

The Consumer Voice in Europe

Frequently Asked Questions

## WHAT IMPACT DOES BREXIT HAVE ON CONSUMERS?



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## **1. How will Brexit affect my consumer rights?**

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Until the UK has formally left the EU, all current EU rights and protections will continue to apply to both EU and UK consumers. It is likely that some rules will change in the future – but not immediately. Negotiations between the EU and Britain about their exit from the EU will start in March and are expected to last a minimum of two years.

## **2. When will Brexit happen?**

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Once the UK government has notified the other EU Member States of its intention to leave by triggering Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon, a minimum two-year negotiating period about the exit conditions will start.

This means the UK won't actually leave the EU until 2019 at the earliest.

## **3. What will happen when the UK has left the EU?**

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This will entirely depend on the withdrawal agreement which the EU and UK will negotiate. The UK government has announced that it intends to negotiate a trade agreement with the European Union of 27.

## **4. What role will consumer organisations play during the Brexit negotiations?**

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We will work with the EU institutions and our UK members to ensure that the consumer voice is heard and that consumer rights are protected.

BEUC has highlighted the following requests for immediate action:

- To include a specific consumer analysis in any impact assessment, especially related to retail prices, exchange rates, safety and quality standards. This analysis should detail the distributional impact on different consumer groups, particularly more vulnerable consumers, both in the UK and in the EU.
- To involve consumer representatives in any advisory groups that are established around the negotiations, ensuring a balanced view.
- To implement strong transparency principles related to availability of negotiation positions.

## 5. What consumer rights and protections could be at stake

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For over 40 years, EU consumer policy has led to a strong set of consumer rights and protections. We have listed some of these protections in which BEUC has played a role: <http://www.beuc.eu/successes>. Across the EU, consumers can return a good they purchased online within 14 days of the sale. Chemical products need to meet robust safety standards before being marketed in the EU. Thanks to the cooperation between market watchdog bodies, unsafe products can be removed swiftly from any shop in the single market. Food products can only carry health claims if they are scientifically proven (for instance “this product will strengthen your immune system”). It is unclear how Brexit will impact on these achievements.

## 6. What about my current rights as an EU or UK consumer? For example, having my rights protected when travelling, enjoying EU food quality standards, benefitting from the upcoming end of roaming charges or being able to make more cost-efficient money transfers?

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The exit of the UK from the EU could have significant implications for consumers on both sides of the Channel. UK consumers might be exposed to high roaming charges when travelling to EU countries, just as EU consumers could lose their traveller rights when flying with a British carrier from the UK. UK citizens would potentially no longer be able to use their European Health Insurance Card, which provides easy access to the local health care system when they are abroad.

However, before the negotiations have been finalised, it is unfortunately not possible to determine what the impact will be on current rights and protections. Our aim is to minimise the detriment Brexit might have on European consumers.



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