

BUSINESS

Invest-minute

■ Ask these two questions before buying a home

You may have heard that buying a home is better than renting. After all, why “throw money away” on rent when you could be building wealth through homeownership? Financial professionals say the decision isn't that simple.

The answer depends on your personal and financial situation. Before you begin house hunting, ask yourself two key questions: Can you afford to buy? And should you buy?

Can you afford to buy? While being ready to purchase a home means having enough money for a down payment and a monthly mortgage, other financial obligations are involved.

It's important that your debt levels are manageable before you buy. Without a mortgage, it's ideal for your monthly debt payments to be less than 20% of your gross monthly income. With a mortgage, debt payments should stay lower than 35%.

You'll also need to cover homeowner's insurance premiums with a deductible, pay annual property taxes, hold emergency saving for the costs of major repairs such as roof or driveway replacement and build flexibility into your budget for routine expenses like HVAC tune-ups and lawn care. Don't forget the upfront costs, such as closing costs, that come with home buying. They typically run between 2% and 6% of the purchase price.

Should you buy? One of the biggest factors in deciding whether to buy or rent relates to time. The longer you plan to stay in your house, the more likely it is that

buying makes financial sense. Generally, professionals say it doesn't make sense to buy unless you're planning to stay in the home at least three to five years.

When you buy a home, you face high purchasing costs right away. Initially, you build equity slowly, since most of your mortgage payment goes to interest. Staying in your house longer offers more time to build equity. Over all, the total cost of buying could be lower than renting.

Many factors can impact whether it will be more cost effective to rent than buy. Job stability, potential reduction in income for one or both spouses, mortgage rates, rental costs, the rate at which homes are appreciating in value and the cost of homeowners insurance all come into play. Fortunately, many online calculators account for these factors and help you compare your options.

Beyond the numbers. When deciding whether to buy a house, don't just look at the cost. Buying a home is more than an investment. Your home is where you live your life. So, you should consider your lifestyle and preferences. Buying might be more suitable if you need stability, want to personalize your home and are comfortable with tying a portion of your wealth to a house. Renting offers more flexibility and fewer maintenance responsibilities.

Ultimately, choosing to rent or buy comes down to understanding your finances, your plans and what you want from the place you call home. Take the time to assess costs and lifestyle trade-offs to help make a choice that supports your longterm goals.

[This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Edward Jones, Member SIPC]

EU and Australia agree on free trade agreement

DPA CORRESPONDENTS

dpa
(TNS)

SYDNEY — The European Union and Australia have concluded negotiations on a free trade agreement, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced on Tuesday.

The announcement comes eight years after negotiations on the free trade deal first began. The agreement aims to remove tariffs and commercial barriers on both sides to boost trade in goods and services.

The conclusion of talks is part of an EU push to diversify trading partners as tensions with China over alleged market distortion persist and relations with the US have become tense under President Donald Trump.

“Today, we are telling an important story to a world that is deeply changing, a world where great powers are using tariffs as a leverage and supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited,” von der Leyen told journalists in Canberra.

“In our story, open, rules-based trade delivers positive outcomes. Trust matters more than transactions.”

Albanese and von der Leyen also presented a new Australia-EU security and defence partnership.

“The wide-ranging partnership will boost cooperation across defence industry, cyber, economic security, counter-terrorism, combatting all forms of hatred, and countering hybrid threats,” the Australian government said in a press release.

APPROVAL STILL REQUIRED

The deal needs to be approved by

EU member states and the European Parliament, as well as by Australia, before it can be signed.

It is yet to be determined when the deal would enter into force, which will also depend on whether it is approved in the EU without delay.

The agreement provides for the abolition of more than 99% of tariffs on EU goods exports to Australia, which would save companies of all sizes around €1 billion (\$1.15 billion) annually in duties, according to Brussels.

It also includes opening up Australia's services market in financial services and telecommunications, improved access for EU companies to public procurement in Australia and measures to secure better supplies of critical raw materials for Europe from Australia.

The agreement is also intended to make it easier for EU professionals to work in Australia and to strengthen innovation through entry quotas for engineers and researchers on both sides.

According to the EU Commission, industrial sectors that could particularly benefit from the agreement include mechanical engineering, chemicals, the automotive industry and agriculture.

OTHER MAJOR EU TRADE DEAL BEING REVIEWED

A landmark free trade agreement between the EU and the Mercosur states Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay was recently referred to the European Court of Justice for a legal review by EU lawmakers, threatening to derail the deal even after a provisional implementation date has been set for May 1.

The EU-Mercosur deal, which was negotiated for over two decades, is

viewed critically by European farmers as they fear increased competition.

Besides better market access for industrial goods, Australia hopes for EU tariffs on agricultural products to be removed under the new agreement with the bloc.

“A range of Australian agricultural exports to the EU, including beef, sheep meat, sugar, cheese and rice, are significantly constrained by EU tariff quotas,” read a fact sheet by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Ahead of Tuesday's announcement, the European Commission tried to dispel EU farmers' concerns about the possible removal of protective measures by stressing the EU's big trade surplus in agricultural goods.

Overall, the commission expects EU exports to Australia to grow by 33%.

RAW MATERIALS HOPES

The EU has been hopeful that Australian trade restrictions on critical raw materials and products made from them will be removed under the agreement.

This is meant to make supply chains for critical raw materials more reliable, a European Commission spokesman said on Monday.

According to EU figures, the bloc was Australia's third-largest trading partner after China and Japan in 2024.

For the EU, however, Australia is a relatively minor partner, ranking 20th in terms of trade volume.

The difference is also due to the market sizes. The EU's 27 member countries together have a population of over 450 million, while Australia has just under 28 million inhabitants.

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200 Public Notice

(First published in the Independence Daily Reporter March 18, 2026) IN THE FOURTEENTH (14th) JUDICIAL DISTRICT OF THE STATE OF KANSAS, SITTING AT INDEPENDENCE, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, KANSAS In the Matter of the Estate of RITA J. BOLTON, Deceased Case No. MGI-2026-PR-000011 NOTICE OF HEARING AND NOTICE TO CREDITORS The State of Kansas to All Persons Concerned:

You are hereby notified that a Petition for Appointment of Administrator Pursuant to the Kansas Simplified Estates Act has been filed in this Court by Jason Mendoza, an heir at law of Rita J. Bolton, deceased, and you are hereby required to file your written defenses thereto on or before April 9, 2026, at 9:00 o'clock a.m. of said day, in said Court, at the Montgomery County Courthouse, 300 E. Main St., Independence, Kansas 67301, at which time and place said cause will be heard. Should you fail therein, judgment and decree will be entered in due course upon said Petition. All creditors are notified to exhibit their demands against said estate within four (4) months from the date of the first publication of this notice as provided by law, and if their demands are not thus exhibited, they shall be forever barred. All interested parties take notice and govern themselves accordingly. Jason Mendoza

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March 18, 25, April 1, 2026

Helpful Tips

Easter egg coloring tips

Many families will soon be partaking in a springtime tradition that has spanned generations: coloring Easter eggs.

While eggs once symbolized fertility and rebirth in Pagan celebrations, they have since come to be associated with Christianity. History.com says eggs historically were not allowed to be eaten during the 40 days of Lent. Subsequently, they were painted and decorated to mark the end of penance and enjoyed as a treat on Easter Sunday. Britannica also notes that the egg has come to represent the tomb Christ escaped, much like a chick breaks out of its shell.

Although it may seem like coloring Easter eggs already is a relatively simple project, there are steps that can simplify the process and make eggs more unique.

- Remove eggs from the refrigerator. Prior to dyeing eggs, bring them to room temperature by removing them from the fridge about 20 minutes before it's time to start boiling. This minimizes the chances that the egg shells will crack.

- Use a pin. Poking a tiny hole into the large ends of the eggs before boiling can release the air pressure inside and prevent the eggs from bursting during boiling.

- Keep vinegar on hand. Vinegar is the key to vibrant eggs because it acts as a mordant, which helps the dye bond to the shell. Without vinegar, the egg colors will be pale.

- Use a whisk. Instead of potentially breaking eggs when dropping them into dye with fingers or spoons, place the egg inside the wires of a kitchen whisk.

- Use protective gear. Children tend to get messy when coloring eggs. Make sure they are dressed in clothes that can get splattered. Also, wearing kitchen dish washing gloves or latex gloves will keep hands from being stained by dye.

- Experiment with different dyeing methods. Wrap rubber bands or string around the eggs before dipping to create geometric shapes and white lines. For a soft, marbled look, mix dye in a tray with shaving cream and roll the egg through. For a speckled appearance, place eggs in a container with dry rice and drops of dye and then shake.

- Create a drying station. Letting eggs dry on a paper towel or newspaper can contribute to smears and white spots. Instead, poke flat-head pins into a foam board. Rest the eggs on the pins while they dry.

- Create some sheen. When the eggs are completely dry, rubbing them with a drop of vegetable oil on a cloth will shine them up nicely.

Eggs are a traditional component of Easter festivities and decor. A few easy tweaks can make the process go more smoothly and result in vivid and creative eggs.

Bank of London, parent firm fined £2 million for misleading watchdog

PA MEDIA/DPA

(TNS)

LONDON — The Bank of England's banking watchdog has fined the Bank of London and its parent firm £2 million (\$2.6 million) over “failing to act with integrity” and misleading the regulator over its finances.

The Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) said it is the first time it has fined a firm for failing to conduct its business with integrity.

It hit the troubled bank, and its parent group Oplyse Holdings, with the £2 million fine despite stating that the breaches warranted a penalty of £12 million.

The PRA said the companies demonstrated that “such a penalty would cause serious financial hardship” and therefore reduced the fine.

The clearing bank was launched in 2021 with a \$1.1 billion valuation but has struggled financially in recent years, with its losses widening to almost £24 million in 2024, according to its latest accounts.

Former Labour grandee Peter Mandelson was on the group's board of directors until 2024.

On Tuesday, the PRA said the bank misled the watchdog over its capital position, failed to act with integrity, failed to be open and cooperative and failed to maintain adequate financial resources.

The regulatory breaches occurred between October 2021 and May 2024.

Bosses at The Bank of London said the breaches took place under previous ownership and management.

Sam Woods, deputy governor for prudential regulation at the Bank of England and chief executive of the PRA, said: “Trust in banking in the UK requires integrity and open communication with the PRA from all banks, regardless of their size.”

“The Bank of London Group Limited and Oplyse Holdings Limited fell well below our standards, resulting in today's penalty which marks the PRA's first finding against a firm for acting without integrity.”

A spokesman for the Bank of London said: “The Bank accepts the PRA's findings and regrets the failings identified.

“As is acknowledged in the final notice, since the change in ownership, the Bank has changed its management team and invested heavily in processes and controls and engaged third parties to assist in their remediation activity.

“The Bank has been implementing a comprehensive remediation programme, and is continuing work to strengthen further its governance and risk management arrangements, and its financial and regulatory reporting controls.

“The Bank, its new management and its investors remain committed to an open, transparent and constructive relationship with the PRA and FCA.

“The board and leadership team are confident that, with these legacy matters settled and with the backing of its investors, the Bank will continue to enhance trust and be able to return to growth in 2026.”

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