

Is There a Threat of Bulgarian Migration Influx to the UK?

A Fact Sheet

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Bulgaria and Romania entered international news in the past month as British politicians and popular media started to worry about influx of Bulgarian migrants after 2014. After January 1, 2014 Bulgarian and Romanian citizens will have full access to the labor market in the UK after the last transition periods barring them would have expired.

However, the concerns, heated debates and alleged fear were rarely, if at all, backed up by numbers and data. The most popular figure floated around is “29 million people” that would flood Britain, for example, is well above the combined total population of Bulgaria (7.3 million) and Romania (19 million) and implied everyone there would leave. The claims for massive stealing of jobs or living off social benefits on the backs of Western taxpayers as the main purpose of migration seem to be strong, but questionable.

In order to fill in the gap of informed debate, OSI-Sofia has compiled highlights from its several studies on Bulgaria’s migration trends conducted over the years:

- Despite greater integration and abolition of travel restrictions to the EU in the last decade, emigration has in fact decreased despite the removal of travel restrictions.
- Twenty EU member states have already opened their labor markets and all the rest seven members states will do so in 2014 so it is unlikely that a single country or just couple of countries will receive all outgoing migration;
- The majority of those who would emigrate will be looking for jobs (52.3%), but only tiny fraction of potential migrants (0.6%) intends to go after the social benefits.
- The potential job-seekers will not threaten the jobs of old member states citizens as they would seek employment in sectors that local residents shy from;
- There is already a confirmed trend of returning of migrants back to Bulgaria, which offsets to an extent the outgoing flow.

Here are more details from OSI-Sofia's surveys:

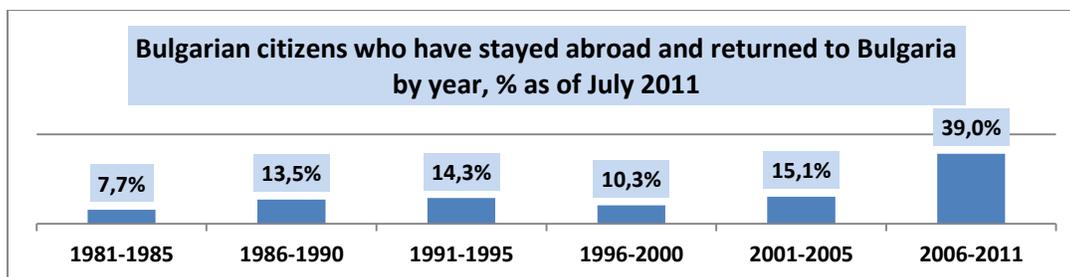
1. Bulgaria is still one of the poorest countries in the European Union, hence emigration to Western Europe remains an attractive solution for part of the population. However, the appeal of emigration is gradually declining, as unemployment rate in Bulgaria is now comparable to Western European levels, while differences in income have decreased: in the 1990s per capita income in Western Europe was 4 times higher than that in Bulgaria, while one decade later this ratio is 2.5 measured by purchasing power parity. As a result, emigration of Bulgarians has gradually declined.
2. Despite greater integration and abolition of travel restrictions to the EU in the last decade, emigration has in fact decreased. Figures suggest that an average of 24,201 Bulgarian citizens per year emigrated between the 1992 and the 2001 censuses, while the annual average between the 2001 and the 2011 censuses was 17,524 persons. Therefore, average annual emigration marked a 28% decline despite the removal of travel restrictions.
3. Bulgaria and Romania are different countries and cases and should be treated as such. This seems pretty obvious, but it somehow became customary to pair them together. In regard to migration, the potential inflow of Bulgarian immigrants is less significant in volume, provided their population size (Bulgaria's population is about 1/3 of Romania's) and it is less likely that it would cause labor market disruption in recipient countries.
4. In 2011 Spain imposed restrictions on the free movement of workers from Romania, but not from Bulgaria. According to the EC Decision, Spain is authorized to temporarily restrict the free movement of workers from Romania due to serious disturbance in the labor market. Such restrictions, however, were not imposed on Bulgaria, which suggests that the country presents no threat for the labor market in Spain (although Spain is a preferred destination for Bulgarian emigration).
5. Bulgarians constitute 0.5% of EU citizens, residing in another EU country (i.e. internal migration within the EU). This is lower than the share of Romanian citizens with 2.9%, UK and German citizens with 0.9% each and is on par with the share of Dutch citizens, also with 0.5% (Eurostat data for 2011);
6. In previous studies, no cases of migration were registered with the sole purpose of obtaining access to social benefits. All respondents who have migrated have done so in order to work or study and most of them were employed at the time of the survey.

What was the main goal of your stay during your last visit abroad?	
Work	72,4%
Student "Work and Travel"	4,7%
Education	6,3%
Joining the family	4,7%
Marriage	0,0%
Retiring	0,0%
Taking care for relatives	2,1%
Temporary social benefits	0,0%
Other	8,9%
<i>OSI-Sofia survey, June 2011</i>	

7. About 12.9% expressed a desire to leave Bulgaria as registered in a 2011 survey. The large wave of outward migration from Bulgaria happened in the 1990s when the country experienced a severe economic crisis and had not yet become a member of the EU. Of those who planned or wanted to leave Bulgaria, only 0.6% said that would seek temporary social benefits. About 14% have already secured jobs and 52.3% said they would be seeking jobs.

What is the main reason for your intention to leave Bulgaria?	
Have secured a job	14,2%
To look for a job	52,3%
Student "Work and Travel"	1,9%
Education	3,9%
Joining the family	10,3%
Marriage or divorce	0,0%
Retiring	0,0%
Caring for relatives	0,6%
Temporary social benefits	0,6%
Other	14,8%
<i>OSI-Sofia survey, June 2011</i>	

8. There is already a confirmed trend of returning of migrants back to Bulgaria, which offsets to an extent the outgoing flow as the table with data from 1981 to 2011 shows. The data, suggest that the number of Bulgarian emigrants returning to Bulgaria has gradually increased, reaching its peak from 2006 onwards, after the country joined the EU.



9. Bulgarian and Romanian workers have played an overall positive role in the economies of old member states, according to a report by the European Commission from November 2011. The report claims that their participation in recipient countries' labor markets has produced no negative impact and that there is no evidence of a disproportionate use of social benefits.

10. The economic sectors in which Bulgarian workers are employed clearly suggest that Bulgarian emigration remains predominantly temporary or seasonal. Even in this case, these are occupations that are not very desired by local residents, so there would be no threat for jobs.

Sectors of employment of Bulgarian migrant workers	
Construction	25,0%
Agriculture, forestry, hunting, fishing	23,0%
Hotels, restaurants	8,8%
Healthcare and social services	8,8%
Transport	8,1%
Other	7,4%
Processing industries	5,4%
Crafts, arts and services	4,7%
Trade	3,4%
Extraction industry	1,4%
IT and Communications	1,4%
<i>OSI-Sofia policy brief, November 2011</i>	

11. While British media and politicians are recently most concerned about immigration from Bulgaria, the UK is not on the top of the list of preferred destinations. Currently, twice less Bulgarians have stayed in the UK than in Spain, Germany or Greece. The most desired future destinations for Bulgarian labor migrants are Germany with 18.2% of Bulgarian respondents who intend to seek employment abroad, would choose Germany), Spain (15.5%), Italy (13.6%) and after that the United Kingdom (10.9; the UK is 9th on the list of Bulgarian Roma citizens). Some non-EU destinations are preferred to Western Europe – e.g. the US, Canada, Australia feature high in the list.

Bulgarians who have stayed abroad by country as of 2011, %	
Italy	12,5%
Greece	12,0%
Spain	10,9%
Germany	8,3%
USA	6,3%
Turkey	6,3%
UK	5,2%
Czech Republic	3,6%
Russia	3,1%
Cyprus	2,6%
<i>OSI-Sofia survey, June 2011</i>	

Preferred destination of migration as of July 2011, % - out of 12,9% desiring to migrate	
Germany	18.2%
Spain	15,5%
Italy	13,6%
UK	10,9%
Greece	9,1%
Turkey	5,5%
USA	4,5%
France	4,5%
Australia	1,8%
Belgium	1,8%
Canada	1,8%
The Netherlands	1,8%
<i>OSI-Sofia survey, June 2011</i>	

12. As now and then there are concerns of a mass Roma immigration from Bulgaria, the OSI-Sofia surveys tackled this issue too. There is no evidence that the migration of Bulgarian citizens of Romani background differs from that of ethnic Bulgarians; the main reason for both Bulgarians and Roma living abroad, is employment. According to a recent survey 84.2% of Roma who had spent time abroad, have done so in order to work. This has been the case for 73% of Bulgarians who had been abroad in the last 20 years, which suggests that employment is even more important reason for emigration among Roma than among Bulgarians. The 10% difference can also be explained with the fact that another important reason for Bulgarians to spend time abroad is education.

The current material is based mainly on surveys and analysis by the Open Society Institute – Sofia, with recent with Eurostat data, as follows:

[“Bulgarian Labor Migration: Do Restrictions Make Sense?”](#), a policy brief by Georgi Angelov, Zvezda Vankova, , Ivanka Ivanova,OSI-Sofia, November 2011

[“Trends in Cross-border Workforce Migration and the Free Movement of People – Effects for Bulgaria”](#) by Georgi Angelov, Diana Ivanova, Eugenia Markova, Evelina Staykova, Zvezda Vankova, Ivanka Ivanova, Marin Lessenski, Tihomira Trifonova, OSI-Sofia, 2010

[Findings of OSI-Sofia Migration Attitudes Survey](#) by Alexey Pamporov, Politiki 08/11 (in Bulgarian)

[“Migration attitudes”](#) public opinion survey of OSI-Sofia, released in July 2011

[“Migration and migrant population statistics”](#) Eurostat data from December 2012



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The European Policy Initiative (EuPI) aims at stimulating and assisting new Member States from CEE to develop capacity for constructive co-authorship of common European policies at both government and civil society level. As a new priority area of the European Policies and Civic Participation Program of Open Society Institute – Sofia, EuPI will contribute to improving the capacity of new Member States to effectively impact common European policies through quality research, policy recommendations, networking and advocacy. The initiative operates in the ten new Member States from CEE through a network of experts and policy institutes.

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