

United Nations Country Profile: United Kingdom

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In June 2016, the United Kingdom held a public vote to decide whether the country should remain within the European Union or not. The country desires to leave due to the many restrictions the European Union poses on British lawmakers. The EU uses the euro, which is weaker than the pound, and is working towards requiring all member states to use it instead of their own currency by 2020 (NowThis, 2016). Many British citizens are concerned that this will affect their economy negatively. Brexit is also fueled by many other EU wide laws that are undemocratic and infringe on the sovereignty of the UK parliament, high membership fees, and the fear of their country suffering from immigration laws (Perrigo, 2019). So, why should the United Kingdom remain in the European Union? Their largest trading partner is the European Union. They benefit from the free trade agreement made to create interdependency between the 28 countries of the Union. The UK has greater global influence while a member of the world's largest trading bloc (Perrigo, 2019), and you would think they would like to keep that status. There is also much more freedom while being a part of the European Union, as any British citizen can live and work abroad in 28 different countries!

The public vote was held in June of 2016, and it is now October of 2019. Why have they not left yet? One of the major reasons is the backstop. The European Union is trying to reason with the United Kingdom and come to an agreement, but the UK is not convinced it is a good deal for them quite yet. The backstop was proposed by the EU and rejected three times by the UK parliament. It is a legal guarantee that a hard border will be avoided between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland amidst this political crisis and after. Critics are not pleased with this because it keeps the UK in the same customs territory as the EU with Northern Ireland tied so closely to the union due to the physical land border (BBC, 2019). This would also prevent

the UK from doing its own trade deals around the world. In ten days, the world will know what happens with Brexit, and until then (and probably after, too) it is at the forefront of British politician's minds.

Historically, Britain has not been incredibly kind to asylum seekers. It is difficult to get to the country as well as to find work, make money, and file a claim for asylum. This "fear of refugees" is widespread throughout the country, although there may not be much cause for concern. Of all the countries in Europe, the United Kingdom takes one of the lowest number of refugees. The Dublin Regulations allow countries to remove refugees from their country and place them in another – as long as you can prove that they entered the other EU country or made a claim for asylum there. The Dublin Regulations are in place to share the burden of taking in refugees among the many countries, but it greatly benefits countries like the United Kingdom, and is somewhat of a detriment to countries like Greece and Italy (Amnesty International, 2019). The country is also not very lenient towards refugees once they are in the country. The weekly allowance of an asylum seeker is £36.95, while in France the asylum seeker can get £58.50 for the same time. Also, permission to work is not granted until 12 months have passed since you filed your claim, whereas in another EU country, it is only 9 months (Amnesty International, 2019). Although asylum seekers often do not know the details of the country they are going to, it is a more difficult process and life to build in the United Kingdom than it is in another country, and this does ward off refugees once they have arrived there.

There has been a civil war raging in Yemen since 2015, and the United Kingdom has been indirectly involved. There was a power struggle between the former Vice President and the former President, and the country split in two. The country is divided between the rebel Houthi's

and the Central Government. The rebels are anti-American, anti-Semitic, and anti-Zionist, and are backed by Iran, and are accused of committing several war crimes. The Central Government is backed by the US, UK, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab countries. Over the years, the UN has imposed import and export bans on the country, which was to prevent weapons going into the country. Unfortunately, that also meant that life essentials such as food and medicine were blocked from entering the country as well, and what wasn't blocked took months to get to the people that needed it. Over 75% of the country is starving, malnourished, and incredibly ill. The people have suffered through this civil war, a cholera outbreak affecting over 1 million people, and more (BBC). Children have seen death and destruction so much that they are afraid of going to school, just in case they are bombed there, on their way there, or if their family gets killed before they come home. The US, UK, and Saudi Arabia all three are backing the Central Government and have moved to put their ally in power once again. In the process though, they have nearly destroyed the country and have created the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world. The US and UK provide military arms and intelligence to Saudi Arabia, and the latter mercilessly bombs the Houthi's territory in Yemen, resulting in the deaths of thousands (Gardner, 2016).

The relationship between the UK and Saudi Arabia is one of the most controversial relationships the countries have, and a Chatham House panel discusses this at length in a seminar in 2018. The UK argues that by engaging directly with Saudi Arabia, they have some leverage and influence over the country's autocratic government. The relationship is based on the security pillar and the economic pillar. Counterterrorism and the sharing of intelligence is crucial to the

security of the UK, and they also see Saudi Arabia as a potential for investment opportunities while the country attempts to decrease its dependency on oil. All this being said, the UK has relations with Saudi Arabia and is not planning on stalling those, even if the country is ruthlessly bombing Yemen once every 99 minutes.

Late last year, in November 2018, the UK led what seemed like the beginning of truce talks between the two warring groups. The draft proposal submitted to the UN Security Council proposed a ceasefire and was significant in adding pressure to end the conflict that has created the worst humanitarian crisis (Ensor, 2018). Recently in July 2019, the UK representative for the UN Security Council, Karen Pierce, condemned the attacks on hospitals, airports, and infrastructure by the Houthi in Saudi Arabia, saying that they are a danger to regional security and stability (UN, 2019). Currently, the Stockholm agreement calling for a full ceasefire has gone nowhere, and the Security Council is working towards another solution.

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