

Bulgaria

In its first year of EU membership, emigration from Bulgaria appears not to have increased compared to the pre-accession period. In the absence of official national statistics on outflows, government estimates are based on data from other EU countries. Significant increases of inflows from Bulgaria occurred only in Spain, the UK and Germany. In other EU countries, inflows from Bulgaria decreased by 20% in 2007. In 2007, Spain was the main destination country, followed by Germany and Greece.

Between 2004 and November 2008, Bulgarians accounted for around 4% of all intra-EU movers. Finland, Sweden, and the EU-8 countries eliminated all restrictions on access to their labour markets for Bulgarian workers on 1 January 2007. On 1 January 2009, the beginning of the second phase of the transitional arrangements, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and Spain also lifted restrictions, and Denmark followed on 30 April 2009.

In 2007, immigration to Bulgaria reached record levels, with an increasing share of EU citizens among immigrants. The stock of long-term residence permits (allowing indefinite stay) rose to 21 904, a 20% increase over 2006, while permits (valid for at least 1 year) stabilised at 3 590 (from 3 550 in 2006). Permit holders from Greece and Italy almost doubled, and increases were registered also for the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia. EU citizens also accounted for more than 35% of new long-term residents, mainly on the grounds of free movement. Immigration to Bulgaria has traditionally been dominated by Balkan countries: in 2007, Macedonians were the largest group, with around 1 000 new permits granted. This number doubled in the first ten months of 2008, as did the number of new permits for Serbians. A similar pattern was observed in the case of long-term permits.

First semester data for 2008 indicate lower immigration to Bulgaria, largely due to lower inflows from the EU (the number of new immigrants from the UK, Spain, Italy, Germany and Greece went down by more than 50%). This is likely related to the economic crisis, as these inflows were mainly driven by real estate and financial opportunities.

Residence permits issued for family reunification started to play an important role in 2007, representing 36% of permanent permits and 17% of long-term permits, and even more in the first months of 2008. Skilled workers and specialists may enter Bulgaria with a work permit. While work permits are increasing (10% over 2006), they were not a major component of immigration in 2007, accounting for only 4.1% of the total inflow (around 1 145). Most work permits were issued to Turks (454), Macedonians (164), Indians (110) and Ukrainians (93).

After a strong upward trend over 2001-2006, applications for naturalization fell 13% from 2006 to 2007, and 5 936 foreigners obtained Bulgarian citizenship. The success ratio of applications doubled in the past two years, mostly due to the high proportion of ethnic Bulgarian applicants coming from neighbouring countries.

The number of asylum seekers rose almost 20% in 2007 but, at 957 applicants, remained relatively low. The rise may have been due to EU accession, and to increased attempted illegal entry from Turkey. In 2007, 322 persons were granted humanitarian status and 13 refugee status. In compliance with EU laws, Bulgaria implemented a new National Refugee Integration Program to consolidate existing measures and to provide refugees with specific integration support.

Perceived labour shortages in certain sectors led the Bulgarian Government to reverse its policy and allow employers to recruit foreign workers. In May 2008, the Government approved measures in the area of migration and integration. The Government, after consultation with the social partners, is to approve an annual Plan of Action with concrete measures. A New Migration and Integration Strategy (2008-2015) aims primarily at encouraging return migration of Bulgarian citizens abroad and those of Bulgarian origin. A second aim is to establish a "policy for immigration of third country citizens in order to support the Bulgarian economy". A National Council of Labour Migration was created at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to monitor the labour market situation, define labour shortages and assign quotas to sectors where foreign labour from third countries will be allowed, subject to demand.

For further information:

www.nsi.bg/Index_e.htm

www.aref.government.bg

www.government.bg/cgi-bin/e-cms/vis/vis.pl?s=001&p=0136&g=