantees this office will remain post Brexit.

We need officials to continue to link to EU in absence of NI Assembly. Can we access/influence Southern politicians in Republic of Ireland to make representations to EU on rural development/cross border issues? We need to push officials here to make the connections on our behalf with EU institutions/policies/initiatives.

Maintain relationships with EU even if terms of engagement might change. Again it was stressed that we need to invest in this work – time/resources.

Civil servants/officials are working away in the background on these issues and we need to connect with them and push them to make links with EU on rural development issues.