

## HOME OFFICE

### Migration – Bulgarian and Romanian Workers

**The Minister of State for Immigration (Damian Green):** I am confirming today that the restrictions currently applied to Bulgarian and Romanian nationals' employment in the United Kingdom will continue until the end of 2013.

The Government is concerned to ensure that migration to the UK does not have adverse impacts on the employment opportunities of the domestic labour force at the current time. Because of the uncertainty of any effects, the Government is firmly of the view that transitional measures are required to mitigate the impacts of labour migration when countries newly accede to the EU.

The transitional restrictions applied to Bulgarian and Romanian workers have been in force since 1 January 2007. They restrict Bulgarian and Romanian nationals to employment that is either skilled or is in sectors where there continues to be a shortage of labour, and have therefore helped to ensure that migration from those countries delivers economic benefits to the UK.

Under paragraph 5 of Annexes VI and VII of the Treaty concerning the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU, the UK may extend these restrictions to the end of 2013 where there is a serious disturbance to its labour market or threat thereof. We have approached the question of whether there is such a disturbance or the risk of one carefully. Economic events of recent years have inevitably impacted upon labour market conditions in the UK but the labour market has demonstrated a high degree of resilience, particularly in terms of levels of employment, during and since the recession. However, labour market conditions, and the extent to which they are affected by migration, are very uncertain in the current economic circumstances.

It is against that background that I have sought advice from the independent Migration Advisory Committee on the labour market grounds for extending the restrictions. The MAC's findings, published on 4 November, are that, on the basis of the indicators of labour market performance which it has used, the UK labour market is currently in a state of serious disturbance and that lifting the current restrictions at this stage would risk negative impacts on the labour market.

In particular, the Committee has concluded that while migration flows from Bulgaria and Romania have been relatively low, the number of Bulgarians and Romanians resident in the UK has nevertheless increased substantially since 1 January 2007 and that it is likely that removing the current restrictions would cause inward flows to increase and cause those who currently come to the UK for temporary purposes to seek more permanent employment in the UK. In addition, the Committee has suggested that the labour market impact of these outcomes would be aggravated by the likelihood that such increased labour market participation by Bulgarian and Romanian workers in these circumstances would tend to be concentrated in lower skilled occupations where the risk of displacement of domestic workers is higher.

The Government has decided that, given its own assessment of the labour market and the MAC's findings, retaining the current restrictions is a proportionate means of addressing any disturbance or threat. The restrictions will therefore continue in their current form until the end of 2013. I am notifying the European Commission of this decision and I am taking the necessary legislative action to extend the period of application of the current Regulations.

The annual quota for the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) will continue at 21,250 places for 2012 and 2013 and the annual quota for the Sectors Based Scheme (SBS) will continue at 3,500 places for 2012 and 2013.

Under European Law, the current restrictions cannot continue beyond the end of 2013 and will therefore be lifted at that point.