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UK Work Restrictions for Romanian & Bulgarian Nationals

The Minister of State for Borders and Immigration, (Phil Woolas): I am today announcing the Government's decision in relation to restrictions on the labour market access of migrants coming to the UK from Romania and Bulgaria.

We have decided to maintain the closure of Tier 3 of the points based system, for unskilled migrant labour from outside the European Economic Area.

We have decided to retain the current restrictions on the employment rights applied to nationals of Bulgaria and Romania beyond the end of this year, subject to the following changes:

The current quota of 3,500 places under the Sectors Based Scheme for the food processing sector will remain unchanged but may be opened up to a wider range of occupations within the sector.

The quota for the number of Bulgarian and Romanian workers admitted under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) will be 21,250 places in 2009;

We will review these arrangements before the end of 2009.

We have previously made clear our intention to gradually open access to our labour market following accession of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007. This decision is in line with that policy of gradual opening of the labour market.

We sought advice from the independent Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) on the labour market impact of relaxing restrictions, and whether it would be sensible to do so. The committee has produced an impressive and comprehensive report, which it is publishing today. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the House libraries. In advising against lifting restrictions the committee pointed in particular to the impact of the current economic downturn, and the possible approach of other member states. We also sought views from members of the Migration Impacts Forum, which provides information to Government on the wider impacts of migration on local areas and services.