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Record number of migrants become UK citizens, figures show



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Richard Ford, Home Correspondent

A record number of migrants became British citizens last year, according to official figures published today.

More than five times as many people were given citizenship last year compared with the number when Labour came to power.

The surge in people being given citizenship was accompanied by a rise of almost a third in the number of migrants allowed to settle in the country indefinitely.

As the number of migrants deciding the UK is their new permanent home increased, fewer people from eastern Europe came to Britain seeking work.

While the number of Poles registering for work fell by almost half, applicants from Latvia and Lithuania rose.

Figures published by the Home Office show the number of people given citizenship last year jumped by almost 60 per cent to a record 203,865. When Labour came to power in 1997 the figure was 37,000.

Overall 1,530,000 migrants have become British citizens since 1997.

Home Office officials suggested that one reason for the surge in new citizens is because of changes in the law coming into force later this year. This will mean migrants will in future spend a time on probation

before becoming a citizen.

The Government is also proposing to link the granting of citizenship to the awarding of points based on age, educational and other qualifications.

Separate figures show the number of migrants allowed to settle indefinitely in the UK rose by almost a third last year to 192,000.

Permanent settlement based on employment jumped by more than a third to 81,200 and 70,000 were allowed to settle on the basis of family links with the UK — a rise of 27 per cent compared with 2008.

Today's figures confirm that the biggest wave of migration in British history is over with immigration from the former Soviet bloc states continuing to fall.

The number of migrants from Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia and Slovenia registering for work fell to 113,000 last year compared with 166,000 in 2008.

Applications to work from Polish migrants fell from 104,000 in 2008 to 54,700 last year but the numbers from Latvia more than doubled to a record high of 15,300 and Lithuania from 11,560 to 14,720.

Long term immigration into the UK remained broadly stable at 518,000 to the end of June last year and emigration increasing by under 10,000 to 371,000.

Net migration — the difference between those leaving and those arriving — was 147,000, down from 168,000 in the previous year.

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