UK/EU SUMMIT EXPLAINER: YOUTH EXPERIENCE SCHEME

OVERVIEW

- The UK and the EU have concluded negotiations on a new Youth Experience Scheme, strengthening opportunities for our young people.
- The scheme will enable young people from the UK, and the EU who are aged between 18 and 31 when they first travel, to live in each other's territories for up to three years to work, study, au pair, volunteer or simply travel. This will give our young people the opportunity to broaden their horizons, experience new cultures, learn languages, and gain new personal and professional experiences.
- The scheme will be open to 100,000 EU and 100,000 UK young people every year. This will be distributed between the Member States on the basis of relative population size for both inbound EU participants and outbound UK participants.
- UK citizens will apply to a particular Member State and subsequently will be able to switch to a different Member State, staying in a total of 3 Member States over a 3-year period.
- The scheme doesn't provide UK or EU citizens with access to benefits in each other's territories, nor will they be able to bring dependants.
- We expect the first young people to travel under the scheme no later than January 2030.

BACKGROUND

- Following the UK's exit from the European Union, opportunities for young UK nationals to travel and work in the EU have been constrained, with both sides relying on standard visa routes for third country nationals.
- At present, the EU allows UK citizens visa free travel within the Schengen Area for up to 90 days in any rolling 180 day period. UK citizens who wish to stay longer in a Member State need to apply for a visa or residence permit which will be connected to the specific purpose of their stay. This means individuals either need to apply for a work route, which likely requires having a job offer, working in a specific sector and/or meeting certain salary thresholds, or a study route, which will require them to have been accepted onto an educational course in advance of travelling. Young people from the UK are also disadvantaged when compared to their Canadian, Japanese and New Zealander counterparts, all of whom can rely on bilateral mobility / working holiday arrangements in many Member States.
- We agreed at the 2025 UK-EU Summit to work towards establishing a balanced Youth Experience Scheme that would be capped, subject to a visa requirement and time limited. We also agreed it should facilitate various activities, such as work, studying, au-pairing, volunteering, and travelling.

KEY OUTCOMES

- British citizens and EU citizens of participating Member States aged 18 to 31 on the day their visa starts will be eligible for the scheme.
- Participants will be able to spend up to 3 years in the UK or participating Member State(s). The visa and/or residence permit issued by the UK or a participating Member State will be initially valid for 2 years with the opportunity to extend for a third year.

- UK citizens will be able to switch to a different participating Member State up to two times, staying in a total of 3 Member States over a 3-year period. 12 months residence in a Member State will be required before switching.
- The scheme doesn't provide UK or EU citizens with access to benefits in each other's territories, nor will they be able to bring dependants.

PERMITTED ACTIVITIES

- This is a non-purpose bound scheme meaning that participants will be able to work, study, au pair, volunteer or travel. There will be no obligation to undertake particular activities under the scheme.
- The agreement will afford the UK and each participating Member State the ability to restrict participants' access to the labour market in their territory. Both the UK and Member States intend to offer broad labour market access when the scheme opens to realise the opportunities for young people on both sides. We have had confirmation that the vast majority of participating Member States do not intend to impose any work restrictions on UK participants. The exact terms of this access, alongside any restrictions, will be published before the agreement is signed.

APPLICATIONS

- Applications will need to be submitted to a participating Member State or the UK. They can be submitted from outside the territory of the relevant state or within its territory if the applicant is already legally resident there (or otherwise legally present, if this is permitted by domestic law).
- Applicants will need to pay an application fee. EU participants will need to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge at the discounted rate which is set at 75% of the full charge that applies elsewhere. UK participants must hold relevant comprehensive healthcare coverage. Applicants will also need to provide biometric information where required, meet the nationality and age requirements of the scheme, demonstrate they have sufficient funds to support themselves during their stay, confirm they have not participated in the scheme before, and indicate their intended primary activity.