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

Here is an easy-to-understand guide to Brexit - beginning with the basics, then a look at the negotiations, followed by a selection of answers to questions we've been sent.

What does Brexit mean?
It is a word that has become used as a shorthand way of saying the UK leaving the EU - merging the words Britain and exit to get Brexit, in a same way as a possible Greek exit from the euro was dubbed Grexit in the past.

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 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. See the results in more detail.

What changed in government after the referendum?
Britain got a new Prime Minister - Theresa May. The former home secretary took over from David Cameron, who announced he was resigning on the day he lost the referendum. Like Mr Cameron, Mrs May was against Britain leaving the EU but she played only a very low-key role in the campaign and was never seen as much of an enthusiast for the EU. She became PM without facing a full Conservative leadership contest after her key rivals from what had been the Leave side pulled out.

Where does Theresa May stand on Brexit?
Theresa May was against Brexit during the referendum campaign but is now in favour of it because she says it is what the British people want. Her key message has been that "Brexit means Brexit" and she triggered the two year process of leaving the EU on 29 March. She set out her negotiating goals in a letter to the EU council president Donald Tusk.

How did the snap election change things?
Theresa May surprised everyone after the 2017 Easter Bank Holiday by calling an election for 8 June (it had been due in 2020). She said she wanted to strengthen her hand in Brexit negotiations with European leaders. She said Labour, the SNP and other opposition parties - and members of the House of Lords - would try to block and frustrate her strategy. However Mrs May did not increase her party's seats in the Commons and she ended up weakened, having to rely on support from the 10 MPs from Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party. You can get more detail on the 2017 election here.

What has happened to the UK economy since the Brexit vote?
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 and it is true that the pound slumped the day after the referendum - and remains around 10% lower against the dollar and 15% down against the euro. But predictions of immediate doom were wrong, 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. UK growth has slowed so far in 2017, but the economy is still expanding. Inflation has risen since June 2016 to stand at 2.6%, but unemployment has continued to fall, to stand at a 42 year low of 4.4%. Annual house price increases have fallen from 9.4% in June 2016 but were still at an inflation-beating 4.7% in the year to May 2017, according to official ONS figures.

Brexit talks are under way
They finally, officially, started on 19 June, 2017. The UK and EU negotiating teams are scheduled to meet face-to-face for one week each month. Their first tasks are trying to get an agreement on the rights of UK and EU citizens after Brexit, reaching a figure for the amount of money the UK will need to pay on leaving, the so-called "divorce bill", and what happens to the Northern Ireland border. You can find out more about the talks here.
What is the European Union?
The European Union - often known as the EU - is an economic and political partnership involving 28 European countries (click here if you want to see the full list). It began after World War Two to foster economic co-operation, with the idea that countries which trade together are more likely to avoid going to war with each other. It has since grown to become a "single market" allowing goods and people to move around, basically as if the member states were one country. It has its own currency, the euro, which is used by 19 of the member countries, its own parliament and it now sets rules in a wide range of areas - including on the environment, transport, consumer rights and even things such as mobile phone charges. Click here for a beginners' guide to how the EU works.

What is Article 50?
Article 50 is a plan for any country that wishes to exit the EU. It was created as part of the Treaty of Lisbon - an agreement signed up to by all EU states which became law in 2009. Before that treaty, there was no formal mechanism for a country to leave the EU. It's pretty short - just five paragraphs - which spell out that any EU member state may decide to quit the EU, that it must notify the European Council and negotiate its withdrawal with the EU, that there are two years to reach an agreement - unless everyone agrees to extend it - and that the exiting state cannot take part in EU internal discussions about its departure.

What date will the UK will leave the EU?
For the UK to leave the EU it had to invoke Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty which gives the two sides two years to agree the terms of the split. Theresa May triggered this process on 29 March, meaning the UK is scheduled to leave on Friday, 29 March 2019. It can be extended if all 28 EU member states agree, but at the moment all sides are focusing on that date as being the key one.

What's going to happen to all the EU laws in force in the UK?
The Conservative government has introduced the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill to Parliament. If passed, it will end the primacy of EU law in the UK. This "Great Repeal Bill" as it has been called, is supposed 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. The government is facing claims from Remain supporting MPs that it is giving itself sweeping powers to change legislation without proper Parliamentary scrutiny. Read a full guide to the bill.

What is the Labour Party's position on Brexit?
Labour's position on Brexit was tweaked in mid-August, when the shadow Brexit secretary, Sir Keir Starmer, announced that the party now wanted to keep the UK in the single market and a customs union during a transition that could last for up to four years. Labour would also accept free movement of people, payments into the EU budget and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice during the transition. This is a considerably "softer" version of Brexit than the one advocated by the government, but there are still divisions within the party about whether the UK should try to stay in the single market in the longer term.

What do 'soft' and 'hard' Brexit mean?
These terms have increasingly been used as debate focused on the terms of the UK's departure from the EU. There is no strict definition of either, but they are used to refer to the closeness of the UK's relationship with the EU post-Brexit. So at one extreme, "hard" Brexit could involve the UK refusing to compromise on issues like the free movement of people even if meant leaving the single market. At the other end of the scale, a "soft" Brexit might follow a similar path to Norway, which is a member of the single market and has to accept the free movement of people as a result of that.

What is the single market?
The single market is seen by its advocates as the EU's biggest achievement and one of the main reasons it was set up in the first place. Britain was a member of a free trade area in Europe before it joined what was then known as the common market. In a free trade area countries can trade with each other without paying tariffs - but it is not a single market because the member states do not have to merge their economies together. The European Union single market, which was completed in 1992, allows the free movement of goods, services, money and people within the European Union, as if it was a single country. It is possible to set up a business or take a job anywhere within it. The idea was to boost trade, create jobs and lower prices. But it requires common law-making to ensure products are made to the same technical standards and imposes other rules to ensure a "level playing field". Critics say it generates too many petty regulations and robs members of control over their own affairs. Mass migration from poorer to richer countries has also raised questions about the free movement rule. Theresa May has ruled out the UK staying in the single market. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has said continued membership of the single has to be an option in negotiations with Brussels. Read more: A free trade area v EU single market.
**What's the difference between the single market and the customs union?**
The customs union ensures EU member states all charge the same import duties to countries outside the EU. It allows member states to trade freely with each other, without burdensome customs checks at borders, but it limits their freedom to strike their own trade deals. It is different from a free trade area. In a free trade area no tariffs, taxes or quotas are charged on goods and services moving within the area but members are free to strike their own external trade deals. The single market is a very different beast - it is not just about the trade in goods. It allows the free movement of people, money and services as if the EU was a single country.

**Who is negotiating Britain's exit from the EU?**
Theresa May set up a government department, headed by veteran Conservative MP and Leave campaigner David Davis, to take responsibility for Brexit. Former defence secretary, Liam Fox, who also campaigned to leave the EU, was given the new job of international trade secretary and Boris Johnson, who was a leader of the official Leave campaign, is foreign secretary. These three are each set to play roles in negotiations with the EU and seek out new international agreements, although it would be Mrs May, as prime minister, who would have the final say. [Who's who guide to both sides' negotiators](#).

**How long will it take for Britain to leave the EU?**
The Article 50 process lasts two years so the intention is for the UK to leave the EU on 29 March 2019. EU law still stands in the UK until it ceases being a member. But there is currently uncertainty about how final the break will be on that day - a number of UK and EU figures back the idea of having a "transition" period of up to three years to allow a smooth implementation of whatever Brexit deal is negotiated and minimise disruption to businesses and holidaymakers etc.

**Why might 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.

**So why can't the UK just cut all ties in March 2019?**
The UK could cut all ties, but Theresa May and others would like to avoid such a "cliff-edge" where current regulations on things like cross-border trade and travel between the UK and the EU ends overnight. They think it would harm the economy.

**What is the focus of negotiations between the UK and EU?**
The priority issues in negotiations are:
1) Agreeing what rights EU citizens already in the UK - and UK citizens living in the rest of the EU - will have after Brexit.
2) Agreeing a figure for the amount of money the UK has to pay the rest of the EU "to settle its accounts", when it leaves.
3) Working out what will happen on the border between Northern Ireland, when it is outside the EU, and the Republic of Ireland, which is part of the EU.
The EU says it wants to make decent progress on these three issues before beginning talks about what the UK's relations with the EU will be like after Brexit. Mrs May set out her negotiating priorities in the letter officially triggering the process of leaving the EU on 29 March. [Here's a guide to the key points](#).

**How are the talks going?**
There have been agreements on some technical points, but the chief EU negotiator, Michel Barnier, has said there had been no decisive progress on any of the main issues. The UK's Brexit Secretary, David Davis, insists progress has been made. The main sticking point at the moment is money - and the size of the bill the UK will pay to cover its outstanding obligations when it leaves. The UK wants this to be as low as possible. All the other countries in the EU want it to be as high as possible. Because when the UK leaves, there will be a hole in the EU budget and they will have to cover the shortfall. The UK government has published a series of papers setting out its position on issues such as future customs arrangements, and on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Government policy is now that the UK will leave the single market and the customs union on the day of Brexit, but that it will try to replicate existing customs arrangements during a time-limited transition period.

**What happens if there is no deal with the EU?**
Prime Minister Theresa May says leaving the EU with no deal whatsoever would be better than signing the UK up to a bad one. Without an agreement on trade, the UK would have to operate under World Trade Organisation rules, which could mean customs checks and tariffs on goods as well as longer border
check for travellers. There are also questions about what would happen to Britain's position as global financial centre and the land border between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. There is also concern that Brits living abroad in the EU could lose residency rights and access to free emergency health care. *Here is a full explanation of what 'no deal' could mean*

**What happens to EU citizens living in the UK?**
It has yet to be agreed. All EU nationals lawfully resident in the UK for at least five years will be able to apply for "settled status" and be able to bring over spouses and children, under a 15-page proposal unveiled by Theresa May. Mrs May says she wants to give reassurance and certainty to the 3.2 million EU citizens in the UK - as well as citizens of the three EEA countries and Switzerland. But any deal on their future legal status and rights must be reciprocal and also give certainty to the 1.2 million British expats living on the continent after the UK leaves the EU - expected to be on 29 March 2019, she says. Michel Barnier, who is leading the Brexit negotiations for the EU, said the UK's proposals did not go far enough and he wanted the same level of protection citizens currently have under EU law. He has demanded more clarity and ambition from the UK government.

The key points of the UK’s proposals are:
- Those granted settled status will be able to live, work, study and claim benefits just as they can now
- The cut-off date for eligibility is undecided but will be between 29 March 2017 and 29 March 2019
- Family members of EU citizens living abroad will be able to return and apply for settled status
- EU nationals in the UK for less than five years at the specified date will be able to continue living and working in the UK
- Once resident for five years, they can apply for settled status
- Those arriving after the cut-off point will be able to stay temporarily
- But there should be "no expectation" they will be granted permanent residence
- A period of "blanket residence permission" may apply to give officials time to process applications to stay in the UK
- The Home Office will no longer require evidence that EU citizens who weren't working held "comprehensive sickness insurance"

Labour has said it would guarantee the rights of EU citizens living in the UK to stay there on "day one" of a Labour government. EU nationals with a right to permanent residence, which is granted after they have lived in the UK for five years, should not see their rights affected after Brexit.

**What happens to UK citizens working in the EU?**
A lot depends on the kind of deal the UK agrees with the EU. If the government opted to impose work permit restrictions on EU nationals, then other countries could reciprocate, meaning Britons would have to apply for visas to work.

**What about EU nationals who want to work in the UK**
Any EU citizen already living and working in the UK will be able to carry on working and living in the UK after Brexit. The current plan is that even after Brexit, people from the EU will be able to move to work in the UK during a "transition" phase of up to three years. However they will have to register. A permanent proposal for post-Brexit immigration is not likely to be known for a few months yet, although it is widely expected that there will be a work permit system along the lines of that for non-EU nationals.

**What does the fall in the value of the pound mean for prices in the shops?**
People travelling overseas from the UK have found their pounds are buying fewer euros or dollars after the Brexit vote. Even if the pound regains some of its value, currency experts expect it in the longer term to remain at least 10% below where it was when the referendum happened. This means exports should get a boost as UK goods will be cheaper, but imported goods will get more expensive - some price rises for food, clothing and homeware goods have been seen. The latest UK inflation figures have the rate at 2.6%, above the target level, but not out of kilter with recent years.

**Will immigration be cut?**
Prime Minister Theresa May has said one of the main messages she has taken from the Leave vote is that the British people want to see a reduction in immigration. She has said this will be a focus of Brexit negotiations as she remains committed to getting net migration - the difference between the numbers entering and leaving the country - down to a "sustainable" level, which she defines as being below 100,000 a year. The rate of increase in the size of Britain's population has slowed significantly since the Brexit vote. This has largely been driven by an increase in emigration from the UK by citizens of Poland and the other East and Central European countries. There were still 246,000 more people coming to live in the UK than leaving in the year to March 2017, according to the latest estimates - some way above the government's target of 100,000.
**Could there be a second referendum?**
It seems highly unlikely. Both the Conservatives and the Labour Party have ruled out another referendum, arguing that it would be an undemocratic breach of trust with the British people who clearly voted to Leave.

**Will MPs get a vote on the Brexit deal?**
Yes. Theresa May has promised there will be a Commons and Lords vote to approve whatever deal the UK and the rest of the EU agree at the end of the two year process. This vote is currently proposed as a "take it or leave it" one. Labour wants the vote to have the option of sending the UK team back to renegotiate. It is worth mentioning that any deal also has to be agreed by the European Parliament - with British MEPs getting a chance to vote on it there.

**Will I need a visa to travel to the EU?**
The UK government wants to keep visa-free travel to the UK for EU visitors after Brexit and it is hoping this will be reciprocated, meaning UK citizens will continue to be able to visit EU countries for short periods without seeking official permission to travel. If visitors from EU countries wanted to work, study or settle in the UK they would have to apply for permission under the proposals. No agreement has been reached yet, however. If it is decided that EU citizens will need visas to come to the UK in the future, then UK citizens will need visas to travel to the EU.

**Will I still be able to use my passport?**
Yes. It is a British document - there is no such thing as an EU passport, so your passport will stay the same. In theory, the government could, if it wanted, decide to change the colour, which is currently standardised for EU countries, says the BBC's Europe correspondent, Chris Morris.

**Has any other member state ever left the EU?**
No nation state has ever left the EU. But Greenland, one of Denmark's overseas territories, held a referendum in 1982, after gaining a greater degree of self government, and voted by 52% to 48% to leave, which it duly did after a period of negotiation. The BBC's Carolyn Quinn visited Greenland to find out how they did it.

**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. Ms Sturgeon has officially asked for permission for a second referendum to be held. She had wanted the vote to be held between the autumn of 2018 and spring 2019, but after losing seats at the 2017 general election she has put her plans on hold with no referendum likely until 2021. Theresa May has said a second referendum should not be held during the Brexit process.

**What does it mean for Northern Ireland?**
The land border between Northern Ireland and EU member the Republic of Ireland is a key part of the Brexit talks. There is currently a common travel area between the UK and the Republic. Like Scotland, Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU in last year's referendum. The result in Northern Ireland was 56% for Remain and 44% for Leave. The UK government has published a paper setting out its vision for a post-Brexit border. It wants to avoid returning to a "hard border" - that means no physical infrastructure, such as customs posts. There would be no CCTV cameras or number plate recognition technology at the border, or set back from it. Instead, the UK government is arguing for a wide-ranging exemption under which small and medium-sized businesses will not have to comply with any new customs tariffs. If the proposals are accepted, customs officials envisage using a mix of technology and physical checks to monitor the compliance of bigger businesses engaged in international trade. Critics say the proposals lack credible detail, with Labour deriding the plans for the border as "a fantasy frontier". Sinn Fein, which was part of the ruling coalition in the Northern Ireland Assembly before it was suspended, has called for a referendum on leaving the UK and joining the Republic of Ireland as soon as possible. The Conservatives have rejected Sinn Fein's call, saying there was no evidence opinion had shifted in favour of a united Ireland.

**How much has Brexit cost so far and how much will it cost by the end?**
There is much debate about the long-term costs and benefits to the UK economy of Brexit - but what we do know for certain is that the EU wants the UK to settle any outstanding bills before it leaves. There have been no official estimates published of the size of the bill, which covers things like pension payments to EU officials, the cost of relocating London-based EU agencies and outstanding EU budget commitments. Various figures ranging from 50bn (£44bn) to 100bn (£88bn) euros have been bandied about but although the UK has agreed to meet its financial obligations, Brexit secretary David Davis has said: "We will not be paying €100bn." The UK could leave without any Brexit "divorce bill" deal but that
would probably mean everyone ending up in court. If compromise can be achieved, and if payment of the bill were to be spread over many years, the amounts involved may not be that significant economically.

**How will pensions, savings, investments and mortgages be affected?**
During the referendum campaign, David Cameron said the so-called "triple lock" for state pensions would be threatened by a UK exit. This is the agreement by which pensions increase by at least the level of earnings, inflation or 2.5% every year - whichever is the highest. Theresa May had proposed ditching the 2.5% part of the lock in the party's election manifesto, but as part of the post-election deal with the DUP the triple lock was again guaranteed. There was an early post-referendum cut in interest rates, which has helped keep mortgage and other borrowing rates low. There are few signs yet that rising inflation have worried the Bank of England enough to consider raising interest rates. But if that happened it would make mortgages and loans more expensive to repay - but would be good news for savers.

**Will duty-free sales on Europe journeys return?**
Journalists and writers on social media have greeted the reintroduction of duty-free sales as an "upside" or "silver lining" of Brexit. As with most Brexit consequences, whether this will happen depends on how negotiations with the EU play out - whether the "customs union" agreement between Britain and the EU is ended or continued.

**Will EHIC cards still be valid?**
If you are already living in another EU country on the day the UK leaves the bloc, your EHIC card - which entitles travellers to state-provided medical help for any condition or injury that requires urgent treatment, in any other country within the EU, as well as several non-EU countries - will continue to work. After that date, for EU citizens wishing to travel to the UK or UK citizens wishing to travel to the EU, it is unclear about what will happen because no deal has yet been reached. Read more here.

**Will cars need new number plates?**
Probably not, says BBC Europe correspondent Chris Morris, because there's no EU-wide law on vehicle registration or car number places, and the EU flag symbol is a voluntary identifier and not compulsory. The DVLA says there has been no discussion about what would happen to plates with the flag if the UK voted to leave.

**Could MPs block an EU exit?**
Could the necessary legislation pass the Commons, given that a lot of MPs in the current Parliament - all SNP and Lib Dems, nearly all Labour and many Conservatives - were in favour of staying? The referendum result is not legally binding - Parliament still has to pass the laws that will get Britain out of the 28 nation bloc, starting with the repeal of the 1972 European Communities Act. The withdrawal agreement also has to be ratified by Parliament - the House of Lords and/or the Commons could vote against ratification, according to a House of Commons library report. So in theory they could block the UK's EU exit. But in practice that is seen as very unlikely given that a majority of people voted for Brexit in the referendum.

**Will leaving the EU mean we don't have to abide by the European Court of Human Rights?**
The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg is not a European Union institution. It was set up by the Council of Europe, which has 47 members including Russia and Ukraine. So quitting the EU will not exempt the UK from its decisions. The Conservatives are committed to sticking with the Human Rights Act which requires UK courts to treat the ECHR as setting legal precedents for the UK during the Brexit process. There have been longstanding plans to repeal the act and replace it with a British Bill of Rights.

**What about the European Court of Justice?**
The Court of Justice of the European Union - to give it its full name - is the EU's highest legal authority. It is based in Luxembourg. It is an entirely different thing to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). It is the ECHR not the ECJ that has often upset British politicians by making it harder, for example, to deport terrorist suspects. The ECJ interprets and enforces the rules of the single market, settling disputes between member countries over issues like free movement and trade. It is at the centre of pretty much everything the EU does. Prime Minister Theresa May has vowed that Britain will not be under the "direct" jurisdiction of the ECJ after Brexit. But the UK government has not ruled out remaining under its jurisdiction during the Brexit transition period that is planned after March 2019. After that, there will need to be a new mechanism for settling disputes between the UK and the EU but what form that take has yet to be decided. There has been talk of an ombudsman, or some other third party, being appointed to settle disagreements. The UK has set out some ideas in a position paper, which was criticised for being too "vague". The EU is insisting that its citizens in the UK should continue to enjoy the legal protection of the ECJ even after Brexit, guaranteeing their right to work and access to benefits among other things.
This is a major sticking point in the negotiations, with the UK saying EU citizens living in the UK should be subject to British law only.

**Will the UK be able to rejoin the EU in the future?**

BBC Europe editor Katya Adler says the UK would have to start from scratch with no rebate, and enter accession talks with the EU. Every member state would have to agree to the UK re-joining. But she says with elections looming elsewhere in Europe, other leaders might not be generous towards any UK demands. New members are required to adopt the euro as their currency, once they meet the relevant criteria, although the UK could try to negotiate an opt-out.

**Who wanted the UK to leave the EU?**

The UK Independence Party, which received nearly four million votes - 13% of those cast - in the 2015 general election, but who saw their vote collapse to about a quarter of that at this year’s election, has campaigned for many years for Britain’s exit from the EU. They were joined in their call during the referendum campaign by about half the Conservative Party’s MPs, including Boris Johnson and five members of the then Cabinet. A handful of Labour MPs and Northern Ireland party the DUP were also in favour of leaving.

**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 wanted the UK to make all of its own laws again, rather than being created through shared decision making with other EU nations. Immigration was also a big issue for Brexiteers, 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".

**Who wanted the UK to stay in the EU?**

Then Prime Minister David Cameron was the leading voice in the Remain campaign, after reaching an agreement with other European Union leaders that would have changed the terms of Britain’s membership had the country voted to stay in. He said the deal would give Britain "special" status and help sort out some of the things British people said they didn't like about the EU, like high levels of immigration - but critics said the deal would make little difference. Sixteen members of Mr Cameron's Cabinet, including the woman who would replace him as PM, Theresa May, also backed staying in. The Conservative Party was split on the issue and officially remained neutral in the campaign. The Labour Party, Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, the Green Party and the Liberal Democrats were all in favour of staying in. The then US president Barack Obama also wanted Britain to remain in the EU, as did the leaders of other EU nations such as France and Germany.

**What were their reasons for wanting the UK to stay?**

Those campaigning for Britain to stay in the EU said it got a big boost from membership - it makes selling things to other EU countries easier and, they argued, the flow of immigrants, most of whom are young and keen to work, fuels economic growth and helps pay for public services. They also said Britain’s status in the world would be damaged by leaving and that we are more secure as part of the 28 nation club, rather than going it alone.

**What about businesses?**

Big business - with a few exceptions - tended to be in favour of Britain staying in the EU because it makes it easier for them to move money, people and products around the world. Given the crucial role of London as a financial centre, there's interest in how many jobs may be lost to other hubs in the EU. Some UK exporters say they've had increased orders or enquiries because of the fall in the value of the pound. Others are less optimistic, fearing products for the European market may have to be made at plants in the EU.

**Who led the rival sides in the campaign?**

- **Britain Stronger in Europe** - the main cross-party group campaigning for Britain to remain in the EU was headed by former Marks and Spencer chairman Lord Rose. It was backed by key figures from the Conservative Party, including Prime Minister David Cameron and Chancellor George Osborne, most Labour MPs, including party leader Jeremy Corbyn and Alan Johnson, who ran the Labour In for Britain campaign, the Lib Dems, Plaid Cymru, the Alliance party and the SDLP in Northern Ireland, and the Green Party. **Who funded the campaign:** Britain Stronger in Europe raised £6.88m, boosted by two donations totalling £2.3m from the supermarket magnate and Labour peer Lord Sainsbury. Other prominent Remain donors included hedge fund manager David Harding (£750,000), businessman and Travelex founder Lloyd Dorfman (£500,000) and the
Tower Limited Partnership (£500,000). Read a Who's Who guide. Who else campaigned to remain: The SNP ran its own remain campaign in Scotland as it did not want to share a platform with the Conservatives. Several smaller groups also registered to campaign.

- **Vote Leave** - A cross-party campaign that has the backing of senior Conservatives such as Michael Gove and Boris Johnson plus a handful of Labour MPs, including Gisela Stuart and Graham Stringer, and UKIP's Douglas Carswell and Suzanne Evans, and the DUP in Northern Ireland. Former Tory chancellor Lord Lawson and SDP founder Lord Owen were also involved. It had a string of affiliated groups such as Farmers for Britain, Muslims for Britain and Out and Proud, a gay anti-EU group, aimed at building support in different communities. **Who funded the campaign:** Vote Leave raised £2.78m. Its largest supporter was businessman Patrick Barbour, who gave £500,000. Former Conservative Party treasurer Peter Cruddas gave a £350,000 donation and construction mogul Terence Adams handed over £300,000. Read a Who's Who guide. **Who else campaigned to leave:** UKIP leader Nigel Farage was not part of Vote Leave. His party ran its own campaign. The Trade Union and Socialist Coalition also ran its own out campaign. Several smaller groups also registered to campaign.

**Will the EU still use English?**
Yes, says BBC Europe editor Katya Adler. There will still be 27 other EU states in the bloc, and others wanting to join in the future, and the common language tends to be English - "much to France's chagrin", she says.

**Will Brexit harm product safety?**
Probably not, is the answer. It would depend on whether or not the UK decided to get rid of current safety standards. Even if that happened any company wanting to export to the EU would have to comply with its safety rules, and it's hard to imagine a company would want to produce two batches of the same products.

**Here are a selection of questions sent in:**

[...]

**How much does the UK contribute to the EU and how much do we get in return?**
In answer to this query from Nancy from Hornchurch - the UK is one of 10 member states who pay more into the EU budget than they get out. Only France and Germany contribute more. In 2014/15, Poland was the largest beneficiary, followed by Hungary and Greece. The UK also gets an annual rebate that was negotiated by Margaret Thatcher and money back, in the form of regional development grants and payments to farmers, which added up to £4.6bn in 2014/15. According to the latest Treasury figures, the UK's net contribution for 2014/15 was £8.8bn - nearly double what it was in 2009/10. The National Audit Office, using a different formula which takes into account EU money paid directly to private sector companies and universities to fund research, and measured over the EU's financial year, shows the UK's net contribution for 2014 was £5.7bn. Read more number crunching from Reality Check.

[...]

**What impact will leaving the European Union have on the UK's long term political influence in Europe, asks Peter Hoare.**
**Norman Smith says:**
There are basically two views on what will happen in terms of clout when outside the EU.
View one is that the UK projects power and influence in the world, working through organisations such as the EU and that on our own it'll be a much diminished force.
View two is that unencumbered by the other 27 members, the UK can get on with things and start adopting a much more independent, self-confident, assertive role on the world stage.
My take is that not much is probably going to change.
I say that because the UK'll still be a member of significant organisations such as the UN and Nato, and will still be co-operating with EU partners. For example, there will still be close ties on defence with the French.
The UK will still be the same old Britain, will still have significant military force, will still be a wealthy country and will still be a nuclear power, so I don't think people will suddenly think the UK's an entirely different country.

[...]
How will access to healthcare change for expats living in the EU, asks Veronique Bradley, who lives in Italy.

Kevin Connolly says:
Healthcare is one of those issues that remains relatively simple as long as the UK remains in the EU. It is just part of a range of citizens' rights that apply across the entire union. After Brexit, I suppose there will be two possibilities. The first and easiest would be that the negotiators come up with a reciprocal deal that keeps the current arrangements, or something a bit like them, in place. If they don't, the situation will depend on the individual country where you live. For the Bradleys in Italy, for example, residents from non-EU countries, and that will soon include the Brits, will have to finalise their residency status, acquire an Italian identity card and then apply for an Italian health insurance card. If they visit the UK at the moment, access to the NHS for non-resident Brits is not straightforward unless you have a European health insurance card. The right to treatment is based on residency, not on your tax status. So, even if you live abroad and pay some British tax on a buy-to-let property for instance, you might find yourself getting a bill for any NHS treatment you end up getting while you are back in the UK.

What will happen to EU nationals who lived and worked in the UK and now receive a British state pension, asks Peter Barz, a German citizen living in the UK.

Norman Smith says:
If you are an EU national and you get a British state pension, nothing much should change, because the state pension is dependent not on where you come from, but on how long you have paid National Insurance contributions in the UK. So it doesn't matter whether you come from Lithuania or Latvia or Transylvania or Timbuktu, what counts is how much you have paid in terms of National Insurance contributions. There is one wrinkle though and that is that you have to have paid in for at least 10 years. Under the current rules, if you are an EU citizen and haven't paid in for 10 years, you can point to any contributions you have made in your native country and say, "I paid in there", and that will count. That works for EU countries and another 16 countries with which the UK has social security agreements. Once we have left the EU, you will no longer be able to do that unless we negotiate new reciprocal agreements. If we don't then potentially, if you have paid in fewer than than 10 years' worth of National Insurance contributions, you will not get a British state pension.

Would EU citizens still be able to move to the UK in the next two years until March 2019?
Yes, they would. The UK is a member of the EU until it withdraws, so the freedom of movement rules will apply until then.