

UK-EU COUPLES AFTER BREXIT

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UK-EU couples now face negative impacts of the UK family immigration regime

- Relationships between British people and partners from the EU are common – 1 in 25 couples in Britain have one UK and one EU partner.
- Before Brexit, UK-EU (including UK-EEA/Swiss) couples could live together in the UK with few restrictions. Now, EU partners can visit visa-free but to stay long-term they must meet the family immigration rules (or find another visa route).
- The UK's family immigration system is expensive, complex, restrictive and slow – it was described by a recent House of Lords Committee report as 'failing families' and 'failing society'.
- This significant expansion of the population affected by the family immigration rules is an overlooked consequence of Brexit. It strengthens the need to address the problems identified by the House of Lords Committee report in order to ensure a fair and transparent family immigration system.



About the Research:

The Brexit Couples research project is investigating the experiences of UK-EU (and UK-EEA/Swiss) couples as they negotiate the UK family immigration regime. By charting the emerging impact of this under-explored consequence of Brexit the project hopes to inform support and improvement of the family immigration system.

Brexit Couples is a research collaboration between the University of Bristol and University of Exeter.

For more information visit:
www.brexitcouples.ac.uk



UK-EU couples and the UK family immigration regime

In 2023, the House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee described the UK family immigration system as ‘[at odds with the Government’s commitment to family life](#)’ due to its restrictiveness, complexity, cost, delay, and poor communication. At best, families undergo an unnecessarily stressful and costly visa process, and at worst, it forces them to [live apart](#). Serious financial, social, physical, and psychological impacts have been [reported](#).

New analysis of the Labour Force Survey by the [Brexit Couples](#) project shows that just under 10% of married/cohabiting couples in the UK have one partner born in the UK, and one born overseas. Almost half of these – around 4% of all couples – involve a British person and a partner from the EU.

Brexit is unlikely to significantly reduce the formation of UK-EU relationships, given ongoing connections and movement (for tourism, work, study) between the UK and its European neighbours.

Many such couples want to build their life together in the UK. Before Brexit this was usually straightforward. Now, if the EU partner does not have settled or pre-settled status, they need a visa or leave to remain. Unlike many other nationalities, they can travel visa-free to the UK for visits, but admission is not guaranteed, the visitor rules are complex and restrictive, and they do not allow couples to live together on a long-term basis.

Discussion of the immigration consequences of Brexit has focused on labour and irregular migration. However, Brexit has significantly expanded the population impacted by the family immigration rules, adding urgency to the calls by the House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee for simplification and reform.

Call for Research Participants

- Are you in a couple with one partner from the UK (or who has made the UK their home), and one from the EU, EEA or Switzerland?
- Does the EU (or EEA/Swiss) partner need a visa or leave to remain for you to live together long term in the UK?
- Are you willing to share your experiences of the UK immigration system?

We are looking for UK-EU couples at any stage of the process (or just thinking of applying for a spouse/partner visa) to interview for the Brexit Couples project.

Get in touch at:

brexitcouples-project@bristol.ac.uk

Contact the researchers

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You can also email the Research Team at: **brexitcouples-project@bristol.ac.uk**