

A Better Future Together

Delivering for British Citizens in Europe: A practical agenda for the UK-EU reset

Labour International

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a survey of Labour International members and supporters across Europe.

Respondents report, among other things, barriers to employment and professional recognition in the EU; reduced opportunities for young people; difficulties securing family reunification; higher travel and administrative costs; and anxiety about residency rights.

The report makes the following policy recommendations:

1. **Negotiate a comprehensive mobility package**, including youth mobility and arrangements for touring artists and cultural professionals, and explore an EU-UK agreement on mutual recognition of professional qualifications
2. **Secure fair and reciprocal family reunification arrangements**, particularly for British citizens returning to the UK with EU-national spouses and children.
3. **Improve travel by** guaranteeing the effective implementation and protection of Withdrawal Agreement rights, ensuring clear guidance for dual nationals, negotiating reciprocal rules on pet passports and seeking a roaming agreement with the EU
4. **Address unnecessary costs and barriers affecting British citizens living in Europe**, including customs charges on personal parcels and protection of exportable benefits including winter fuel payments
5. **Review reciprocal arrangements for local election voting rights**, with a view to helping British citizens living in EU member states to participate in the democratic life of their local communities

Delivering these proposals would deliver immediate, tangible benefits while rebuilding trust and cooperation between the UK and Europe.

In the longer term, respondents overwhelmingly support joining the European Union. Even stronger support is shown for pursuing membership of the EU Single Market and a customs union.

The Government should treat these not as distant ambitions, but as the direction of travel for a UK-EU relationship capable of meeting the economic, security and social challenges of the coming decade.

Contents

Introduction **3**

Mobility **4**
Work and careers 4
Education and youth mobility 6

Family and free movement **7**

Travel **8**

Financial and economic impact **11**

Representation and rights **14**

Looking ahead **15**

Conclusion **17**

Introduction

Labour International CLP exists to represent Labour Members living abroad, including over one thousand members in the European Union.

Many of these members could not vote in the referendum on the UK's membership to leave the EU, yet they are some of the most profoundly affected by it. Since 2016, these members have experienced first-hand the human cost of the UK's decision to leave the European Union, with their rights, families, livelihoods, and futures all impacted. Meanwhile, even today, they are often treated as a footnote in debates about the future relationship.

This paper seeks to outline some of the key issues facing Brits in Europe and offers concrete policy recommendations ahead of the UK-EU summit. Our aim is to secure practical improvements that benefit British citizens abroad, while strengthening the relationship between the UK and the EU in ways that benefit society as a whole.

Our recommendations were formed following a survey of Labour International members and other Britons living in the EU. The respondents to the survey represent a range of experience, from those who secured residency rights before Brexit, to those who have moved since, to retirees, younger people and Britons living outside the EU and EEA.

The evidence is clear: Brexit has not merely changed trade rules or political structures. It has narrowed opportunity, separated families, complicated travel, raised costs and made it harder for British people to live, work, study and participate fully in European life.

As we look to resetting the relationship, we must not only think about what works for businesses and for the economy, but what works for people. This is crucial if we are to rebuild trust, repair divisions and create a relationship that delivers tangible benefits for everyone.

Our central message is simple: the UK should pursue an ambitious, practical agenda with the EU. It should deliver mobility, protect acquired rights, reduce needless border friction and rebuild the connections that Brexit severed. And it should be honest that the most durable solution to many of these problems lies in a much closer relationship with the European Union.

Mobility

Labour's 2024 manifesto made a number of pledges when it comes to resetting our relationship with the EU.

While those relating to security, defence and trade are beginning to slowly materialise, the pledges that would bring tangible benefits to people's lives – most notably, a mutual recognition agreement for professional qualifications and reducing barriers for touring artists – have yet to be realised or even properly discussed.

Moreover, a survey among Labour International members and supporters shows that since Brexit, further issues have appeared relating to the ability of Brits abroad to work and study in the EU. Many also face difficulties around family reunification, including being unable to return to the UK because of this.

Our asks to improve mobility are backed by 85-89% of all respondents to the survey.

Work and careers

Respondents to the survey reported post-Brexit difficulties in securing work in the EU as Brits. Even those here before Brexit, whose right to remain was protected under the Withdrawal Agreement, face barriers when it came to the knowledge of their rights in the workplace, resulting in their careers hitting barriers.

For those seeking to gain experience in the EU post-Brexit the situation is much worse: we have seen anecdotal evidence of talented interns not able to stay on and pursue their chosen field, and British people turned away from jobs because of visa situations, leading to a marked downturn in British people applying for jobs in certain sectors. This is not just an individual problem: With the growing nature of multinational companies, it is obvious how this puts the UK at a disadvantage.

Evidence gathered through the survey is supported by wider reports. For example, after the transition period ended on 31 December 2020 and the EU Directive on the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (2005/36) stopped applying, numerous examples of British workers losing their professional mobility and employment opportunities, as qualifications that were previously recognised across the EU became subject to individual Member State rules and recognition procedures.

At the same time, the UK has lost out on the potential benefits of mutual recognition of professional qualification at a national level, including its contribution to economic growth, international competitiveness, research and innovation, and the development of domestic expertise and capabilities.

The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) does allow for Mutual Recognition Agreements to be negotiated. However, this must be done on a sector-by-sector basis.

Our ask: Negotiate a comprehensive UK-EU agreement on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications.

The Government should make mutual recognition a priority in the reset negotiations, seeking the widest possible agreement across regulated professions. Particular priority should be given to professions where British and European workers have historically worked across borders.

One sector in particular that was mentioned when it comes to mobility was the cultural sector. Music, ballet, and beyond has often been touted as the UK's soft power. The importance of being able to build cultural ties with our closest neighbours cannot be underestimated; just as culture in our communities at home is important, so too is it abroad.

We should not underestimate the devastating impact that the Brexit deal has had on this sector. A UK Government-commissioned study published in August 2026 estimates that Brexit-related barriers to European touring cost the UK economy £208 million in lost economic value and 2,490 full-time equivalent jobs between 2022 and 2024. Within this, the music sector alone suffered an estimated £180 million in economic losses, while orchestras, theatre, dance and visual arts accounted for a further £27.8 million.

The human and cultural consequences are equally serious. UK music performances in the EU were still 21% below their 2019 levels in 2024. UK Music research also found that 43% of music creators affected by Brexit considered touring in the EU no longer financially viable, while 65% had received fewer invitations to perform in Europe.

This is about much more than lost revenue. It is about the erosion of Britain's cultural influence, the weakening of longstanding European artistic relationships, fewer opportunities for British performers and the gradual loss of the international mobility that helped make the UK one of the world's leading cultural centres.

Responding to our survey, individuals reported losing their careers in this sector due to its dependence on the ability to take contracts – not for touring but for the job itself. However, when it comes to touring, professionals in the sector are totally dependent on free movement to sustain a viable career. Years of study and dedication, taken away in one day.

Our ask: Come to practical arrangements to put British music and culture back on the map

The Government should seek to ease carnet and cabotage rules, expanding existing exemptions for short cultural engagements and creating a dedicated visa for long-term touring. It should also seek to join AgoraEU to provide new funding avenues.

Education and youth mobility

While the UK's inclusion in Erasmus+ from January 2027 is a step in the right direction, more can be done to ensure our young people have the best opportunities we can give them. If not, we risk having a lost generation, forced inward because of decisions taken when they were still children.

Our survey, and discussions with members, has shown just how difficult it is for young people now. From having to involve embassies to study abroad – something that was once so easy – to having spots at prestigious EU universities become untenable due to the costs for non-EU citizens.

Conversely, Brits living in the EU now also face increased costs to study in the UK as they are considered international students. This has cut off access to British universities to a considerable number of British citizens. Meanwhile, those without another nationality are also subject to international fee rates at EU universities that are thousands of euros higher than those paid by EU students, putting studying at

popular universities like Leiden, Sciences Po, Sorbonne and more out of the reach of many more young people.

And the impact on youth goes beyond education: they have also lost their right to travel and work in Europe. Even those with parents living abroad faced difficulties taking a second nationality due to the low-income nature of post-graduate or student jobs – even if they meet all other criteria.

When it comes to finding work, young British candidates are reporting being held to much higher standards than their EU peers when searching for jobs. And, they have lost access to programmes such as the European Solidarity Corps, and the European University Institute to name but two.

One final note in this section is for those who were entering the working world around the time of Brexit. Many people in their thirties and forties have also seen their careers, professional development and opportunities to live and work in Europe curtailed. So, even in discussions about young people, the Government should not forget the much wider impact this had on career and job mobility.

Our ask: Get youth mobility over the line

The Government should finalise an ambitious and accessible Youth Experience Scheme to give meaningful opportunities to work, study, volunteer and travel in the EU and ensure that arrangements on university fees and student access are fair and reciprocal, including for British citizens living in the EU. Finally, it should seek to join the European Solidarity Corps and pursue participation in the European University Institute.

Family and free movement

One heartbreaking discovery for Brits living abroad with EU-national families was being blocked from returning to the UK with their families.

These are not isolated stories. Research undertaken by the Universities of Lancaster and Birmingham, involving more than 1,300 British citizens living in Europe documented widespread concern about the loss of the ability to return to the UK with non-British family members. In our survey, some respondents described having to reconsider their retirement plans, abandon plans to return to Britain or contemplated selling their UK homes because their partners could no longer easily accompany them.

More recent research involving the nearly half a million UK-EU couples in England and Wales has documented there are considerable financial, emotional and practical barriers introduced by Brexit. This includes the requirement for many EU spouses to obtain expensive UK family visas, subject to minimum income requirements. Some couples have experienced prolonged separation, while others have been forced to reconsider where they can realistically live together.

What makes these experiences particularly painful is that some of the affected EU spouses previously worked in Britain, paid into the British economy, receive UK pensions, own property in the UK and have British children. Yet their historical connection to Britain does not automatically give them the right to return and live there with their British family. The result is that British citizens can find themselves unable to exercise what many would regard as a fundamental right: to return to their own country without having to leave their spouse or children behind.

There is also a strong case for exploring more imaginative bilateral arrangements with our closest European neighbours, particularly France. Before Brexit, cross-border working and commuting formed part of the normal economic and social fabric of many European regions. Although existing frontier workers have some protected rights, the general ability to take up new employment across the UK-EU border has been lost.

Our ask: A reciprocal family route so that British citizens returning from the EU can bring EU-national spouses and children

The Government should address the disadvantages faced by British citizens who have built their family lives in the EU and subsequently wish to return to the UK with their EU-national spouses and children.

In particular, the Government should review the financial, residency and other eligibility requirements that can make returning prohibitively difficult, and seek reciprocal arrangements with the EU that recognise the reality of families whose lives span both jurisdictions.

Travel

Possibly one of the most visible impacts of Brexit for many is the changes to travelling to the EU. From pre-travel authorisation to airport queues, fun holidays are now filled with bureaucracy. This does not just affect those living in the UK, but also Brits who have emigrated to Europe, with around 67% of those surveyed reporting longer queues as an issue they frequently encounter.

Since the introduction of the EU Entry/Exit System, airports have regularly seen wait times reach two hours at peak times – and at times, Brits have been left waiting even longer. The queues for other travel options are equally bad: In May 2026, Dover saw delays of up to four and a half hours.

Although there is a limited amount the UK can do to alleviate such queues, for those of us living abroad, it often feels strange to be stuck in a queue when we hold residency cards, especially since those with residency cards for EU countries should be exempt from EES and ETIAS – when it begins – under the Withdrawal Agreement. In practice they are often directed to the “others” queue, which tends to be much longer. That treatment may be required by the Schengen Border Code, but it is disproportionate for people who live there. Agreements should be made to expedite their passage.

Our ask: Guarantee correct and consistent border treatment for Withdrawal Agreement beneficiaries

The Government should work with the European Commission and member states to ensure that beneficiaries of the Withdrawal Agreement with correct residency cards be permitted to use the EU, EEA and CH border queues throughout Schengen.

Clear guidance and consistent procedures should be established across member states and guards should be trained to recognise qualifying withdrawal agreement residence documents.

Another issue faced by Brits abroad when travelling is unique to those with dual nationality. While for some, the consequence has been minor – just having to carry two passports and remember which one to use at which border – others have faced more serious consequences facing unexpected costs, delays and, in some cases, being prevented from boarding flights to the UK.

Since 25 February 2026, carriers have checked passengers’ permissions before travel to the UK. British citizens are not eligible for electronic travel authorisation and are expected to demonstrate their right of abode through a valid British passport or a Certificate of Entitlement. Those who have historically travelled using their other nationality's passport may therefore find themselves unable to board a flight without obtaining additional British documentation.

The financial implications can be substantial. A Certificate of Entitlement to the Right of Abode currently costs £589, while an adult British passport application from overseas costs £116.50. Campaigners estimate that 1.2 million dual nationals are affected. This is particularly difficult to justify for British citizens who have lived abroad for many years, who may have never previously needed to use a British passport for travel, and have no reason to believe that their underlying right to enter their own country has changed.

The Government has acknowledged the difficulty that this creates and issued temporary guidance allowing carriers, at their own discretion, to accept expired British passports issued in 1989 or later alongside a valid foreign passport. However, this is not a permanent solution. Moreover, it does not help those who no longer hold an old passport or never had one.

There is also a wider issue of recognition. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) does not maintain a comprehensive register of British citizens living abroad, and has acknowledged that it does not hold reliable figures for the British population in individual countries.

There is a clear need to improve the UK's ability to identify, recognise and assist British citizens living overseas, including those with dual nationality. This should include clearer and more consistent guidance for airlines and border authorities, a permanent and accessible alternative for establishing British nationality where a valid British passport is not immediately available, and consideration of more proportionate fees for Certificates of Entitlement, particularly where the need for documentation arises from changes in travel requirements.

The Government should also work with EU partners to clarify passport procedures and ensure that dual nationals receive consistent advice when travelling between the UK and EU.

Finally, it should examine the feasibility of a voluntary overseas registration system, enabling British citizens to register their country of residence and receive timely information about changes to travel requirements, consular assistance and other matters affecting their rights.

British citizens should not feel that living abroad, or holding a second nationality, makes them less visible to their own Government. Nor should the practical exercise of their right to return to the UK become prohibitively expensive or unnecessarily complicated.

Our ask: Issue clear guidance for dual nationals

Improve information for dual nationals and people with older residence documents and establish clear procedures for correcting erroneous EES records and resolving disputes.

Create a permanent, accessible alternative way for British citizens to prove nationality where a valid British passport is not immediately available, and cap or reduce the Certificate of Entitlement fee.

Another issue on both sides of the border is pet travel. Since 22 April 2026 EU pet passports for UK-resident owners are no longer valid. With an animal health certificate costing about £100 on average and only covering one entry, many UK residents travelling to the EU are at a disadvantage compared to their EU counterparts, who can still travel with their pets to the UK without extra post-Brexit costs.

Our ask: Negotiate reciprocal recognition of pet passports and veterinary documentation to reduce unnecessary costs and paperwork for people travelling between the UK and EU with their pets

Families also feel the impact when relatives visit from the UK. Labour members with young families spoke of the difficulty of having grandparents visiting for extended periods of time due to time abroad being restricted to 90 days in any 180. Staying longer requires a national long-stay visa, which varies by country. EU visitors, by contrast, can stay in the UK for up to six months.

Mobile roaming adds to the cost. Most large UK networks no longer include EU roaming as standard, and daily charges are typically between £2 and £2.75, subject to data caps. Visiting grandparents – as well as all other travellers – who rely on their phones to find hotels and book taxis can face real costs.

The UK cannot fix this alone. The Trade and Cooperation Agreement commits both sides only to promote transparent and reasonable rates, not to cap them. There is, however, a precedent: the UK has agreed wholesale roaming limits with Norway and Iceland under a free trade agreement. A reciprocal agreement, modelled on the arrangement with Norway and Iceland, would be a relatively simple fix and would make visits much less stressful, whether finding a hotel or booking a taxi.

Our ask: Seek a reciprocal roaming arrangement with the EU, building on the flexible wholesale-rate precedent with Norway and Iceland, and publish clear information on visitors' rights to stay.

Financial and economic impact

One cannot mention the impact of Brexit in any scenario without touching upon its financial and economic damage. Although much has been written about the impact on GDP, this can be hard to translate into something tangible when talking to people.

However, what is very real is how Brits abroad have been impacted financially by both the decision to leave the EU and the way in which it was – and continues to be – carried out.

Across Europe, people are feeling the cost of living crisis, with demands for breathing space echoed across EU countries and beyond. Within this framing, there are certain areas where Brits abroad have felt a specific impact.

Some of these have been mentioned in the previous sections: the cost of travel to the UK for them or to the EU for visiting family with additional border requirements, the rise in tuition fees, the difficulty finding work.

The survey found that the impact goes further than this: 38.6% face currency exchange losses, 21.5% have had their pensions or savings affected, and over a quarter felt the decrease in their income was a personal economic impact felt from Brexit.

As well as this, two issues stood out from the feedback we received.

Firstly, that of social security benefits.

At the Withdrawal Agreement joint committee on 10 November 2026, Hamish Falconer and Maroš Šefčovič **"**….underscored the importance of the work on social security coordination for the full protection of citizens on both sides of the Channel." However, there are doubts about whether this is being honoured in practice.

Under Part Two, Title III of the Withdrawal Agreement, people within the protected scope of the agreement should continue to benefit from EU social security coordination rules. This includes winter fuel payments, which the UK Government's own guidance expressly recognised as an exportable benefit for qualifying pensioners living in eligible European countries.

However, the position changed when with the introduction of the Social Fund Winter Payment Regulations. This removed the provision that had allowed qualifying Withdrawal Agreement pensioners living in certain EEA countries and Switzerland to receive the payment. In effect, pensioners who had previously been able to export the benefit were excluded solely because they lived outside the UK.

The Independent Monitoring Authority (IMA), which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the citizens' rights agreements, has itself raised the issue with the Department for Work and Pensions – as have our members – and continues to investigate this matter.

While contact with authorities Labour International has reached out to has yielded different results, what is clear is that pensioners who expected to be protected and relied on this benefit, have found it cut.

The UK cannot simply avoid its obligations under the Withdrawal Agreement by changing the domestic treatment or description of a benefit, if that benefit continues, in substance and legal character, to fall within the scope of the protected social security coordination rules. Its classification must be determined by the applicable legal framework, not merely by the label the Government chooses to attach to it. The UK must be fair and meticulous in its work, and avoid jeopardising the rights of UK nationals abroad.

Our ask: Protect the exportability of benefits guaranteed under the Withdrawal Agreement

The Government should urgently review the removal of Winter Fuel Payment entitlement from eligible Withdrawal Agreement beneficiaries living in the EU, publish its legal assessment of the compatibility of this decision with the Agreement, and restore payments where entitlement is protected.

Secondly, the impact on cross-border small packets and parcels and the everyday exchange of goods between Britain and its citizens living in Europe.

Around 18 respondents specifically raised this issue. While this is not a large enough sample to quantify the overall economic impact, the consistency and nature of the experiences reported are worth noting, particularly in the context of wider reporting on this concern.

Since Brexit, recipients have encountered customs declarations, import VAT, customs duties where applicable, and additional postal or courier administration charges. The precise costs and procedures vary depending on the destination country, the nature and value of the goods, whether VAT has already been paid, and the postal operator or courier used.

It is important to distinguish between the different charges in place. Customs duties are tariffs on imported goods; import VAT is a tax applied by the destination country; and postal or courier administration fees are commercial charges for processing customs formalities and collecting payments.

These charges can accumulate: Many Brits abroad are paying at times over double the cost of an item just to receive it in Europe.

For example, in Belgium, bpost currently charges an administration fee of €21.50 for many non-exempt consignments valued up to €150 where VAT has not been paid in advance. This is before any applicable import VAT or customs duty. For someone receiving a modest present or purchasing an inexpensive item from a small British retailer, the additional charges can easily exceed the value of the goods themselves.

The consequences are not merely having an impact on the recipient. Respondents described reducing or abandoning purchases from smaller British shops because the additional costs and administrative complications make them uneconomic. This is particularly damaging for small independent retailers, whose customers include British citizens living abroad and people who maintain longstanding connections with the UK.

Moreover, there is a poignant emotional impact, with people now having to pay substantial charges to receive birthday and Christmas presents from friends and family. As one person put it in an example ‘It’s all very well that freddos have gone up in price, but being charged €30 in tax to receive them is really too far.’ Moreover, even documents that should be exempt from these charges are becoming a financial burden.

While the EU in theory does retain an exemption for qualifying occasional gifts sent between private individuals, provided the value does not exceed €45 and the other conditions are met. However, this exemption does not apply to purchases from retailers, even where the item is intended as a present. The distinction is often poorly understood, leaving families confused about why one parcel is charged and another is not.

These are precisely the kinds of everyday consequences that are often missing from the broader debate about Brexit. They may appear trivial when considered individually, but collectively they represent another way in which the relationship between British citizens and their home country has become more difficult, more expensive and more remote.

Our ask: Negotiate simpler and fairer arrangements for personal parcels between the UK and EU

The Government should work with the EU to address disproportionate charges on gifts and personal parcels, ensure that applicable exemptions are consistently recognised, and simplify customs procedures for low-value and non-commercial consignments.

While these two elements constitute our main asks, it is also worth raising other elements that will need to be considered in the months ahead. This includes the cost of obtaining another citizenship out of necessity, the loss of bank accounts in the UK, the loss of clients to businesses, higher mortgage rates due to changes in residency, businesses failing due to customs rules.

More generally, which will be discussed in the final section, many feel that these issues would be resolved by joining the single market and negotiating a customs union, with 96.2% and 96.8% in favour of these two options respectively.

Representation and rights

As part of the survey, Labour International also concentrated on the impact on the representation of Brits abroad and their rights in their resident countries.

Around 45% of respondents cited a loss of voting rights in local and European elections. Having these lost, despite being taxable in the EU, despite having lived in the same building pre- and post- Brexit and being active in our communities, really feels like something being actively taken away. In some cases, before the 15 year rule for voting from abroad was abolished in the UK, this left Brits abroad with no democratic representation.

This right to representation should have been protected in the Withdrawal Agreement, but was just one of many areas left off the list. Given that each country may have its own approach to this, the UK should seek bilateral agreements around voting rights, citing the fact that migrants can vote in local elections in the UK.

As well as political representation, many people raised concerns around their ability to exercise their permanent residency or indeed, obtain a second nationality to secure their rights – rights which were guaranteed before the UK left the EU.

In some countries, such as the Netherlands and Austria, taking a second nationality to guarantee, for example, your right to free movement, to representation, to remain, is only possible if you renounce British citizenship.

This leaves people conflicted between applying for full rights and equal treatment in the place where they live and retaining nationality with which they feel a deep rooted connection. Moreover, it leaves some worried for the grandchildren whose future they see becoming impacted by these limitations while the UK remains outside of the EU. This is not a direction of travel the UK should embrace.

We are not asking the UK to do the impossible. What we are asking is for the UK to negotiate that withdrawal agreement beneficiaries have the same EU-wide rights as long term residents, rather than the rights focusing on the host country.

More widely, residency rights are, to quote one respondent, a ‘nightmare’. It is not just the loss of free movement for those living in the EU, but a fear of losing their status if they are unable to find a job or traineeship, and being forced to make decisions for immigration reasons, rather than following their aspiration.

A University of Strathclyde survey found that almost 40% of respondents with new post-Brexit residency status did not feel secure about their rights going forward. The consequences extend beyond the immediate question of residence: people have had to reconsider career opportunities, educational aspirations, family arrangements and even where they can afford to build their future.

Our ask: The Government should review the bilateral consequences of nationality and residency rules, and seek to protect British citizens from losing their effective rights and connections to the UK simply because they have established permanent lives elsewhere in Europe. This should be reciprocated for EU nationals in the UK.

Looking ahead

Since coming into power, Labour has set a new direction for the UK-EU relationship, seeking to cooperate on shared challenges, and identifying opportunities for shared prosperity.

We've seen this in deliverables such as the UK-EU Security and Defence Partnership, the UK's return to Horizon Europe, and the forthcoming return to Erasmus+. These are welcome developments and demonstrate the potential of a more constructive relationship with our European partners.

Labour International welcomes this direction of travel and looks forward to further progress at the upcoming UK-EU summit on 20 November.

But this is not a time to rest on the laurels of that which we have managed to save from the disastrous Tory Brexit.

The current reset should not be treated as an end point but a stepping stone to a more ambitious and sustainable future. This has been made clear by many, including the Prime Minister himself, who said "I will take the opportunity around the summit to lay out to you, to lay out to the country, what I believe the different options are for Britain's long-term relationship with our European partners."

From Labour International's survey, 95.7% say joining the single market would be in Britain's interest, 96.3% say the same of the customs union, and 75.2% want a process started to rejoin the EU.

Although over 60% could not name a factor against these steps, the most cited reasons for not pursuing this further relationship were political unpopularity at home (17.1%), sovereignty (8.7%), budget contributions (7.5%), free movement, regulatory alignment and EU court jurisdiction (each 6.2%) and limits on trade deals (5.6%). These concerns deserve serious consideration, but they should not prevent an open and informed debate. Political leadership should help the public understand the options and their implications – both positive and negative. What it should not do is let perceived difficulties limit ambition.

And the public is moving: YouGov found 59% in favour of rejoining in September 2026 against 32% opposed, and 73% in favour of a closer relationship short of rejoining.

The EU of course has its own reasons for wanting a closer relationship with the UK. We remain important trading and security partners. Our economies, research institutions, energy systems and cultural communities are deeply interconnected. A stronger relationship offers opportunities for both sides.

There is also a strong historical case for Britain's continued involvement in European cooperation. Labour MEPs, working alongside our sister parties across Europe, helped to deliver hundreds of benefits to working people and society across the continent, from signing Britain up to the Social Chapter, giving our workers guaranteed holidays and better parental rights, to securing a guaranteed right to paid holiday for the first time in Britain, to launching an EU-wide programme to combat violence against women and children, introducing a common definition of terrorism to allow action against international terrorism, banning the testing of cosmetics on animals and bringing in fines for airlines when they deliberately overbook – the list goes on.

Moreover, it was through representation at European level that British citizens were able to receive help when they encountered problems in other EU countries, whether accidents in France, crime in Germany or healthcare in Greece.

Of course, the decision about our future relationship with Europe is one for the UK. Yet, as this report has demonstrated, British citizens living in Europe have experienced the practical consequences of Brexit in ways that are often overlooked in national discussions. Our ability to maintain family relationships, pursue careers, access social protections, travel freely and participate in European cultural and educational life depends significantly on the nature of the UK-EU relationship.

Any discussion of Britain's future must therefore take account of the interests of these citizens. They should have a meaningful voice in shaping the next phase of the relationship, rather than being considered only when problems arise.

While we wait for the Prime Minister to set out options for a future relationship, we must remember that much can be done in the short term.

Our ask: Use the 20 November summit to set out a staged pathway to join the EU that does not leave people behind

1. **Stage 1 – Deliver practical improvements now**
   Resolve the immediate problems affecting British citizens in Europe: mobility, professional qualifications, family reunification, border arrangements, cultural cooperation and protected rights.

2. **Stage 2 – Deepen economic and social cooperation**
   Develop closer Single Market and customs arrangements, expand education and research cooperation, and establish more comprehensive mobility arrangements.

3. **Stage 3 – Begin exploring full EU membership**
   Set out the options for a much closer relationship, including the possibility of EU membership, and allow the British public to consider the economic, cultural, social and political implications.

Conclusion

This paper cannot cover every issue that British people living in the EU have faced since Brexit.

The effects have been felt differently across regions and sectors Regional and sectoral effects have been felt by Brits living in the EU and in crown dependencies, which are also included in Labour International CLP. And of course, individually, everyone has their own unique stories and experiences. Many of those now in secure positions have had to jump through numerous hoops that were constantly shifting. It has had a significant impact, not just politically or economically but also psychologically – beyond the sense of being cut off, living through a decade of continued uncertainty has had an undeniable impact.

The UK-EU reset offers an opportunity to address some of these injustices. There are practical improvements that can be achieved now, without waiting for a fundamental change in the UK's relationship with Europe. The Government should pursue them with ambition and urgency. British citizens living in Europe should no longer be an afterthought in Britain's European policy. They are part of the British community, part of the European community and an important bridge between the two.

We must also be bold about our long-term choices. We cannot keep moving in isolation. Not as a country in Europe nor as a progressive party in an increasingly polarised world. Our survey demonstrates overwhelming support among respondents for a much closer relationship, including the Single Market, a customs union and ultimately a process towards EU membership.

We want a relationship with Europe that delivers a better life for people on both sides of the Channel. The summit should be the beginning of that process, not its conclusion.

Whatever the path chosen, Labour must work with its sister parties not only across the EU, not only across the continent, but globally, to ensure we give people the breathing space they need, to deliver on our values, and to show them that their voices continue to matter.