

Brussels, 8 January 2009

Four more countries lift labour market restrictions for Bulgarian and Romanian workers

Greece, Spain, Hungary and Portugal have lifted restrictions on access to their labour markets for Bulgarian and Romanian workers, the European Commission announced today. The four countries join ten other EU Member States which had already opened their labour markets for workers from Bulgaria and Romania. Restrictions remain in eleven Member States.

"I welcome the fact that more Member States have decided to lift remaining restrictions to their labour markets for Bulgarian and Romanian workers. I continue to encourage Member States who still impose restrictions to lift them as soon as possible: it makes economic sense," said Vladimír Špidla, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. He added: *"The economic downturn is not a reason to keep restrictions. Free labour mobility is self-regulatory and provides a much needed flexibility in both directions: workers go to where there is demand for labour, not to be unemployed in another country."*

The first phase of the transitional arrangements on free movement for Bulgarian and Romanian workers ended on 31 December 2008. Until then, Bulgarian and Romanian workers were free to work in 10 Member States while 15 Member States imposed restrictions on free movement (usually requiring a work permit). EU-25 countries that wanted to continue to apply restrictions during the second phase of the transitional arrangements had to notify the Commission before 1 January 2009.

Eleven EU-25 Member States have notified the Commission of their decision to continue to apply national law on labour market access after 1 January 2009 (details in background). Four Member States (Greece, Spain, Hungary, and Portugal) that previously restricted access of Bulgarian and Romanian workers to their labour markets have decided to lift these and now apply European law on free movement of workers. This means that workers from Bulgaria and Romania can now move freely to 14 Member States to take up employment there. Denmark, which currently imposes some restrictions, has also announced that it will stop applying restrictions for Bulgarian and Romanian workers from 1 May 2009, when it will also end all restrictions for workers from the EU-8 Member States.

All Member States that continue to restrict labour market access by applying national law can end these restrictions at any time during the second phase. In principle, full free movement of workers should apply after the end of the second phase (31 December 2011). Member States can only maintain restrictions thereafter if there is a serious disturbance (or threat thereof) to the labour market. All restrictions for workers from Bulgaria and Romania must be lifted by 31 December 2013 at the very latest when full free movement of workers will apply across the EU-27.

Background

In November 2008, the Commission presented a report on the impact of free movement of workers in the context of EU enlargement (see [IP/08/1729](#) and [MEMO/08/718](#)). It concludes that the overall impact of post-enlargement mobility has been positive: labour mobility flows in the wake of the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements have made an overall positive economic impact and workers from the new Member States have helped to meet labour demand in receiving countries without causing serious labour market disturbances.

Summary table of restrictions applied to workers from Bulgaria and Romania

<i>Member State</i>	<i>Restrictions (of varying degrees) 1st phase</i>	<i>Decision 2nd phase</i>
<i>BE</i>	Yes	Restrictions remain
<i>CZ</i>	No	Free movement of workers
<i>DK</i>	Yes	Restrictions remain
<i>DE</i>	Yes	Restrictions remain
<i>EE</i>	No	Free movement of workers
<i>IE</i>	Yes	Restrictions remain
<i>EL</i>	Yes	Free movement of workers
<i>ES</i>	Yes	Free movement of workers
<i>FR</i>	Yes	Restrictions remain
<i>IT</i>	Yes	Restrictions remain
<i>CY</i>	No	Free movement of workers
<i>LV</i>	No	Free movement of workers
<i>LT</i>	No	Free movement of workers
<i>LU</i>	Yes	Restrictions remain
<i>HU</i>	Yes	Free movement of workers
<i>MT</i>	Yes	Restrictions remain
<i>NL</i>	Yes	Restrictions remain
<i>AT</i>	Yes	Restrictions remain
<i>PL</i>	No	Free movement of workers
<i>PT</i>	Yes	Free movement of workers
<i>SI</i>	No	Free movement of workers
<i>SK</i>	No	Free movement of workers
<i>FI</i>	No	Free movement of workers
<i>SE</i>	No	Free movement of workers
<i>UK</i>	Yes	Restrictions remain

For further information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=466&langId=en>