

17059 **Rejection of EU citizens seeking UK residency hits 28%**

Jessica Elgot The Guardian Monday 27 February 2017 07.00 GMT

Lib Dem analysis published as Tories admit immigration numbers will not fall dramatically post-Brexit.

More than a quarter of EU citizens are having their applications for permanent residency in the UK rejected since the UK voted to leave the EU, according to new analysis of the government's migration data.

If the government was to require all EU citizens to apply for residency, the refusal rate could mean 800,000 EU citizens are left without certainty as to whether they can stay in the UK post-Brexit, according to the research.

In the last two quarters of 2016, more than 800 EU citizens had their permanent residency requests refused with a further 5,500 declared invalid, a rejection rate of around 28%, analysis by the Liberal Democrats found. To qualify, EU nationals need five years of continued residence in the UK.

The day that Theresa May triggers article 50 next month is reported to be the most likely cut-off date for when EU citizens will no longer have the automatic right to stay in the UK, with the prime minister prepared to guarantee that those here before that date will be protected as long as UK citizens in Europe have reciprocal rights.

The home secretary, Amber Rudd, repeated the pledge that the government "will be ending freedom of movement as we know it" but said she would not expect immigration to fall dramatically immediately after the UK leaves the EU, echoing comments by the Brexit secretary, David Davis.

"Refusal rates have not changed over the last year," the spokesman said. "European citizens resident in the UK make a vital contribution both to our economy and our society. That's why we will be making securing their status, as well as that of British nationals in the EU, a priority as soon as we trigger article 50 and the negotiations begin.

The home secretary has previously been thought to prefer a permit system. Speaking on ITV1 on Sunday, Rudd said that was one of a number of options which would be considered, as well as a work permit system where the government would control how many EU citizens could enter the UK every year to take up a job offer with a UK company.

Rudd confirmed that the government would consult businesses over plans for an immigration system over the summer. "We're looking at all sorts of different alternatives as a government; we're going to work with businesses, with employers, to make sure that the immigration system we put in place does enable them to continue to thrive and to continue to grow".

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