

1. Introduction

1.1. This evidence has been prepared to inform the National Assembly's committee consultation on Wales' Future Relationship with the EU.

1.2. About WCVA WCVA is the national membership organisation for the third sector in Wales. Our vision is for a future where the third sector and volunteering thrive, improving wellbeing for all. Our mission is to be a catalyst for positive change by connecting, enabling and influencing.

1.3. WCVA's position aligns closely with Welsh Government's on a number of key areas, namely access to the single market and customs union, continued participation in the European cooperation programmes and associated networks and a commitment to the social, environmental and employment protections which have been secured through our EU membership.

2. Maintain and forge new relationships with relevant EU institutions to protect and advance rights

2.1. Many of the EU regulations and legislation that underpin rights protections in the UK were driven by civil society. We must maintain our relationships with the relevant European institutions to inform the development and advancement of rights and protections post Brexit. Any move toward the weakening of rights in the UK will not be reflective of the devolved perspective. To illustrate its commitment to rights protections, Welsh Government should strengthen its independent relationship with the Council of Europe to enable Wales to be more proactive in relation to the EU conventions and International Labour Organisation.

3. Maintain access to the wider European funding programmes

3.1. WCVA supports Welsh Government's position on maintaining access to the European transnational cooperation programmes, such as the ETC programmes, Daphne and Erasmus+. The withdrawal of youth driven initiatives, funded by Erasmus+ for example, would significantly disadvantage Wales' younger generation's ability to engage with European employment and educational opportunities post Brexit.

4. Maintain EU connections for UK civil society

4..1. The European Union is much more than a free trade area. Wales benefits considerably from close cooperation with 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 communities 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.

5. For the UK to remain in the single market and customs union

5..1. 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 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.

6. A sufficient transition period

6..1. Determining what comes next will be incredibly complex and putting new processes and arrangements in place will take time. A sufficient transition period is needed, in order to minimise confusion and uncertainty. The UK 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.

7. Continued engagement

1..1. The third sector plays a vital role in society promoting positive values, being a voice for marginalised groups and developing creative solutions to some of our society's most problematic issues. It's crucial that the third sector and wider civil society is fully engaged at every stage of the transition process to ensure better outcomes for all.

2. Discussion

2..1. If requested, we would be pleased to discuss further these or any other points relating to this inquiry.