

# Brexit: All you need to know about the UK leaving the EU

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BBC News (<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887>)

## Why is Britain leaving the European Union?

A referendum - a vote in which everyone (or nearly everyone) of voting age can take part - was held on Thursday 23 June, 2016, to decide whether the UK should leave or remain in the European Union. Leave won by 51.9% to 48.1%. The referendum turnout was 71.8%, with more than 30 million people voting.

## What were their reasons for wanting the UK to leave?

They said Britain was being held back by the EU, which they said imposed too many rules on business and charged billions of pounds a year in membership fees for little in return. They also cited sovereignty and democracy, and they wanted Britain to take back full control of its borders and reduce the number of people coming here to live and/or work.

One of the main principles of EU membership is "free movement", which means you don't need to get a visa to go and live in another EU country. The Leave campaign also objected to the idea of "ever closer union" between EU member states and what they see as moves towards the creation of a "United States of Europe".

## What was the breakdown across the UK?

England voted for Brexit, by 53.4% to 46.6%. Wales also voted for Brexit, with Leave getting 52.5% of the vote and Remain 47.5%. Scotland and Northern Ireland both backed staying in the EU. Scotland backed Remain by 62% to 38%, while 55.8% in Northern Ireland voted Remain and 44.2% Leave.

## What does this mean for Scotland?

Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said in the wake of the Leave result that it was "democratically unacceptable" that Scotland faced being taken out of the EU when it voted to Remain. She said Mrs May's decision to rule out the UK staying in the single market meant Scotland should have a choice between a "hard Brexit" and becoming an independent country, possibly in the EU. Ms Sturgeon has officially asked for permission for a second referendum to be held, saying that she wanted the vote to be held between the autumn of 2018 and spring 2019.

## What does it mean for Northern Ireland?

Before his resignation Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness said the impact in Northern Ireland would be "very profound" and that the whole island of Ireland should

now be able to vote on reunification. But, speaking while she was still Northern Ireland Secretary, Theresa Villiers ruled out the call from Sinn Féin for a border poll, saying the circumstances in which one would be called did not exist. The land border is likely to be a key part of the Brexit talks. Theresa May said a priority for her would be negotiating a deal with the EU which allowed a common travel area between the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

### What about the economy, so far?

David Cameron, his Chancellor George Osborne and many other senior figures who wanted to stay in the EU predicted an immediate economic crisis if the UK voted to leave. House prices would fall, there would be a recession with a big rise in unemployment - and an emergency Budget would be needed to bring in the large cuts in spending that would be needed.

The pound did slump the day after the referendum - and remains around 15% lower against the dollar and 10% down against the euro - but the predictions of immediate doom have not proved accurate with the UK economy estimated to have grown 1.8% in 2016, second only to Germany's 1.9% among the world's G7 leading industrialised nations.

Inflation has been inching higher - to 1.8% in January - its highest rate for two and a half years, but unemployment has continued to fall, to stand at an 11 year low of 4.8%. Annual house price increases have fallen from 9.4% in June but were still at an inflation-busting 7.4% in December, according to official ONS figures.

### So when will Britain actually leave it?

For the UK to leave the EU it has to invoke an agreement called Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty which gives the two sides two years to agree the terms of the split. Theresa May has said she intends to trigger this process by the end of March 2017, meaning the UK will be expected to have left by the summer of 2019, depending on the precise timetable agreed during the negotiations. The government will also enact a Great Repeal Bill which will end the primacy of EU law in the UK. This Great Repeal Bill is expected to incorporate all EU legislation into UK law in one lump, after which the government will decide over a period of time which parts to keep, change or remove.

### How long will it take for Britain to leave the EU?

Once Article 50 has been triggered, the UK will have two years to negotiate its withdrawal. But no one really knows how the Brexit process will work - Article 50 was only created in late 2009 and it has never been used. Former Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond, now Chancellor, wanted Britain to remain in the EU, and he has suggested it could take up to six years for the UK to complete exit negotiations. The terms of Britain's exit will have to be agreed by 27 national parliaments, a process which could take some years, he has argued.

EU law still stands in the UK until it ceases being a member. The UK will continue to abide by EU treaties and laws, but not take part in any decision-making.

### Why will Brexit take so long?

Unpicking 43 years of treaties and agreements covering thousands of different subjects was never going to be a straightforward task. It is further complicated by the fact that it has never been done before and negotiators will, to some extent, be making it up as they go along. The post-Brexit trade deal is likely to be the most complex part of the negotiation because it needs the unanimous approval of more than 30 national and regional parliaments across Europe, some of whom may want to hold referendums.

