



What Would Rejoining the EU Mean for the UK?

A Look Ahead

Rejoining the EU isn't straightforward; it certainly won't be the same as it was before. But it's a conversation more people are beginning to have.

This reference guide explores what rejoining could mean for daily life in the UK, from trade and travel to research and opportunity. It's about understanding what we'd gain, what we'd need to negotiate, and what matters most to people now.

1. Trade & the Economy

What could rejoining restore?

- Frictionless trade with 27 countries (no customs checks, no rules of origin costs or export codes).
- Simplified and reliable supply chains for UK businesses.
- Stronger UK investor confidence due to long-term stability.

Rejoining the single market could reduce paperwork and costs, especially for small and medium businesses.

2. Freedom of Movement

What could rejoining restore?

- The right to live, work, study, and retire in 27 EU countries without visas.
- Greater job mobility for young people and skilled workers.
- Easier family connections across borders.

Freedom of choice, not just migration policy.

3. Education & Research

What rejoining could unlock:

- Full access to Erasmus+ (youth mobility, school exchanges, teacher training).
- More research funding and international collaboration for UK universities.

4. Consumer Rights & Protections

What could rejoining help with?

- EU-wide environmental and safety standards.
- Protections for air and water quality help clear up our waterways.
- Stronger food labelling, product safety, and worker rights.

5. Influence and Partnership

What rejoining could offer:

- A seat at the table in shaping Europe's rules and direction, without having to blindly follow the rules and regulations they create.
- Greater cooperation on climate, energy, digital policy, and defence.
- More stability in UK–EU relations (fewer reactive negotiations).

6. Regional and Social Funding

What rejoining could offer:

- Access to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which supports economic growth in deprived areas.
- Access to the European Social Fund (ESF), which supports people in gaining skills, training, and employment.
- Access to the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which helps rural communities and farm development.
- Access to the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), which supports coastal economies, fishing fleets, and marine projects.

What Would Rejoining Involve?

Rejoining the EU wouldn't mean simply reversing Brexit. It would be a new application, shaped by the UK's political climate, public support, and the EU's current structure.

There's no one-size-fits-all pathway, but other countries' experiences help us understand what to expect.

The UK's Unique Position

- The UK would be the first country to reapply after leaving.
- It has a high level of regulatory alignment (still close to EU standards).
- But it also has a complex history and may face tougher political questions than new applicants.

What We Can Learn from Others

Norway & Switzerland –

Close but Not In

- Chose not to join the EU.
- Maintain access through the EEA and bilateral agreements.
- Must follow many EU rules without having a vote on them.

Lesson: Staying close without membership still requires following rules set by the EU, with limited influence in decisions.

Croatia:

Joined in 2013

- Applied in 2003 and joined after 10 years of preparation.
- Met the EU criteria on governance, economy, and judicial reform.
- Adopted the euro in 2023, 10 years after accession.

Lesson: Entry takes time, alignment, and political readiness, but it is achievable.

What Would the UK Likely Face?

- *Public debate:* Support would need to be visible and sustained.
- *Negotiation of terms:* Likely no automatic opt-outs on issues like the Euro or Schengen.
- *Approval:* All 27 EU countries.
- *Rebuilding of political trust within EU institutions.*

“Rejoining would take political will — and political humility. But it’s a conversation that’s increasingly being had — in good faith, and with clearer eyes.”

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This document was edited collaboratively, and we welcome feedback or corrections.

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