

Amid Unemployment, Spain Aims to Limit Romanian Influx

By [RAPHAEL MINDER](#)

MADRID — The Spanish government was moving on Thursday toward endorsing tough restrictions on Romanians seeking to enter the country at a time of enormous unemployment in [Spain](#).

A decision on the restrictions is expected Friday. They would require Romanians to have a work contract before settling in Spain, reversing a previous commitment to give Romanians unrestricted access as fellow members of the 27-nation [European Union](#). The number of Romanians in Spain has quadrupled in the past five years, making them the country's biggest foreign community.

Support for such a decision comes amid evidence that Europe's economic crisis, coupled with the rise of xenophobic sentiment in some countries, is straining the commitment by many European countries to the principle of border-free travel.

In May, Denmark, one of the signatories to a pact known as the [Schengen Agreement](#), which took effect in 1995 and abolished internal border checks, said that it would re-impose them for people coming from Germany and Sweden, bowing to the demands of the right-wing [Danish People's Party](#), which has been campaigning against illegal [immigration](#) and organized crime.

The Schengen Agreement has also come under pressure because of the recent influx of refugees escaping the turmoil in North Africa. Both President Nicolas Sarkozy of France and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi of Italy called for a revision of the Schengen Agreement after France stopped migrants crossing over from Italy by train.

Still, the Spanish government emphasized that its decision was in line with the terms the European Union set for [Romania](#) to join the union, as well as earlier restrictions on Romanians imposed by other countries like France and Italy.

[Anna Terrón](#), the Spanish secretary of state for immigration, said in a telephone interview on Thursday that the decision was “completely different” from efforts by some of Spain's fellow European Union members to alter the Schengen Agreement.

“We are and will continue to be a country fighting against any reform of Schengen,” she said. At the same time, she said, “We now have to recognize that we are not creating any employment here, and something has to be done to respond to this difficult labor situation.”

Spain’s population of 46 million includes 864,000 Romanians. Last year they became the biggest foreign community here, eclipsing Moroccans and Ecuadoreans, and their number has continued to swell even as Spain’s construction industry and other sectors of the economy have crumbled. Ms. Terrón said this “countertrend” was surprising since Romania had a jobless rate of 7 percent, about a third of that of Spain.

Furthermore, many of the Romanians who have already acquired residency in Spain, and will not be affected by the new restrictions, have been among the hardest hit by Spain’s downturn, with the jobless rate among Romanians now around 35 percent.

“We are not just talking about temporarily protecting the jobs of Spaniards, but also about preventing new arrivals from Romania from having a negative impact on the Romanians that are already here,” Ms. Terrón said.