

Readers explain why they are rushing for dual-nationality EU passports

The Guardian has heard from more than 1,500 people who are considering getting a second passport or leaving the UK

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People with UK passports are scrambling to get passports for other EU countries and considering leaving the country as the result of last week's EU referendum begins to sink in.

The Guardian has heard from more than 1,500 people who are considering dual nationality - with a spike in numbers since last Thursday's Brexit vote.

In a call-out, originally posted last year, we asked whether anyone had plans to get a second passport before the referendum. On Friday, after the result of the referendum, 700 more people got in touch - with many announcing their intention to acquire European documentation.

This follows news that on the day the results were announced there was a surge in Google searches for "getting an Irish passport" and Ireland's foreign ministry said it had seen a significant rise in applications from Britain. There was also evidence that panicked expatriates were trying to acquire citizenship and naturalisation in other EU countries.

Declan McAlister, 24, from Leicester, said: "I did it to keep my options open, really. I applied for an Irish passport last week because I was so worried about the result. I wanted to make sure I could still move freely around Europe regardless of what happens."

He added: "I have the right to one because my dad is an Irish citizen by birth. He was born there, so I can get one as his son."

Anyone with an Irish parent or Irish grandparent is entitled to an Irish passport. An estimated 5 million Britons are eligible and a surge in interest after the referendum is threatening to overwhelm Irish officials.

Ireland's minister for foreign affairs and trade, Charlie Flanagan, said there had been a "a spike in interest in Irish passports in Northern Ireland, Great Britain and elsewhere", and moved to reassure UK citizens with an entitlement to an Irish passport that these rights have not changed after the referendum result.

Flanagan said: "An unnecessary surge in applications for Irish passports will place significant pressure on the system and on turnaround times and is likely to impact those with a genuine need for passports to facilitate imminent travel plans. I urge those who believe they need to apply for an Irish passport immediately to enjoy free travel in the EU to take full account of the facts before making an application."

He added: "The increased interest clearly points to a sense of concern among some UK

passport holders that the rights they enjoy as EU citizens are about to abruptly end,” reminding would-be applicants that the process of exiting the EU could take more than two years.

Ian Paisley Jr, the MP for North Antrim in Northern Ireland, urged his constituents to get a second passport even though he had campaigned for the leave campaign.

“My advice is if you are entitled to second passport then take one,” he tweeted in response to a BBC tweet asking viewers if they had “made a mad dash for an Irish passport”.

Some post offices in Northern Ireland have already run out of passport application forms, with one in Belfast telling customers it has made an “emergency order” to deal with the unexpected demand.

One reader, who preferred not to be named, said: “I’m a Brit, married to a Spaniard, and have lived in Granada, Spain, for 35 years. I am entitled to Spanish citizenship but have always been reluctant to apply for it. I am now seriously considering doing all the paperwork. I am concerned, however, about the right to have dual nationality under Spanish law.”

The reader added: “What does the future hold for the younger generation? At present, it is a case of young Spaniards seeking employment abroad - they will still be able to go to other countries in the European Union, but what about young Britons now? Who knows whether they might in turn need to leave the UK due to the impact of Brexit on the British economy?”

Another reader, who also wished to remain anonymous, said they had always been happy with their British passport but, being half-Austrian, were now having second thoughts.

“On an emotional level and in support of the EU I would now prefer an Austrian passport. This is a bigger decision for my brother, who will have to do Austrian military service in order to get his Austrian passport. My whole family’s lives have now become a lot more complicated and the future more uncertain.”

As well as applying for dual nationality, respondents indicated plans to move abroad. Of those who got in touch since the referendum result, almost half said they had considered leaving the UK.

Astrid Shapiro, 21, a freelance model from Leeds, said she was in the process of moving to Canada, inspired by Brexit. “A lot of people didn’t realise that voting for Brexit had wider implications than just the UK breaking off from Europe. I am worried about the fact that it seems undemocratic that Scotland should be dragged, kicking and screaming, from Europe. I am concerned about further breakup in the UK and Europe.”

She said her family moved to Canada in 2014 because they were worried about the direction England was taking and the rise of antisemitism. “We are Jewish and on the surface Canada seems to be pushing the country in the right direction. England is a place that seems stuck in negativity and that gets overwhelming at times.”

Armando, who did not give his surname, said: “I am British-born but from Dutch parents and grew up in Italy. I have lived in London for nearly 30 years and have extensively worked in the EU. I speak six European languages.

“Depending on what happens next with this disgraceful xenophobic outcome I am seriously considering moving. I don’t want to be associated with a country that represents such a backwards view of the world.”

The Guardian also heard from Europeans in the UK who are applying for British passports. Bossi Lorenzo, 32, who works in retail in London, has just started the process. “I have been in the UK for six years. It is not straightforward to get one [a passport] - and I am still going through all the documents. You do your exams and then apply for it but from what I hear it takes a while. Together it can cost as much as £1,500. I know a friend who still hadn’t got theirs after a year.”

He added: “Now we have voted for Brexit, no one really knows what will happen. If one day I have to leave Britain I want it to be on my own terms. I want to be able to decide whether I stay or leave.”

Boris Johnson has sought to reassure Britons in the UK and EU citizens living in the UK that their rights were “completely protected”.

While negotiations to exit the EU continue, this remains the case as migrant rights remain the same as ever, say legal experts. However, they say rights are not guaranteed after Britain leaves the EU.

Rights acquired under the EU relating to work, pensions and residency must be negotiated. They are not protected under UK law because before the referendum no one envisaged an exit from the EU.

“We don’t yet know how withdrawal will be negotiated on either side, and even if Boris Johnson is confident of what he thinks UK will say, he can’t forjudge what the EU will do,” said Sionaidh Douglas-Scott, the anniversary chair in law at Queen Mary school of law, University of London.

“International and national law do not do nearly such a good job of protecting free movement rights as EU law and EU law will longer apply in the UK once we leave,” she added.

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