



advice and support for older age

**Independent  
Age**



# **Brexit and the future of migrants in the social care workforce**

**Executive summary**



# Executive Summary

Since the referendum of 23 June, there has been intense speculation about the future residence rights of the estimated three million EU migrants already living in Britain. Recent analysis has focused on European Economic Area (EEA) migrants<sup>1</sup> who work as nurses and doctors in the NHS and their future, as the government decides what – if any – guarantees to provide to people already resident in the UK. However, to date, not enough attention has been given to what Brexit means for the country's social care workforce, increasing numbers of whom come from Europe to provide personal care and support to our ageing population.

In this follow up to our 2015 report 'Moved to Care', we have reviewed **future workforce shortages in adult social care in England to take account of the EU referendum result**. As the government examines options for the country's future policy on migration from within the EEA, it should ensure whatever approach it adopts responds to serious new concerns regarding the tens of thousands of care workers who are EEA migrants, but whose future immigration status remains highly uncertain.

Potential changes to immigration policy post-Brexit could have serious consequences for the social care workforce unless the necessary work is done now to mitigate any risks.

Around 1 in 20 (6%) of England's growing social care workforce are EEA migrants, equating to around 84,000 people. Further, more than 90% of those EEA migrants (78,000) do not have British citizenship – meaning they could be at risk of changes to their immigration status following Brexit.

Turnover and vacancy rates in the social care workforce have been steadily rising for the past decade, and 2016 saw them rise further to 24.3% and 5.1% respectively. We raise concerns that if thousands of EEA migrant care workers lose their right to work in England as a result of post-Brexit immigration changes, it will be almost impossible to close the already sizable social care workforce gap.

In the longer term, the problems are even more far-reaching. Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of migrants from the EEA in the social care workforce.

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**By 2037 there could be 13.5 older people per care worker**

The rate at which EEA migrants have been filling vital care worker vacancies is accelerating as immigration rules affecting non-EEA workers continue to place limits on unskilled labour. In the first part of 2016 alone, over 80% of all migrant care workers who moved to England to take on a social care role were from the EEA.

Any restrictions to the migration status of EEA citizens would therefore very likely reduce the overall number of migrant workers in the social care sector, making it even harder to recruit and retain the necessary numbers of staff.

To model the impact of post-Brexit immigration changes on the social care workforce, we looked at a number of potential scenarios:

- In a zero net migration scenario<sup>2</sup>, the social care workforce gap could reach just above 1.1 million workers by 2037. This means that there would be 13.5 older people for every care worker – compared to a ratio of seven for every care worker today. This is a workforce gap which, by 2037, is around 70,000 workers larger than our worst predictions in our analysis pre-EU referendum.
- In a (more likely) low-migration scenario, where the sector remains as attractive as it is today, but the government delivers on its commitment to reduce levels of net migration, there will be a social care workforce gap of more than 750,000 people by 2037.
- Even in a scenario where there are high levels of migration and the care sector becomes more attractive, the social care gap will be as big as 350,000 people by 2037.

The implications of a social care workforce gap of between 350,000 and 1.1 million workers for older and disabled people are clear – far fewer will be able to access the care they need to live meaningful, independent lives.

To avoid this outcome, we will build upon the recommendations of our 2015 'Moved to Care' report, calling for:

- an increase in the attractiveness of the social care sector to British born workers

- immigration policy to reflect the needs of the older and disabled people who rely on social care for their independence
- a fundamental look at the way care is funded and delivered in England.

In isolation, changes to migration policy cannot close projected workforce gaps. If we do not take the best elements of care delivery from around the world, and combine them with a well-funded, well-integrated social care sector in England, older and disabled people will be the ones to suffer over the next 20 years.





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# Independent Age

**Independent Age**  
18 Avonmore Road  
London  
W14 8RR

T 020 7605 4200  
E [charity@independentage.org](mailto:charity@independentage.org)  
[www.independentage.org](http://www.independentage.org)  
**Advice line 0800 319 6789**

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