# Brexit sparks surge in Britons reclaiming EU citizenship through ancestry



Just like many others, Paul Zaba, born in the UK, was granted British citizenship at birth, a factor that defines his legal identity. However, his cultural roots run deep into Poland, where his family has always maintained strong ties, including speaking the language and engaging with the Polish community. "I describe myself as Polish-British," Paul notes, articulating a dual identity he cherishes. Yet, despite his lineage, he had never pursued Polish citizenship—until the pivotal moment of Brexit.

“On the day we got the result of the Brexit vote, my Polish friends and I texted each other that, obviously, we were going to get Polish citizenship now,” Paul recalls, reflecting on the immediate shift in sentiment among many UK-born individuals with European connections. With Brexit revoking the seamless freedom of movement across the EU, the once-overlooked option of pursuing dual citizenship has gained new significance for many.

The desire to recover lost European liberties has sparked a notable surge in applications for dual citizenship. Data from the Office for National Statistics indicates that approximately 1.26 million people in the UK now hold both British and another nationality, with a significant rise in those born in the UK obtaining EU passports since the Brexit referendum. A Global Citizenship Observatory report estimates that around 90,000 Britons have sought a second European passport, while claims for first-time Irish passports by UK citizens are thought to range between 120,000 to 500,000.

In a personal victory for Paul, his mother, Christina Malkowska, successfully navigated the complex Polish citizenship process in 2018, enabling him to apply. “My mum had kept her old Polish passport,” Paul explains, “but she needed to provide proof of lineage, which involved a lot of paperwork.” After thorough documentation, including a parish christening certificate from Poland, Christina’s citizenship was confirmed, allowing the family to reclaim their Polish heritage officially.

The ramifications of Brexit are echoing beyond individual stories. Sarah Wellband, who discovered her Irish ancestry while living in Dublin, experienced a similar awakening. Initially hesitant due to the complexities involved, Sarah’s outlook changed as Brexit loomed. “With just a UK passport, I would have been very limited in my travel,” she shares, highlighting the perceived constraints of UK-only citizenship. Upon securing the necessary documents from her birth mother, she embraced her identity as an Irish citizen, illustrating a shift from merely seeking a passport to a deeper cultural connection to her heritage.

Though acquiring citizenship through ancestry is often seen as a straightforward task, it can entail nuanced emotional landscapes. Tom Harrison, born in Northern Ireland, grappled with the cultural implications of claiming Irish citizenship rooted in his family history. “I have a legal entitlement, but I don’t have any real connection with the culture,” he admits, conflicted over how to navigate his identity amid Brexit's fallout. As he embarked on the application process, his father’s perspective shifted from discouragement to acceptance, reflecting broader societal changes in attitudes towards dual citizenship.

The landscape of European citizenship applications has notably altered since the Brexit vote, with countries like Germany, which has been proactive in granting citizenship to former UK citizens, documenting a substantial rise in applicants. According to reports, Germany alone has granted citizenship to over 34,000 British citizens in the years following the Brexit decision.

Meanwhile, stricter regulations imposed by some EU countries on non-EU property investments, particularly in light of the latest economic forecasts for the UK, are further incentivising Brits to seek alternative pathways through ancestry. As one immigration lawyer mentioned, the desire for a 'backdoor access' to the EU is more pronounced than ever, fueled by economic uncertainty and changing immigration policies.

In this changing environment, British citizens’ journeys towards reclaiming their European identities reflect not only individual aspirations but also a collective reckoning with the ramifications of Brexit. For many, the ability to travel, live, and work freely within the EU is not just a bureaucratic formality but a vital lifeline to a more interconnected and culturally enriching future.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/dual-citizenship-eu-brexit-passport-ancestry-b2764189.html), [[5]](https://schengenvisainfo.com/news/germany-leads-in-granting-eu-citizenship-to-britons-after-brexit-vote/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/dual-citizenship-eu-brexit-passport-ancestry-b2764189.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/870c382c-00ed-4f7b-9b5f-3a2df60d4461), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-44629193)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/dual-citizenship-eu-brexit-passport-ancestry-b2764189.html), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/sep/07/british-eu-passport-european-brexit), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jan/30/brexit-730000-britons-acquired-non-uk-eu-irish-passports-since-2016)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/870c382c-00ed-4f7b-9b5f-3a2df60d4461), [[6]](https://www.globalcitizensolutions.com/how-to-get-an-eu-passport-for-uk-citizens-after-brexit/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/870c382c-00ed-4f7b-9b5f-3a2df60d4461), [[5]](https://schengenvisainfo.com/news/germany-leads-in-granting-eu-citizenship-to-britons-after-brexit-vote/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-44629193), [[6]](https://www.globalcitizensolutions.com/how-to-get-an-eu-passport-for-uk-citizens-after-brexit/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/sep/07/british-eu-passport-european-brexit), [[5]](https://schengenvisainfo.com/news/germany-leads-in-granting-eu-citizenship-to-britons-after-brexit-vote/), [[6]](https://www.globalcitizensolutions.com/how-to-get-an-eu-passport-for-uk-citizens-after-brexit/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/dual-citizenship-eu-brexit-passport-ancestry-b2764189.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/870c382c-00ed-4f7b-9b5f-3a2df60d4461> - In 2024, Irish citizenship applications from Britain reached a post-Brexit high, with 23,456 applications to the Foreign Births Register, marking a 15% increase. This surge is attributed to the UK's weakening economic outlook, anticipated tax hikes, and post-Brexit travel and work restrictions. Additionally, European countries have been imposing stricter regulations on non-EU property investments, such as Spain's planned 'super tax' on non-EU buyers. These factors have prompted many British workers and pensioners to seek 'backdoor access' to the EU by acquiring Irish citizenship through their lineage. Immigration lawyers anticipate this trend will continue as the UK remains economically unattractive. Demand for Irish citizenship has also increased in North America, particularly from the US, influenced by political events and concerns over future uncertainties.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/sep/07/british-eu-passport-european-brexit> - The article discusses the surge in UK citizens applying for EU citizenship post-Brexit. It highlights that Spain, France, Germany, Italy, and Portugal have seen significant increases in applications. Spain, for instance, had 33 applications in 2016, rising to 209 in 2018. France experienced a tenfold rise in naturalisation of British citizens since the EU referendum, from 375 in 2015 to 3,211 in 2018. Germany, with about 96,000 UK citizens, allows dual citizenship and has seen a rise in applications. Italy permits dual nationality, and Portugal offers easier naturalisation processes.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-44629193> - The BBC reports a surge in UK citizens acquiring the nationality of another EU country since the Brexit referendum. In 2017, 13,141 UK citizens obtained the nationality of one of the 18 member states from which the BBC has received figures, compared to 5,056 in 2016 and 1,826 in 2015. The most frequent new nationality was German, which saw a significant increase from 594 cases in 2015 to 7,493 in 2017. One applicant, Paul Petty, from Bath, gained a German passport and is now a dual German/British citizen, expressing a desire to remain part of the EU.
5. <https://schengenvisainfo.com/news/germany-leads-in-granting-eu-citizenship-to-britons-after-brexit-vote/> - Since the 2016 Brexit vote, Germany has granted citizenship to 34,186 British citizens, representing 31.8% of all EU citizenships granted to Brits from 2016 to 2023. The highest number of Brits obtaining German citizenship was recorded in 2019, with 13,675 new German citizens who had British citizenship. After 2021, France became a top issuer of EU citizenship to Brits, with 3,693 Brits obtaining French citizenship in 2021. Thousands of Brits have also obtained citizenship from smaller EU countries, especially Cyprus.
6. <https://www.globalcitizensolutions.com/how-to-get-an-eu-passport-for-uk-citizens-after-brexit/> - Since 1 January 2021, UK citizens no longer have access to European rights, making them eligible to apply for EU residency and citizenship by investment programs. These programs are designed to boost economic development and help non-EU investors and their families acquire EU citizenship in exchange for an economic investment. Countries offering some of the most attractive EU immigration schemes include Malta, Spain, and Portugal. Requirements vary by country but generally include being non-EU, non-Swiss, or non-EEA, making a minimum investment, having a clean criminal record, and complying with the country’s stay requirement.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jan/30/brexit-730000-britons-acquired-non-uk-eu-irish-passports-since-2016> - Since 2016, more than 350,000 UK citizens have applied to acquire the nationality of another EU member state, with Ireland, Germany, and France seeing significant increases. In Ireland, the number of UK citizens applying for Irish passports rose from 7,372 in 2015 to 54,859 in 2019. In Spain, where dual nationality for British nationals is not possible, the numbers remain small but have increased since the referendum, with 209 applications in 2018 compared to 50 in 2015. The surge reflects the desire of UK citizens to retain EU rights post-Brexit.