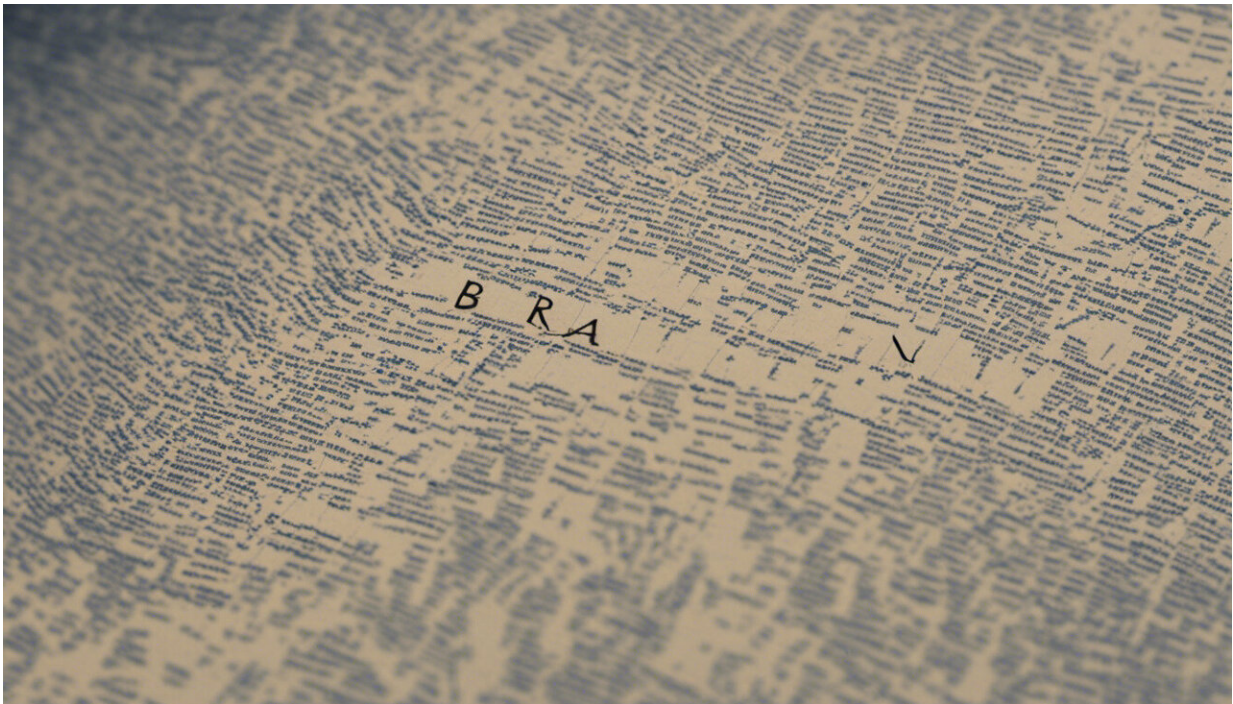


Brexit uncertainty and migration decisions spark brain drain concerns

August 4 2020



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Brexit has sparked major changes in migration decisions, equivalent to the impact of a serious economic or political crisis, according to a pioneering joint study between the Oxford-in-Berlin research partnership and the WZB Social Sciences Center Berlin.

The study reveals the UK is facing a potential brain drain of highly-educated British citizens, who have decided to invest their futures in continental Europe. Based on OECD and Eurostat data, it shows migration from the UK to EU countries increased by some 30%, compared to pre-Brexit numbers and the number of British citizens obtaining an EU member state passport increased by more than 500% across the Continent, and by more than 2000% in Germany.

The study, authored by Daniel Tetlow of Oxford-in-Berlin and Daniel Auer of WZB, compares changes in migration and naturalisation patterns of migrating UK citizens before and since the Brexit referendum. Their analysis reveals Brexit has been the dominant driver of migration decisions since 2016, by comparison with stable migration flows of other EU nationals over the same period.

According to the study, the numbers of UK citizens obtaining EU member state passports provides evidence that an increasing number of UK immigrants are making long-term migration decisions to protect themselves from some of the negative effects of Brexit.

The study authors maintain that, since 2015, when the Brexit referendum was announced, the UK to EU migration and naturalisation trajectories have diverged dramatically from the norm and the numbers have continued on this trajectory in the subsequent years of observation.

Dr. Auer says, "These increases in numbers are of a magnitude that you would expect when a country is hit by a major economic or [political crisis](#)."

Additional study data collected from controlled interviews of British citizens across all 16 German federal states, reveals increased levels of risk-taking and impulsivity to deal with the impact of Brexit. Decisions were also taken and acted upon over a much shorter time period than

equivalent decisions made before the Brexit vote. As a result, more than double the [number](#) of interviewees, who migrated post-referendum, reported taking a 'big risk' (57% vs 24% pre-Brexit). In addition, the majority of interviewees who migrated post-referendum, agreed either to a pay-cut or a pay freeze as part of their migration [decision](#), when before referendum the majority received a pay rise.

An unexpected outcome of the study, of UK citizens in Germany, was that many have made a greater commitment to integrate or 'socially embed' in their [local communities](#) as a direct result of Brexit. The study found in many respondents a commitment to language learning and local community work along with a pride in a new British European identity. Since the referendum, the German government has decided to grant 31,600 British citizens German citizenship while allowing them to maintain their UK identity indefinitely.

"We're observing a new social [migration](#) phenomena and a redefining of what it means to be British-European," says Mr Tetlow.

The study concludes, in the last four years, 'collective uncertainty,' triggered by Brexit, was and still remains powerful enough to alter migratory behaviour at scales comparable to the impact of a large-scale economic shock.

More information: Brexit, Collective Uncertainty and Migration Decisions: bibliothek.wzb.eu/pdf/2020/vi20-102.pdf

Provided by University of Oxford

Citation: Brexit uncertainty and migration decisions spark brain drain concerns (2020, August 4) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-08-brexit-uncertainty-migration->

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