



CONTROLLED ACCESS TO UK LABOUR MARKET FOR NEW ACCESSION COUNTRIES

The UK's labour market will be opened gradually to citizens of Bulgaria and Romania after the two countries join the European Union in January 2007, Home Office Minister Liam Byrne announced today.

The UK has decided to limit access to its labour market following the European Commission's recommendation to permit Bulgaria and Romania to join the EU on 1 January 2007. From that date Romanians and Bulgarians will have the right to travel throughout the EU.

In the UK low-skilled workers from Romania and Bulgaria will be restricted to existing quota schemes to fill vacancies in the agricultural and food processing sectors. There will be no net increase in these existing schemes and workers will be required to have an authorisation document.

Skilled workers will be able to work in the UK - as now - if they get a work permit or qualify under the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme, if they are a student, are self employed or as their dependents.

These new arrangements will be reviewed within 12 months and the Government's proposed new Migration Advisory Committee will assist in this process taking account of the needs of our labour market, the impact of the A8 accession and the positions adopted by other EU countries.

Employers and employees will have a duty to abide by the new rules and there will be controls in place for rogue employers and illegal workers, including fixed penalty notices.

Liam Byrne said:

"A bigger Europe is good for Britain and British jobs. We're a strong supporter of EU enlargement and overwhelming evidence shows that migration from the countries which joined the EU in 2004 has had a positive effect on our economy. But we need to make progress on our immigration reforms and understand the transitional impacts from the last round of accession before we take the next step.

"That is why we have decided to take a gradual approach this time round, taking account of the needs of our labour market, the impact of EU expansion and the positions adopted by other Member States.

Workers or employers who are tempted to break the rules should be aware that penalties will be robustly enforced, with fines if necessary. Through this measured response to Accession we will ensure that migration is, and continues to be, managed in the best interests of the country as a whole."

Other elements of the scheme also announced today are:

- An audit of local areas to monitor the effect of EU enlargement / migration on local services with a review led by the Department of Communities and Local Government;
- A consultation process with industry on whether there is a need for similar schemes in other sectors;
- A review of the transitional controls to ensure future access to the labour market is gradual and controlled; and
- A new helpline for employers.

Notes to Editors

1. A Written Ministerial Statement was laid at 11.00am on Tuesday 24 October.
2. From 1 January 2007, restrictions on employed work for Romanian and Bulgarian workers will be as follows:
 - Skilled Romanian and Bulgarian workers with the right qualifications and experience will continue to be allowed to come to the UK on work permits to take up specific jobs where no suitable UK applicants can be found;
 - Romanian and Bulgarian workers with particularly high levels of skills and experience will continue to be admitted as they are now under the Highly Skilled Migrants Programme; and
 - Low-skilled migration from Bulgaria and Romania will be restricted to those sectors of the economy where the UK already has low-skilled schemes and will be subject to a strict quota which will not exceed 20,000 workers per year. A2 workers on these schemes will have rights to work limited to six months that will not give them access to benefits and public housing.
3. The Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) will continue to apply to nationals of the A8 (the central European countries who joined the EU in 2004). The WRS will not apply to Bulgarian and Romanian nationals.
4. Bulgarian and Romanian nationals will require visas to enter the UK up until midnight on 31 December. Thereafter they will be able to travel freely throughout the EU provided they are in possession of a valid EU travel document.

5. Bulgarian and Romanian students will continue to be allowed to study in the UK and to seek part-time employment during their stay but will need a work authorisation document to do so.
6. The self-employed will continue to be able to work here, but must be able to prove they are genuinely self-employed.
7. ONS data on arrivals to the UK from the enlarged EU can be found at www.statistics.gov.uk
8. The Home Secretary announced on 23 February 2004 that transitional measures would be introduced for accession state nationals coming to the UK from 1 May. See press notice 069/2004.
9. Regulations were laid for the Worker Registration Scheme on 25 March 2004. See press notice 138/2004.
10. The numbers in the existing schemes for food processing and agriculture sectors are 3,500 and 16,250.