

Britain to restrict Bulgarian and Romanian migrants through 2008

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE

The Associated Press

Tuesday, October 30, 2007

LONDON: Britain will restrict newcomers arriving from Romania and Bulgaria until the end of 2008, ministers said Tuesday, as a dispute escalated over the government's failure to record numbers of foreign workers already in the country.

Restrictions on migrants from the two countries — which joined the European Union on Jan. 1 — will remain in place until "at least the end of 2008," Immigration Minister Liam Byrne said.

Under EU rules, citizens can move freely to work, but nations are allowed to place restrictions on citizens from new member nations for up to seven years.

Though skilled workers from Bulgaria and Romania — such as lawyers, teachers and medical practitioners — are allowed the same access as 2004 EU accession countries, access for unskilled workers from the two countries is limited.

Byrne said the decision reflected warnings that an influx of workers from EU states is placing an unsustainable burden on schools, doctors and housing stocks.

"While accession workers have made a positive contribution to Britain's economy, there are signs of a wider impact on public services," he said.

The Home Office said only around 20,000 unskilled workers per year enter from the two countries, employed exclusively in agriculture and food processing.

Germany and Luxembourg in September agreed to relax restrictions on workers from the new EU member states, though Austria, Belgium, Denmark and France still impose caveats.

The decision came as Home Secretary Jacqui Smith acknowledged Tuesday the government had failed to count 300,000 foreigners in a total of the number of overseas workers in Britain.

She said the number of foreign nationals working in the U.K. since 1997 was 1.1 million, meaning immigrants had taken around 40 percent of the 2.7 million jobs created since the governing Labour came to power.

Conservative lawmaker Chris Grayling said the confusion "confirms fears that ministers have simply lost control of our systems for migrant workers."