

Bulgaria



General Information



Population

6 465 097 (World Bank 2022)

6 838 937 (National Statistical Institute 2021)



Immigration

106 514 (Eurostat 2020)

39 461 (National Statistical Institute 2021)



Emigration

1 683 074 (UN Emigration Stock 2020)

26 755 (National Statistical Institute 2021)



Working-age population

4 113 496 (World Bank 2022)

3 247 600 (National Statistical Institute 2021)



Unemployment rate

4.3 % (World Bank 2022)

5.3 % (National Statistical Institute 2021)



GDP

90 346 169 914.9 current prices USD (World Bank 2022)

132 744 000 000 current prices BGN (National Statistical Institute 2021)



Refugees and IDPs

Refugees

189 577 (UNHCR 2023)

2 019 (AREF BG 2021)

Asylum Seekers

9 595 (UNHCR 2023)

10 999 (AREF BG 2021)

IDPs

0 (UNHCR 2023)



Citizenship

By Birth

No (GLOBALCIT 2022)

By Descent

Yes (GLOBALCIT 2022)

Years of Residency

5 (GLOBALCIT 2022)



Territory

110 879 km² (CIA World Factbook)

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

General Directorate of Border Police

Key Policy Documents

2021-2025 National Strategy on Migration of the Republic of Bulgaria

2020-2025 National Strategy for Integrated Border Management in the Republic of Bulgaria

1998 Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria Act

April 2019 Amendment to the Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria Act

2018 Labour Migration and Labour Mobility Act

2013 Law on Asylum and Refugees

2020 Amendments to the Law on Asylum and Refugees in Bulgaria

Relevant Publications

Migration in Bulgaria: Current Challenges and Opportunities

2020 Migrant Integration Policy Index

Demographic Changes in the Prague Process in 2020

The Bulgarian migration paradox. Migration and development in Bulgaria

Country report: Bulgaria

2020 UNHCR report on municipal housing policies in Bulgaria

Migration: Fundamental Rights Issues at Land Borders

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

The population of Bulgaria, which amounted to **6.838.937** persons in 2021, continues to decline. Over the past three decades, the emigration of Bulgarian citizens overseas has become an important phenomenon, which was further accelerated by Bulgaria's accession to the EU in 2007, motivating many Bulgarians to leave for other EU countries with better economic opportunities.

Bulgaria has one of the largest Diasporas in Europe and the Central Asia region. According to **UNDESA**, approximately 1.7 million Bulgarians lived abroad in 2020, **with the majority staying in the EU**. The Bulgarian emigrant population in the EU is estimated at over **800.000 people**. Turkey is another major destination country hosting over **300.000 Bulgarians**. The remaining 8% live primarily in the USA, Canada and Israel.

Economic factors represent the main driver for outmigration. Bulgarian migrants with **high education concentrate** in high-income EU countries, while those with low skills are primarily in Southern Europe (Italy, Portugal, Greece) and also Belgium, where they seek opportunities in low-skilled jobs in agriculture, tourism and construction. In contrast, Bulgarians with tertiary education choose Luxembourg, the UK, Austria, Denmark, France, Ireland, Sweden, and Switzerland. The economic considerations and opportunities for career advancements play an important role in emigration decisions among highly skilled **Bulgarian** professionals. The **brain drain** has particularly affected such fields as medicine, biology, and IT technologies, where the training of skilled professionals is the most expensive.

The number of Bulgarian students that choose to pursue higher education abroad had increased annually from **11.594 in 2013 to 17.575 in 2020**. The top countries for tertiary enrolment of Bulgarian students include Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK. The number of **foreign students** in Bulgaria is equally increasing. During the 2019-2020 school year, foreign students represented **8%** of the total student body in Bulgaria, of which 23% were from Greece, 15% from the UK, 8% from Germany and 7% from Ukraine. According to the National Statistical Institute, out of the total 220.439 students registered in the Bulgarian education system for the academic year 2021-2022 **18.242** are foreign students.

Immigration to Bulgaria has been gradually increasing, although it remains relatively low compared to the rest of the EU countries. The country's foreign-born population grew from less than **80.000 immigrants in 2011 to 201.940 immigrants in 2021**, representing approximately 2.7% of the total population. **In 2021, 39.461 immigrants came to Bulgaria and 26.755 emigrants left the country.**

In 2019, the largest groups of immigrants in Bulgaria came from Russia and Turkey. Following the war in Syria, Syrians have become the fastest-growing group of immigrants. In 2019, their number amounted to 15.000 persons. Other immigrant groups come from Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, as well as Ukraine and North Macedonia. In 2019, third-country nationals received **13.500** residence permits (4097 family reasons, 1642 education and study, 2414 remunerated activities, 5347 other reasons). In 2020, this number stood at 10.267 residence permits (2902 family reasons, 1154 education and study, 2388 remunerated activities, 3823 other reasons). In addition, about **30.000 Bulgarians** returned to the country in 2020. Bulgarian nationals return due to the loss of employment, and reduced income, which render their residence abroad meaningless.

In response to the war in Ukraine, the government of Bulgaria

has taken steps to welcome Ukrainian refugees. More than 100.000 Ukrainian citizens entered the territory of Bulgaria until March 2022, and approximately 50.000 of them remained in the country, according to the data of the Operational Coordination Group of the Council of Ministries.

In 2021, according to the reports of the [State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministries](#), 10.999 persons lodged asylum applications, 143 persons received refugee status and 1876 persons were granted subsidiary protection. [The top five countries of origin](#) of asylum seekers were Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Morocco and Pakistan. In the period January-March 2022, Bulgaria recorded [4484 new asylum applications](#), of which 16 received refugee status and 788 subsidiary protection. Asylum seekers from Ukraine made it to [the top five origin countries](#) along with Afghanistan, Syria, Morocco and Pakistan.

According to [ECRE-country report Bulgaria](#), large numbers of third-country nationals continued to transit and exit the country without interfering with the national authorities. The majority of those who have been apprehended further abscond after being released on account of submitted and registered asylum applications. According to the Ministry of Interior, 2184 irregular migrants were apprehended in 2019 (489 irregular entry, 494 irregular exit, 1201 irregular stay on the territory). In 2020, this number increased to 3487 persons (510 irregular entry, 924 irregular exit, 2053 irregular stay on the territory). Since [1 January 2017](#), the Ministry of Interior no longer publicly discloses the number of prevented entries.

On 13 September 2019, Bulgaria established a new [National Council on Migration, Borders, Asylum and Integration](#). The Council is a collective advisory body for formulating and coordinating the implementation of national policies in the areas of migration, borders, asylum and integration. It replaced the former National Council on Migration and Integration, which operated from 2015 until September 2019. The [2019 amendments to the Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria Act](#) introduced several changes related to resident permits of **unaccompanied minors and migrant children and representatives of foreign trade companies. Provisions on long-term residence permits for researchers working on scientific projects and foreigners with study visas, permits for seasonal workers with the right to long-term residence, and permits for family members of foreigners who have received international protection have been equally amended.** [Amendments](#) to the Law on Asylum and Refugees in Bulgaria, relating particularly to unaccompanied minors and safe third countries, were published on 16 October 2020.

In early 2021, Bulgaria adopted [the new National Strategy on Migration of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2025](#). The previous strategy has also featured the integration area in its title, which received less attention in the new document. The strategy majorly focuses [on the four areas](#): legal labour and educational migration (incl. high-skilled migration), irregular migration and return of foreigners without legal grounds, international protection with the focus on the adoption of the Common European Asylum System, and cooperation with key third countries of origin and transit - a source of irregular flows to the Republic of Bulgaria.