**Brexit** is the impending [withdrawal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Withdrawal_from_the_European_Union) of the [United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) (UK) from the [European Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union) (EU). In a [referendum on 23 June 2016](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_European_Union_membership_referendum,_2016), a majority of British voters supported leaving the EU. On 29 March 2017, the [UK government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_the_United_Kingdom) invoked [Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_50_of_the_Treaty_on_European_Union). The [European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union_(Withdrawal)_Act_2018) declares "exit day" to be 29 March 2019 at 11 p.m. ([Central European Time](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_European_Time)).

Prime Minister [Theresa May](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theresa_May) announced the government's intention not to seek permanent membership of the [European single market](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_single_market) or the [EU customs union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union_Customs_Union) after leaving the EU and promised to [repeal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union_(Withdrawal)_Bill) the [European Communities Act of 1972](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Communities_Act_1972_(UK)) and incorporate existing [European Union law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union_law) into [UK domestic law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_the_United_Kingdom). A new government department, the [Department for Exiting the European Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department_for_Exiting_the_European_Union), was created in July 2016.

[Negotiations with the EU](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brexit_negotiations) officially started in June 2017, aiming to complete the withdrawal agreement by October 2018. In June 2018, the UK and the EU published a joint progress report outlining agreement on issues including [customs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Customs), [VAT](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Value-added_tax) and [Euratom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euratom_Treaty" \o "Euratom Treaty).

The UK joined the [European Communities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Communities) (EC) in 1973, with membership confirmed by a [referendum in 1975](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_European_Communities_membership_referendum,_1975). In the 1970s and 1980s, withdrawal from the EC was advocated mainly by [Labour Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Party_(UK)" \o "Labour Party (UK)) members and [trade union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_union) figures. From the 1990s, the main advocates of withdrawal were the newly founded [UK Independence Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_Independence_Party) (UKIP) and an increasing number of Eurosceptic [Conservative Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Party_(UK)) members. Prime Minister [David Cameron](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Cameron) held the referendum in fulfilment of a 2015 manifesto pledge. Cameron, who had campaigned for "Remain", resigned after the referendum result and was succeeded by Theresa May, who called a [snap general election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_general_election,_2017) less than a year later, in which she lost her overall majority. Her minority government is [supported in key votes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confidence_and_supply) by the [Democratic Unionist Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Unionist_Party).

Six weeks after the referendum, the Bank of England introduced [quantitative easing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantitative_easing) and lower interest rates, thus allowing both [depreciation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Depreciation) of [sterling](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pound_sterling) and a rise in inflation that outpaced wage growth for most of 2017. The drop in the value of sterling has been claimed to have been caused in part by hedge-fund managers betting on Brexit against polls predicting a narrow victory for the "Remain" camp.

There is a broad consensus in existing economic research that Brexit is likely to reduce the UK's real [per capita income](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Per_capita_income) in the medium term and long term. There is also agreement among economists that the Brexit referendum itself damaged the economy in the subsequent two years. Studies on effects that have materialised since the referendum show annual losses of £404 for the average UK household, and losses between 1.3% and 2.1% of UK GDP. Brexit is likely to reduce immigration from [European Economic Area](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Economic_Area) (EEA) countries to the UK, and poses challenges for UK higher education and academic research. As of June 2018, the size of the "[divorce bill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brexit#Divorce_bill)", the UK's inheritance of existing EU trade agreements, and [relations with Ireland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland%E2%80%93United_Kingdom_relations) and other EU member states remain uncertain. The precise impact on the UK depends on whether the process will be a ["hard" or a "soft" Brexit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brexit#Hard_and_soft_Brexit).