PRAGUE PROCESS
ПРАЖСКИЙ ПРОЦЕСС



Bulgaria

General Information

Population

6 433 302 (World Bank 2025)

6 437 360 (STAT BG 2024)

Immigration

299 100 (UN Immigration Stock 2024)

52 189 (STAT BG 2024)

Emigration

1 252 234 (UN Emigration Stock 2024)

13 002 (STAT BG 2024)

Working-age population

4 076 441 (World Bank 2025)

2 945 600 (STAT BG 2024)

Unemployment rate

3.5 % (World Bank 2025)

4.2 % (STAT BG 2024)

GDP

130 777 235 529.6 current prices USD (World Bank 2025)

185 233 000 000 current prices BGN (STAT BG 2023)

Refugees, Asylum seekers, IDPs

Refugees

105 596 (UNHCR 2025)

56 (State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers 2024)

Asylum Seekers

1 317 (UNHCR 2025)

12 250 (State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers 2024)

IDPs

0 (UNHCR 2025)

7 300 (IDMC 2024)

Citizenship

By Birth

No (GLOBALCIT 2024)

By Descent

Yes (GLOBALCIT 2024)

Years of Residency

5 years of residence required (GLOBALCIT 2024)

Territory

110 879 km^2 (CIA World Factbook)

Data from international sources is updated automatically as it becomes available.

Migration Authorities

Responsible Body

Ministry of the Interior

Line Ministries

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

Ministry of Justice

Agencies

State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministries

State Agency for Child Protection

Employment Agency

Migration Directorate

General Directorate of Border Police

Key Policy Documents

Strategy for Migration and Asylum Management 2025–2030

2021-2025 National Strategy on Migration of Bulgaria

2020-2025 National Strategy for Integrated Border Management in Bulgaria

Law on Bulgarian Citizenship

Labour Migration and Labour Mobility Act 2016

Law on Entry, Stay and Departure of EU Citizens and their Family Members 2006

Law on Asylum and Refugees 2002

Law on Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria 1998

Relevant Publications

Exploring the Potential of Digitalisation in Migration Management in the Prague Process Region

Digitalisation and labour migration: the use of modern technology, challenges and opportunities

Demographic Changes in the Prague Process in 2020

Labour migration from East to West: The example of foreign workers in Austria

How will migration to Europe look in the Future?

Intra-corporate Transferees (ICTs): The benefits for the EU and the opportunity cost

Reintegration of victims of trafficking in Bulgaria: supporting social inclusion and economic empowerment

Reintegration and Social Inclusion of Child Victims of Trafficking in Bulgaria

ICMPD Policy Brief 'How to Prevent Human Trafficking among People Travelling along Migration Routes to Europe', 2019

ICMPD Briefing Paper, The Strength to Carry On - Resilience and Vulnerability to Trafficking and Other Abuses among People Travelling along Migration Routes to Europe, 2019

ICMPD, Achievements and Developments in the Area of Home Affairs during Bulgaria’s Presidency of the EU, 2018

Bulgaria is a country of emigration, though immigration and return flows have increased in recent years. At the end of 2024, Bulgaria's population stood at 6,437,360, continuing the decline that began in 2010. Between 2010 and 2020, this decline was exacerbated by the emigration of working-age Bulgarians following EU accession in 2007. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, slowed emigration and encouraged return migration, resulting in positive net migration between 2020 and 2025, though not enough to offset the population decline.

Bulgaria has one of the largest diasporas in Europe and Central Asia. According to UNDESA, as of 2024, 1,252,234 Bulgarians lived abroad, with the majority residing in Europe (851,797), Türkiye (348,052) and Northern America (20,592). Within the EU, major Bulgarian communities reside in Germany (338,439), followed by Spain (103,587), Greece (78,992), Belgium (51,857) and Italy (50,769). Economic factors remain the main driver of outmigration. Highly educated migrants tend to move to high-income countries such as Luxembourg, the UK, Austria, Denmark, France, Ireland, Sweden, and Switzerland, while lower-skilled migrants predominantly work in agriculture, tourism, and construction in Southern Europe.

Over the past five years, emigration from Bulgaria declined sharply from about 39,900 people in 2019 to 13,002 in 2024. Of those, 9,119 were Bulgarians and 3,883 foreign nationals, mostly from non-EU countries. The main destinations regardless of nationality were Germany (16,9%), the UK (13,9%) and France (8,9%). Most emigrants (82,7%) were of working age. The number of Bulgarian students pursuing higher education abroad also declined from 14,604 in 2020 to 9,834 in 2023, with the majority enrolled in Germany and in Türkiye.

Immigration to Bulgaria has been gradually increasing in the past five years. According to UNDESA, the immigrant stock reached 299,100 in 2024, with largest migrant groups coming from Ukraine (61,074), Russia (45,089), Germany (17,311), the UK (16476), Greece (11,085), Spain (10,245), North Macedonia (6,345), Syria (24,543), and Türkiye (19,877). The foreign-born population doubled from 107,275 in 2014 to 211,839 in 2024, accounting for 3,3% of the total population.

In 2024, Bulgaria registered 52,189 immigrants, including 18,205 Bulgarian nationals. The number of first residence permits issued to non-EU nationals in Bulgaria nearly doubled between 2015 and 2024, rising from 9,595 in 2015 to 19,662 in 2024, despite periodic declines. Of these, 44% were issued for remunerated activities, 27% for family reasons, 12% for study, and 17% for other reasons. Notably, the number of first permits for issued for work more than tripled between 2021 and 2024, reflecting growing demand for foreign labour. By the end of 2024, 72,275 non-EU nationals held valid residence permits – the highest number on record and over five times the 2015 figure. Despite this overall growth, Bulgaria continues to face labour shortages in certain sectors limited success in attracting highly skilled migrants. In 2023, only 705 people received the EU Blue Card for the first time, far below employer expectations. Meanwhile, the number of foreign students has fluctuated, peaking at 18,242 in 2021/22, and stabilising at 16,850 in 2024/25 – around 8% of all university students in Bulgaria (203,517), according to the National Statistical Institute.

When it comes to international protection, the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministries recorded 12,250 asylum applications in 2024, 46% fewer than in 2023. The same year, 56 persons were granted refugee status and 4,895 received humanitarian protection. In the first quarter of 2025, Bulgaria recorded 832 new asylum applications, while 42 individuals obtained refugee status and 537 subsidiary protection. The decline in applications is largely attributed to fewer arrivals from Türkiye in 2024. The top five countries of origin of asylum seekers in 2024 were Syria (7,646), Afghanistan (1,980), Morocco (871), Egypt (654) and Iraq (541). Syrians have remained the largest group of asylum seekers in Bulgaria since the onset of the Syrian civil war in 2011. Meanwhile, Bulgaria in 2024 reinstated national safe country lists (after a 19-year pause related to EU legal alignment) as part of its Schengen accession efforts in 2024, designating 22 safe countries of origin and 3 safe third countries.

In response to the war in Ukraine, Bulgaria introduced a range of measures to support refugees, including information provision on residence, registration and rights, as well as temporary protection for persons displaced from Ukraine with retroactive effect from 24 February 2022. In 2024 alone, 27,775 Ukrainians registered under Bulgaria's temporary protection scheme. Since the start of the war, 201,484 people overall, primarily women and children, have been registered, with 60,864 remaining under temporary protection by the end of 2024.

According to AIDA country report, large numbers of non-EU nationals continued to transit and exit Bulgaria without engaging with national authorities. Many of those apprehended abscond after being released upon lodging an asylum application. According to the Eurostat, 15,150 non-EU nationals were found to be illegally present in Bulgaria in 2024, four times more than in 2021 (3,200), though fewer than in 2023 (22,805). A total of 8,470 persons were ordered to leave in 2024, 53% of whom were Syrian nationals. The number of returns following an order to leave amounted to 965, mainly involving citizens of Morocco and Türkiye.

Sexual exploitation remains the most common form of human trafficking in Bulgaria, predominantly affecting women and girls, particularly in the capital, resort areas, and border towns. Forced labour mainly affects men working in agriculture, construction, and hospitality industries. Recent reports show a decrease in the number of identified child trafficking victims: from 298 victims in 2022 to 191 victims in 2023 (78 sex trafficking, 70 labour trafficking, and 43 unspecified forms of trafficking). Most identified victims are Bulgarian nationals, many from Roma and Turkish minorities, unemployed individuals with low levels of education, and children without parental care. The country also registers victims among migrants transiting through Bulgaria. In 2024, 76 potential trafficking cases and 79 victims (including children) were officially identified. Among non-EU nationals, eight were exploited for labour and one for sexual exploitation.

In recent years, Bulgaria has amended its migration legislation to align with EU requirements. Amendments to the Labour Migration and Labour Mobility Act (2022-2023) improved labour market access for beneficiaries of temporary protection, including highly qualified refugees from Ukraine, Russia, and Moldova, and simplified Blue Card procedures by allowing holders to change employers after 12 months. In 2023, the Law on Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria (LFRB) was amended to introduce the EU Blue Card

scheme, harmonising conditions for highly skilled workers from non-EU countries. Further changes in 2024 covered seasonal workers, granting them greater mobility and a path to residence, and aligned rules with Schengen border control standards. Also in 2023, the Criminal Code were amended to tighten rules on illegal border crossing, residence, and smuggling, while easing proof requirements for property benefits. Additional measures were taken against foreigners assisting irregular migration, such as establishing bans on entering the territory of the EU.

On 1 January 2025, Bulgaria became a full member of the Schengen Area, following the lifting of checks on persons at internal land borders. To strengthen cooperation in preventing and combating irregular migration and cross-border crime, Bulgaria and Romania signed a joint action plan reflecting their Schengen status.

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