

The Evolution of Brexit and Its Impact on European Education and Research Programmes

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Abstract

Brexit has represented a historic transformation in the relationship between the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU), with significant impacts not only on the political and economic level, but also in the educational and academic spheres. This article explores the effects of Brexit on student mobility and research, analysing in detail the repercussions of the end of the UK's participation in crucial programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe. In particular, it examines how the UK, after its withdrawal from Erasmus+, established the Alan Turing Scheme to support the international mobility of British students, albeit with reduced funding compared to the European programme. The impact on UK universities and their opportunities to participate in joint research initiatives is also discussed, highlighting the growing competition for Horizon Europe funds and the increase in bureaucracy following the separation from the European single market. The work concludes with a reflection on the future prospects for the UK and the EU, underlining the need for adaptations to migration, economic and research policies to mitigate the effects of Brexit and foster broader international cooperation. Finally, possible research directions are suggested to better understand the evolution of educational mobility programs, migration policy management and post-Brexit economic competitiveness, with particular attention to the growing role of global alliances such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

Keywords: Brexit, mobilità studentesca, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Alan Turing Scheme

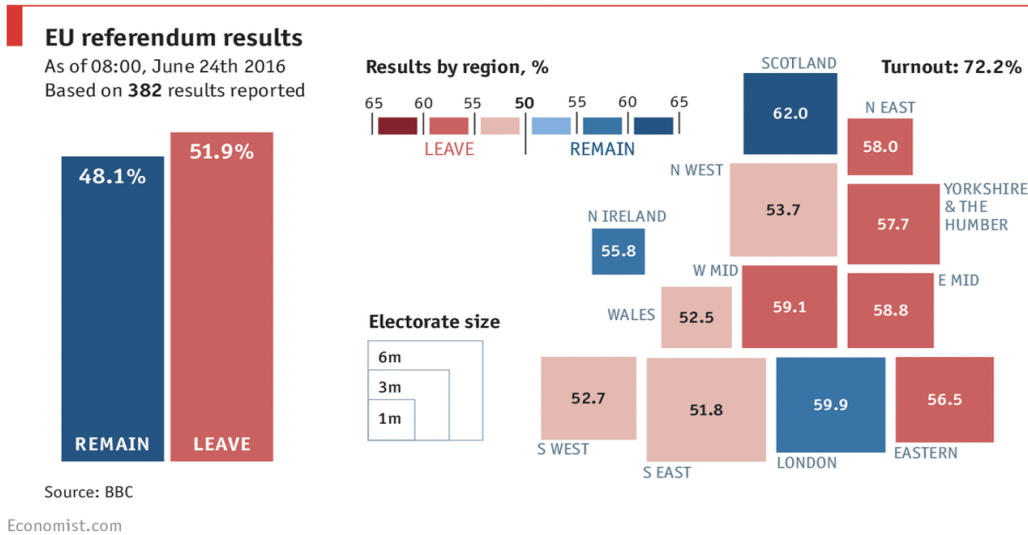
Introduction

The term "Brexit" was coined as a neologism, inspired by another term that emerged in the same period, "Grexit," which referred to the possible exit of Greece from the Eurozone. Although initially, Brexit represented a manifestation of opposition to European identity, marking a growing divide between the United Kingdom (UK) and the rest of Europe, the effects of its implementation have extended far beyond British borders, significantly impacting the European Union (EU).

The 2016 referendum saw a sizable part of the British population convinced that remaining in the EU was an evil to be rid of as soon as possible. Many believed that the preservation of a supposed "British identity" depended on the success of the pro-Leave campaign. The referendum question was: "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave it?" On June 23, 2016, the result saw the pro-Leave campaign win with

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51.89% of the votes, against 48.11% for Remain, with a turnout of 72.2%. While London, Scotland, and Northern Ireland supported Remain, the rest of Britain chose to leave the EU (Economist, 2016).



The UK's exit from the EU represents one of the most significant political and legal events of modern times, applying for the first time Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which regulates the exit of a member state. After forty-three years of membership, the UK withdrew, leaving an unprecedented landscape of uncertainty.

While the exit was not entirely unexpected, Brexit has had a profound economic and political impact on the EU, with repercussions in crucial areas such as finance, migration, and education. In particular, changes in EU funding programs, such as Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 (and later Horizon Europe), and other funds dedicated to research, education, and regional development, have had significant effects, creating new challenges for British students, researchers, and institutions.

The aim of this study is to analyze in detail how Brexit has affected these programs, with a particular focus on the changes in funding opportunities for education and research. This paper will examine both the direct and indirect impacts on UK beneficiaries of these funds, as well as explore potential future implications for academic and scientific collaboration between the UK and the EU.

An Overview of Impact of Brexit on Different Economic and Social Sectors

For a better representation the table below provides an overview of the impact of Brexit on different economic and social sectors, highlighting the direct consequences on trade flows, investment, labour mobility, as well as on educational and research exchange programmes. The data presented show a complex picture, in which Brexit has led to significant changes, reducing opportunities for cooperation with the EU, but also stimulating new alliances and economic opportunities with third countries.



Table 1²

Sector	Impact	Key figures	Sources
Commercio (UK-EU)	Reduction of exports between the UK and the EU	UK exports to the EU down by 15-20% (2021-2022)	Dhingra et al., 2017; LSE, 2021
Foreign direct investment	Decrease in foreign direct investment (FDI)	Estimated decrease of 10-15% compared to pre-Brexit levels	NIESR, 2020
Labour market	Reducing EU labour mobility in the UK	Decrease in EU labour mobility by 30-40% ; increase in bureaucracy for companies	CER, 2021
Erasmus+ programme	Exit from the Erasmus+ programme and creation of the Alan Turing programme	Reduction of Erasmus+ opportunities for British students: 50% (2021); Turing supports 40,000 students	British Council, 2021; UK Ministry of Education, 2021
Horizon Europe	Limited participation in the Horizon Europe programme (2021-2027)	5-10% reduction in research funding, compared to the pre-Brexit period	European Commission, 2021
Technology and innovation	Increased investment in some non-EU sectors, but loss of access to EU resources	Growth in technology by 7-10% ; reduction of EU investment in advanced technologies by 5%	UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), 2021
Global trade	New trade agreements with third countries (CPTPP, Australia, New Zealand)	New trade treaties signed that strengthened trade with CPTPP countries and global economies	UK Government, 2021
Global policy and alliances	Strengthening global alliances (with Ukraine, Turkey, etc.)	Increased cooperation with Ukraine and other nations outside the EU	UK Government, 2021

In the trade sector (UK-EU), there is a significant decrease in exports between the UK and the EU, with a decline of between 15% and 20% in the period of 2021-2022, as documented by studies such as that of Dhingra et al. (2017). This reflects the post-Brexit logistical and administrative difficulties, which have hampered traditional trade flows between the two areas.

² This table is my own elaboration.

In the field of foreign direct investment (FDI), the table highlights a 10-15% reduction in FDI to the UK, indicating that the country is less attractive as an investment destination due to new regulatory uncertainty and detachment from the EU, according to the NIESR (2020).

As far as the labour market is concerned, the most relevant figure concerns the decrease in the mobility of workers from the EU, which has been reduced by about 30-40%, with a consequent increase in bureaucratic difficulties for British companies. This phenomenon has been explored in detail by the ERC (2021), which highlights the issues related to the visa and registration of foreign workers.

In the education sector, the UK's exit from the Erasmus+ programme and the creation of the Alan Turing programme have led to a significant reduction in mobility opportunities for British students, with an estimated decrease of 50% in 2021. However, the Alan Turing program offers some compensation, supporting up to 40,000 students, as indicated by the British Council (2021).

For the research sector, the UK's participation in Horizon Europe has been limited, with a reduction in research funding of 5-10%, reflecting the country's difficulties in maintaining full access to the European research programme, as documented by the European Commission (2021).

In the technology and innovation sector, despite growth in the technology sector of 7-10%, the UK has suffered a 5% reduction in investment from the EU in advanced technologies, according to data from UK Research and Innovation (2021). This shows how Brexit has had mixed effects, with increasing opportunities in some non-EU sectors, but a loss of access to crucial resources and collaborations at the European level.

Finally, the table also highlights global trade and global politics and alliances. The UK has signed new trade treaties with third countries, such as those with the CPTPP, Australia and New Zealand, thus strengthening global trade, as reported by the UK Government (2021). In addition, increased cooperation with countries outside the EU, such as Ukraine and Turkey, has been a strategic response to the challenges arising from the detachment from the EU.

Evolution and Impact: The Trade and Cooperation Agreement

One of the first problems the British government faced after the Brexit referendum was the need to renegotiate trade agreements with the EU and each of its member states. The EU is, in fact, the UK's largest trading partner, accounting for 46% of the country's total trade in 2020 (Ward, 2021).

After a long period of intense negotiations and uncertainty, stemming from the need to balance the UK's sovereignty with a desire to maintain close economic and political relations with the EU, the two sides reached an agreement setting out the terms of future trade, social, political and security interactions. The Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), signed on 30 December 2020, provisionally applied from 1 January 2021 and formally entered into force on 1 May 2021, marks the beginning of a new phase for the UK outside the EU structures, highlighting the complexity of the dynamics that have driven the negotiations. Although the Agreement establishes a free trade area, removing tariffs and



trade quotas between the UK and the EU, it represents a move away from the single market, reflecting a more limited but functional partnership.

The TCA created a large free trade area, eliminating tariffs and quotas for goods traded between the two parties, but introduced new non-tariff barriers. For example, customs controls, certificates of origin and phytosanitary controls have been introduced for the movement of goods, agricultural products and animals between the UK and the EU. These administrative measures aim to protect high standards in crucial areas such as the environment, workers' rights and tax transparency.

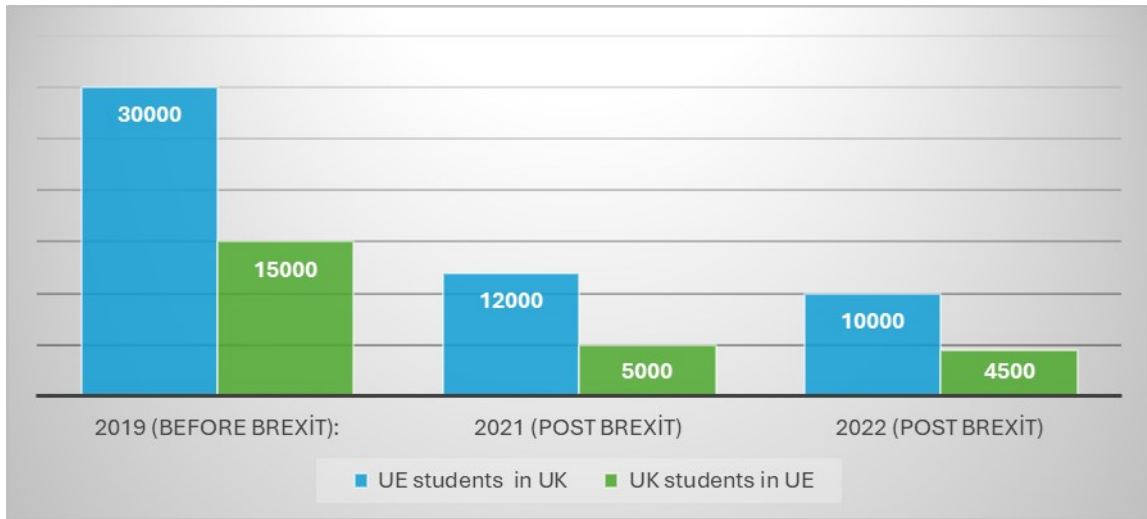
In addition, the agreement includes provisions for cooperation on security and justice, focusing on transnational crime, terrorism and other security threats. This cooperation provides for close coordination between EU and UK police forces, fostering joint efforts in the legal and criminal fields.

Numerous studies (Dhingra et al., 2017; Hantzsche et al., 2019; Oberhofer & Pfaffermayr, 2021; Stack & Bliss, 2020) simulated post-Brexit scenarios, predicting negative effects on trade between the UK and the EU. Due to the lack of comprehensive data on the post-Brexit period and uncertainty regarding the future of trade relations, most of these simulations were based on theoretical models.

A crucial aspect of the TCA is the governance framework, which is designed to provide legal certainty for businesses, consumers and citizens. A Joint Committee has been set up to oversee the implementation of the agreement and resolve any issues. However, despite efforts to maintain continuity in relations between the UK and the EU, some areas of collaboration have been disrupted such as student mobility and participation in the Erasmus+ programme.

Impact on Student Mobility and Education

One of the most significant effects of Brexit has been student mobility and academic exchanges between the UK and the EU. Before Brexit, in 2019, the UK welcomed around 30,000 students from the EU to its universities, while around 15,000 British students travelled to other EU member states to complete their studies. These exchanges were mainly facilitated by the Erasmus+ programme, which played a crucial role in promoting academic collaboration and student mobility between the UK and the EU.

Figure 1: Number of students in mobility (UK and EU) before and after Brexit³

The graph shows the number of students in mobility between the UK and the EU before and after Brexit, and highlights a significant drop in student mobility after Brexit, particularly for British students who previously easily participated in the Erasmus+ programme.

In the period 2014-2020, the UK had contributed around €1.8 billion to the Erasmus+ programme budget, receiving in return around €1 billion in funds from the same programme with a net negative balance of €800 million (UK Department of Education, 2020). Despite this, the UK government had initially asked to be able to participate in Erasmus+ only for a period of two years, but this proposal was rejected by the EU, which made it clear that participation in EU programmes would only be possible for the entire 2021-2027 programming period. Following this decision, the UK established the Alan Turing Scheme, which since 2021 has replaced Erasmus+ as the main international mobility programme for UK students and UK universities. This new scheme, while aiming to continue to facilitate academic exchanges, has significant limitations compared to its predecessor. Unlike Erasmus+, which covered all expenses for students, from transport to stay, the Alan Turing Scheme offers more limited funding for exchanges. For example, for the 2021-2022 academic year, the UK government allocated £110 million for the programme, which supported around 35,000 British students on exchanges with universities around the world. This is well below the reach of Erasmus+, which in 2019 had supported around 30,000 students from the EU in the UK (UK Government, 2021).

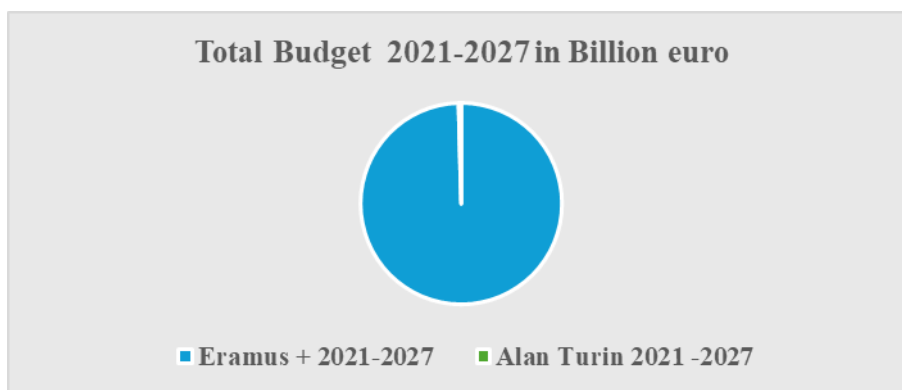
³ This table is my own elaboration. But please see the following sources for further information: British Council. (2021). *The impact of Brexit on student mobility between the UK and the EU*. www.britishcouncil.org; EU Commission. (2020). *Annual report on Erasmus+ mobility statistics and funding*. European Commission. www.ec.europa.eu



Table 2 : UK financial contributions to Erasmus+ (2014-2020) and funds received⁴

Year	Contribution from the UK (€)	Funds received (€)	Net balance (€)
2014	250 million	150 million	-100 million
2015	280 million	175 million	-105 million
2016	290 million	190 million	-100 million
2017	300 million	200 million	-100 million
2018	310 million	210 million	-100 million
2019	320 million	210 million	-110 million
Total (2014-2020)	1,800 million	1,000 million	-800 million

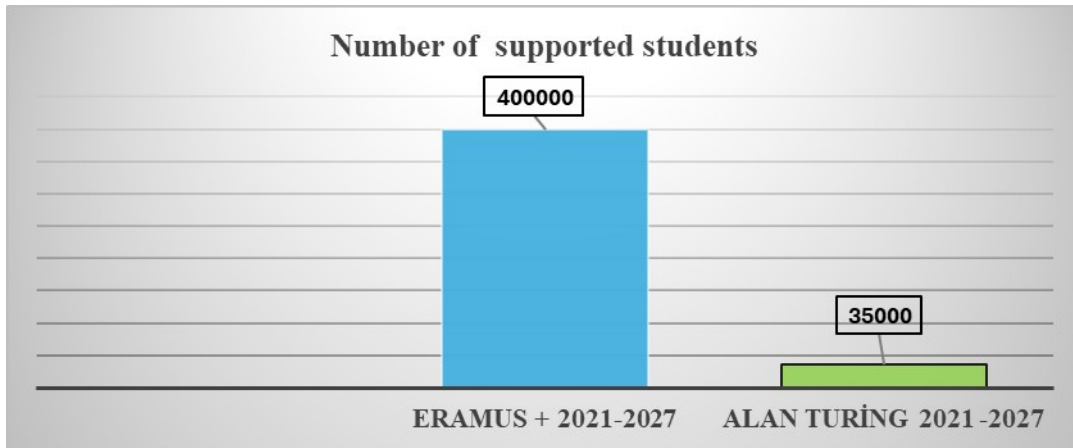
The table summarises the UK's financial contributions to Erasmus+ and the funds it received in return before Brexit. These figures indicate that the UK had a net negative balance, contributing more than the funds received, but despite this, benefited significantly from the Academic Mobility Scheme

Figure 2: Erasmus+ vs Alan Turing Programme financial comparison (2021-2022)⁵

⁴ This table is my own elaboration. But please see the following source for further information: British Ministry of Education. (n.d.). *Erasmus+ Programme financial contributions and funding received by the UK*. www.gov.uk

⁵ This figure is my own elaboration. But please see the following sources for further information: Department for Education, UK. (2021). *Alan Turing Programme: Funding and participation statistics*. www.gov.uk; European Commission. (2021). *Erasmus+ Programme: Financial report 2021*. www.ec.europa.eu

Graph 3: Comparison of the number of students supported by Erasmus+ vs Alan Turing Programme (2021-2022)⁶



The graph presents a comparison between the global funding of Erasmus+ and the Alan Turing Programme for the years 2021 and 2022, highlighting the difference in the size and scope of both programmes. As shown, the budget allocated to Erasmus+ is significantly higher than the Alan Turing Programme, as well as the number of students involved is significantly higher in the former. This disparity underlines the breadth and global influence of Erasmus+ (EU programme) that aims to promote international mobility and academic cooperation on a large scale.

On the contrary, the Alan Turing Programme, despite being an initiative of increasing importance for the UK, appears limited in resources and extension, a reflection of the challenges posed by Brexit and the need to develop an international mobility network competitive with that offered by Erasmus+. The relatively small size of the UK programme highlights the economic and political difficulties the UK has faced in creating an alternative to an established programme such as Erasmus+, which has operated for decades as a benchmark for European and global academic mobility.

The UK's exit from Erasmus+ has had significant repercussions for students and institutions. The loss of participation in Erasmus+ has reduced mobility opportunities for the UK students and limited the ability of the UK universities to attract students from the EU. At the same time, European universities have seen a decrease in exchanges with the UK, with an impact that has partly reduced opportunities for academic and research collaboration, two areas that traditionally benefit greatly from these exchange programmes.

⁶ This graph is my own elaboration. But please see the following sources for further information: Department for Education, UK. (2021). *Alan Turing Programme: Funding and participation statistics*. www.gov.uk; European Commission. (2021). *Erasmus+ Programme: Financial report 2021*. www.ec.europa.eu



Impact on Research Funding and Academic Mobility

In terms of access to research funding, Brexit has brought significant changes. Until its exit from the EU, the UK benefited fully from funding from the Horizon 2020 programme, the EU's main funding instrument for research and innovation, with annual contributions of around €2 billion. Brexit cuts off direct access to these funds, but thanks to an agreement negotiated in 2020, the UK continued to participate in the Horizon Europe programme for the period 2021-2027. Despite continued participation, the UK universities now find themselves having to compete with other EU members to access these funds. In addition, the separation from the single market has led to increased bureaucracy, resulting in higher operational costs and slowdowns in the approval processes of proposals. According to some studies (Tight, 2021), British universities have seen an overall reduction in European funding, with a drop of about 40% in contributions to research in some sectors.

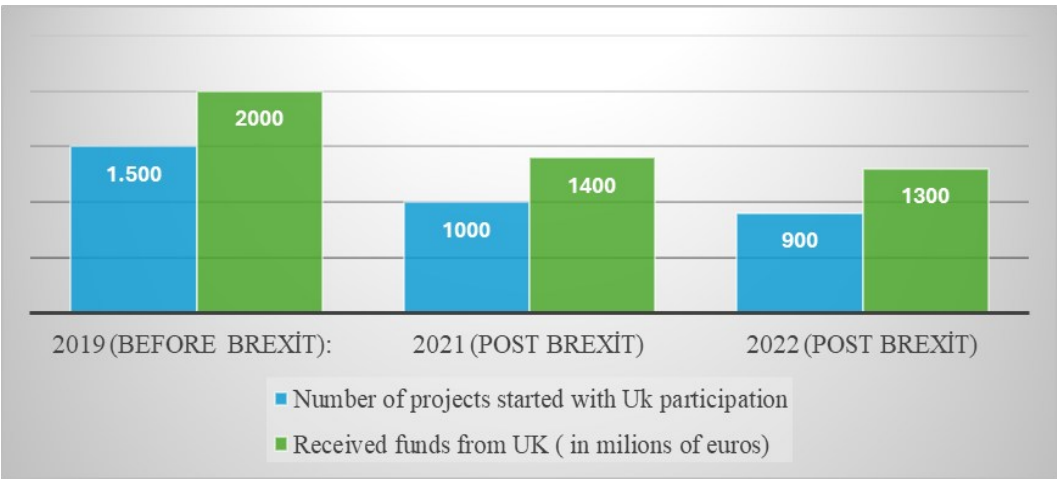
Table 3: UK access to Horizon Europe funds (2021-2027)⁷

Year	Horizon Europe (UK) Funds	Contribution to the Horizon Programme (EU)	Participation (direct vs. indirect)
2020 (before Brexit)	€2,000 million	€2,000 million	Direct participation
2021 (post-Brexit)	€1,400 million	€1,600 million (estimated)	Indirect participation
2022 (post-Brexit)	€1,300 million	€1,700 million (estimated)	Indirect participation
2023 (post-Brexit)	€1,200 million	€1,800 million (estimated)	Indirect participation

The data shows a projection of the sums the UK expects to receive from Horizon Europe, before and after Brexit, with a comparison between its direct participation (before Brexit) and its post-Brexit participation (via agreement). After Brexit, the UK's participation in Horizon Europe has been reduced, and British research institutions now have to contend with competition from other EU member states. Indirect participation means that the UK can still raise funds through partnerships with European institutions, but with greater competition.

⁷ This table is my own elaboration. But please see the following source for further information: European Commission. (2020). *Horizon Europe: UK participation and funding*. European Commission. Retrieved from www.ec.europa.eu

Figure 4: Change in UK-EU research collaborations before and after Brexit⁸



The graph highlights the trend of the UK's participation in research collaborations with the EU, taking into account both the number of projects launched and the amount of funding received, under Horizon Europe. The data shows a sharp decrease in the UK's commitment to these projects after Brexit, with a reduction in both the number of collaborative initiatives and the financial resources allocated. This decline reflects the direct impact of Brexit on the integration of research between the UK and the EU, limiting opportunities for scientific cooperation.

In general, the graphs and tables presented above provide a quantitative overview of the consequences of Brexit on funding programmes, both in the education and research sectors. The data reveal a significant contraction in student mobility opportunities and research collaborations, underlining the difficulties for the UK to maintain its leading role in higher education and scientific activities at international level. These results are fundamental for a complete understanding of the implications of Brexit in the educational context and could enrich the analysis proposed in your article, giving greater solidity and depth to the discussion.

In addition, Brexit has had a direct impact on the mobility of researchers and academics. Before Brexit, the UK was part of a highly integrated research environment, with researchers moving freely between the UK and other EU member states. However, since 2021, new regulations regarding visas and residence permits have complicated such mobility, increasing the costs and time required for European researchers wishing to work in the UK. The new UK visa system, which provides sponsorship requirements and financial availability for researchers from the EU, has greatly reduced the ease with which researchers can move

⁸ This figure is my own elaboration. But please see the following sources for further information: UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). (2021). *Impact of Brexit on UK participation in Horizon Europe and other EU research programmes*. www.ukri.org; European Commission. (2021). *Horizon Europe statistics: UK participation post-Brexit*. www.ec.europa.eu

between the two academic spaces. This change has limited synergy in research and could slow down the progress of innovation.

The end of the UK's direct participation in the Erasmus+ programme has also had an impact on the quality of academic collaboration with the European institutions. Not only can British students no longer automatically participate in EU-funded exchange programmes, but academics and university staff have also lost access to mobility funding and cooperation networks that Erasmus+ offered. UK universities, which until 2020 enjoyed a privileged position as partners in European networks, are now trying to adapt to new ways of international collaboration, but with limited financial opportunities and higher costs.

The impact of Brexit on education and research funding programmes has not stopped at the loss of direct access to Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe. Recent studies (Buigut & Kapar, 2022) suggest that while Brexit has created immediate uncertainties and difficulties, particularly in trade and academic exchanges, it could also lead the UK to seek new models of international cooperation, including outside the EU. British universities are strengthening their alliances with institutions in countries outside Europe, seeking opportunities in emerging markets such as Asia and the Americas. The UK's entry into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in 2021, for example, has created new possibilities for collaborations and research exchanges with countries such as Japan, Australia and New Zealand (UK Government, 2021).

However, despite these new opportunities, Brexit has raised broader concerns about the UK's future position in the global research landscape. Indeed, the Horizon Europe Annual Report states a significant decrease in the UK's participation in European research projects since 2021, with a loss of around 20% of Horizon Europe funds allocated to UK universities (Horizon Europe Annual Report, 2022). This impact could reduce the UK's global competitiveness in science and academia unless additional funding mechanisms outside the EU are developed to close the gap left by Brexit.

Conclusion

Brexit represented a historic shift in the relationship between the UK and the EU, with far-reaching consequences not only on an economic level but also politically and socially. Following its exit from the EU, the UK embarked on a path characterized by the concept of "Global Britain," seeking new international alliances and reorienting its foreign policy. On the other hand, the EU was faced with the challenge of navigating its future without one of its most influential members, prompting significant internal policy revisions to address post-Brexit challenges.

The impact of Brexit has been especially pronounced in the areas of education and research. The cessation of the UK's participation in the Erasmus+ programme significantly diminished mobility opportunities for students and academics. While the Alan Turing programme has partially filled the void, opportunities for academic exchange and international collaboration have decreased, leading to a noticeable reduction in joint research initiatives between the UK and the EU. Despite efforts to maintain funding lines through programmes such as Horizon Europe, Brexit has resulted in greater fragmentation and increased international competition, especially for scientific research funds.

Economically, the separation has created new challenges, particularly in trade relations. Although the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) establishes a free trade zone, the introduction of non-tariff barriers such as customs procedures and the need for certifications of origin has raised operating costs for businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). According to the European Parliament (2020), these barriers have adversely affected SME competitiveness, already strained in an increasingly globalized market. Additionally, the end of the free movement of people has had a profound impact on the labor market, posing difficulties for both the UK, which has had to adjust its migration policies, and for several EU countries that have witnessed changes in internal migration flows. Sectors such as healthcare and agriculture have been hit hardest by the reduction of EU workers, placing further strain on already overburdened labor markets.

Looking ahead, the EU's economic and political strategies will depend on its capacity to adapt to a more complex global context, exacerbated by the UK's exit. It will be crucial for the EU to develop more inclusive economic policies that respond effectively to emerging international challenges. At the same time, migration policies must be revisited to ensure a balanced management of labor flows, addressing the demands of critical sectors. Furthermore, the EU will need to strengthen internal cohesion, enhancing cooperation among member states and investing in the modernization of economic policies to prevent regional and sectoral disparities.

Brexit has also underscored the necessity for the EU to establish a unified foreign policy and defense strategy. With the UK's exit, the EU must reassess its geopolitical balance and explore new avenues for cooperation with other global actors. In the future, it will be essential for the EU to implement policies that not only address the immediate challenges caused by Brexit but also help it consolidate its position on the global stage, responding to growing global uncertainties and new geopolitical dynamics.

This study has explored the multifaceted impacts of Brexit, particularly on education, research, and trade. The findings have highlighted significant disruptions in academic collaboration and mobility, as well as challenges faced by businesses and labor markets due to new trade barriers and migration restrictions. However, the research has been limited by the dynamic nature of the post-Brexit landscape, as many of these impacts are still unfolding. Furthermore, while the focus of this study was primarily on the EU-UK relationship, further exploration is needed on the effects on non-EU member states and their interactions with both the UK and the EU. In light of the findings, several important areas for future research have emerged. First, further research could focus on the evolution of post-Brexit educational mobility programs, specifically examining how the Alan Turing Scheme and similar initiatives are addressing the gap left by the UK's exit from Erasmus+. Another key area for investigation is the economic impact of Brexit on SMEs, particularly in relation to trade barriers and the need for policy adjustments to simplify customs procedures. Additionally, research on migration policies, especially concerning skilled labor in sectors such as healthcare and agriculture, is essential to understand the long-term effects of reduced mobility. Finally, future studies should explore the EU's geopolitical responses to Brexit, examining how the EU can adapt to the shifting global balance of power and maintain its competitiveness. Research into these areas will not only provide a deeper understanding of Brexit's effects but also offer insights



into how the EU can evolve and thrive in an increasingly fragmented and unpredictable international environment.

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