

Survey – Brexit

8 British expats out of 10 see Brexit as a threat for the United Kingdom

Port-Louis, March 22nd, 2017

Only a few days before the British government launches the Brexit procedure and starts negotiations with the European Union, two surveys conducted by the [interactive platform Expat.com](#) highlight the concerns of expats in the UK and EU. One survey has collected the opinions of British expats living in other EU countries, while the other survey has collected the opinions of largely EU citizens (amongst others who identified as being nationals of non-EU countries) living in the UK. Both surveys show consensus between respondents regardless of their nationality. Overall, 80% of the respondents consider that Brexit poses a threat for the United Kingdom.

1 in 3 respondents say Brexit has had an impact on their life as an expatriate

When asked whether the Brexit vote has affected their daily life, 38% of British expatriates noted that it has had a significant impact. While 22% of people asked noted only a slight change in day to day life as a result of the referendum, 40% noted no immediate change at all. The same question put to expatriates in the UK yielded similar results.

As the questions were open-ended, individuals were also able to express their emotions following the decision to leave the EU, which included uncertainty about the future, depression, a higher level of stress, etc. Many comments also reveal the precarious situation of families with members from other EU countries. An alarming number of UK citizens living in the EU directly noted the impact Brexit has had on their mental health, with stress, anxiety (“worry”) and depression being the main feelings expressed by numerous participants.

“I stopped planning my future in the UK. I stopped planning any investments in the UK.”

“It will affect my children who were both born in the UK. I thought that the UK will offer them a better education. But I'm afraid that the UK is one of the most racist countries in the world.”

“I will have to leave the country in which I have been paying tax for the past 20 years.”

“I feel stress and anxiety every time I turn on the news. Brexit will influence the choice of my career and future planning.”

“My income is diminished considerably. I am depressed and stressed, and my health generally has suffered.”

“The stress of not knowing what will happen to us – lack of sleep and worrying.”

Around 12% of expatriates living in the UK have reported experiencing or witnessing some form of racism, while a further 8% stated that they feel unwelcome in the UK as a result of Brexit. British expats also mentioned a change of attitude towards British residents, as well as a sense of embarrassment and fear over rising nationalism in the UK.

“Some people make nasty comments about me as an immigrant, accusing me of taking a job from the British.”

“I had my car vandalised six times in the months before the vote. I was fired from my job afterwards.”

“I am scared about my future. English people are not nice to immigrants, now more than before.”

“They see us as second-class citizens.”

Other concerns cited by respondents include the falling value of the pound. Of the 60% of British expats who replied that Brexit has to some extent affected their daily life, 11% noted the exchange rate being an area of major concern because it is due to property values, paying mortgages or just relying on an income in pound sterling. A further 7% expressed their fears in connection with the drop in the value of the pound and their pensions, as well as uncertainty over pension guarantees from the UK government while living abroad. 7% of expats in the UK also relayed concerns regarding the depreciation of the pound.

More than 80% of expats in the UK say that Brexit is a threat for the country

82% of expats in the UK believe that Brexit is a threat for the UK, with just 18% viewing the outcome of the referendum as an opportunity for the UK. The question asked to British expats was slightly different: "Are you optimistic or pessimistic with regards to the future of the UK?" 78% of respondents reported feeling pessimistic. Interestingly, three-quarters of under 35's were pessimistic about the UK's outlook but were not looking to leave the country, while four-fifths of participants over 50 reported feeling pessimistic, despite the fact that there was a noteworthy age divide when it came to how people voted during the referendum.

Many British expats recalled that they were not able to vote at the referendum, as they had left the country more than 15 years ago. Despite the striking disapproval among British expats, the difference of votes between the Yes and No sides (1.26 million) in the referendum is such that even an en masse vote by the UK expats in favor of the "remain" side would probably not have been enough to fill the gap.

Freedom to live anywhere in the EU at the heart of British expats concerns

A yes or no question was asked to British expats living in the EU: "What is your main topic of concern with regards to Brexit?" 36% of respondents cited the freedom to live in the EU as being their main concern, followed by the freedom to work (15%). Salaries and pensions and freedom to move anywhere in the EU came in a very close third and fourth (12% and 11%, respectively). The results vary according to the profile of the respondent. Pensions are naturally a greater cause of concern among retirees, while freedom to work is much more important among employees and employers.

More than 1 in 3 expats expressed an intent or desire to leave their country of residence

4% of British expats living in the EU and 11% of expats in the UK stated an intent to leave their country of residence and that the vote in favor of Brexit played a role in their decision. 21% of British expats and 31% of expats in the UK are considering leaving their country of residence as a result of the referendum.

Plans by UK companies to move abroad

Much has already been said about British companies moving to the continent to continue benefiting from the EU market. For example, HSBC announced earlier this year, the relocation of 1000 jobs to Paris. The survey confirms this trend.

To the question "Does your company intend to leave the UK?" 19% of the respondents answered positively, while 23% answered "no, but I know one or several companies considering this possibility". A few sources indicated that major companies were looking to take their European headquarters to an EU member state or at least establish a base on the continent. There were also small business

owners who were worried about the consequences of the vote to leave on their businesses, as well as those employed by universities who reported an uncertainty around funding.

Expats' emotions vary between confusion, frustration, and anger

The survey sent to expats in the UK ends with an open question: “What is your general feeling since the vote for Brexit?”

Negative comments

“As a former civil servant who has been negotiating free trade agreements, it is laughable what the politicians say about the ease with which new deals will be signed and so on.”

“Brexit definitely has divided people and demonised the word 'migrant' »

“Very pessimistic. I feel like I am not allowed to be with my British husband anymore, like I am suddenly unwelcome. And the UK government isn't helping by making it so expensive to become a British national.”

“It feels like the past 20 years of slow and steady progress away from xenophobia has been undone in one foul swoop!”

Positive comments

“Very optimistic. Especially for commonwealth relationships and trade opportunities. By joining the EU, the UK betrayed the commonwealth regarding trade.”

“Yes very optimistic. Change is an opportunity. Something different than the status quo.”

“Yes very optimistic about Brexit. I see it as a new opportunity for the UK to regain its sovereignty and grow economically.”

“I'm optimistic that in the long term things can go back to normality, however in the short term I believe there will be a strong negative economic impact.”

“I am sure everything will work out well in the end, but I think that it is going to be more complicated for individuals to move around; simple things like travelling and buying a property”

About the survey

1903 individuals, either British expats living in the EU or expats living in the UK answered a survey designed by Expat.com and communicated between March 14 and March 17 through the social networks. 1083 British expats and 820 EU expats in the UK participated in this poll.

About Expat.com

With more than 1.8 million members, [Expat.com](https://www.expat.com) is the largest expat help and support network. Whether they are about to relocate or already living abroad, Expat.com helps thousands of individuals throughout their expatriation project. Among its services, Expat.com offers a forum, organises expat meetings, has individual country guides, hosts job and housing offers, classifieds, content focused on international mobility — all services are free.

Press contact:

Séverin Guiton

Communications Department

Expat.com

severin@expat.com