



Stop blaming EU citizens for failures of the UK immigration system

In the current divisive Brexit debate, Theresa May is feeding prejudice against EU citizens in her latest push to sell her deal to the public. the3million is counting on MPs to dispel the myths on freedom of movement, and firmly resist a resurgence of poisonous anti-immigrant rhetoric wherever and whenever it occurs.

No one likes a queue jumper - yet that is what the Prime Minister is accusing EU citizens of doing. At this week's Confederation of British Industry (CBI) conference, she claimed ending freedom of movement will increase control and fairness: *"It will no longer be the case that EU nationals can jump the queue ahead of engineers from Sydney or software developers from Delhi."*

Once again, EU citizens are pitted against other groups of immigrants. This is wrong on every level.

If UK decision makers are going to abolish freedom of movement, they should at least be honest about what it means. Freedom of movement is not queue-jumping, but a mutual arrangement between EU countries. Scrapping it will mean British citizens cannot freely live, study or work in Europe either.

The current immigration system of unrealistic migration targets and minimum salary thresholds for citizens of non-EU countries is not an EU invention, but was developed by Theresa May herself and later Home Secretaries in her government.

Other benefits of freedom of movement to the UK economy were outlined in the September 2018 report from the Migration Advisory Committee: over their lifetime EU citizens contribute £78,000 more than they receive in benefits and cost in the provision of public services. Far from reducing the training of UK-born workers, immigration has a positive effect on productivity and innovation.

There is no evidence yet that the UK government plans to make it easier to employ anyone without a UK passport. For instance, Theresa May as Home Secretary opposed an EU-India trade deal in 2010 because it involved an increase in visas for Indian citizens.

Instead of playing divide and rule with different groups of immigrants or labelling people already living here as queue jumpers, the UK government should focus on creating a system that works for everyone - not just employers or "highly skilled" workers in particular industries.

We EU citizens in the UK will not tolerate a repeat of the toxic anti-immigrant language used in the 2016 referendum, with constant tabloid headlines on immigration and a 29% rise in hate incidents and hate crimes. In that campaign, we were vilified and British citizens living in Europe stereotyped or ignored. We call on MPs to publicly oppose the return of these tactics and promote an honest debate at every opportunity.

Nicolas Hatton
Co-founder, the3million

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