

# Brexit is one of the greatest threats to women's rights: study

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Brexit is one the greatest threats to women's rights and social inclusion, a new study in the *Journal of Social Policy and Society* reports.

Researchers from the University of Surrey and University of Canterbury, New Zealand, investigated the potential impact of Brexit on gender equality in the UK and examined the country's previous voting record in the Council of the European Union on such issues.

They found that gender equality in the UK is potentially at risk following the country's withdrawal from the European Union, as business interests have historically taken precedence over [women's](#) rights when negotiating terms with the EU. Silence on this issue during ongoing Brexit discussions, which have focused mainly on trade, and a recent vote against amendments to the European Withdrawal Bill that was aimed at safeguarding rights under the 2010 Equality Act, has led researchers to the conclusion that gender equality policies are likely to become watered down as a result.

This perceived attack on fundamental rights is further strengthened by the UK's poor record in protecting the rights of women. Researchers point to the UK's resistance of the Pregnant Workers Directive, on the basis that it was going to be too costly for employers, as a clear example of business interests taking precedence over those of females.

Additionally the UK's restrained position on [gender balance](#) on corporate boards and a desire to avoid regulation in this area, shows a preference to

preserve the status quo within businesses, which is often discriminatory towards women. Researchers warn that the exit of the UK from the EU could lead to the collapse of fairness standards in the industry without minimum EU standards.

Professor Roberta Guerrina, Head of Politics at the University of Surrey, said: "Brexit poses the greatest modern day threat to women's rights and [gender](#) equality policies in the UK. European legislation affords a degree of protection to women in the UK, but once we leave Europe there is no guarantee that the same levels of protection will remain intact.

"Women's reproductive rights are particularly vulnerable to attack. As business production remains more valued than reproduction, the interests of [business](#) are likely to trump other fundamental principles such as [equality](#) in the workplace."

**More information:** Roberta Guerrina et al, Walking into the Footprint of EU Law: Unpacking the Gendered Consequences of Brexit, *Social Policy and Society* (2018). [DOI: 10.1017/S1474746417000501](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746417000501)

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