

A total of 32 900 new work permits were granted in 2004. Overall, 25 300 work permits were granted to nationals from the new EU countries in 2004. Compared with 2003 this is an increase of around 40 per cent. The number of permits granted in accordance with the specialist rules declined by more than a third to 734.



Transitional rules

On 1 May 2004 the European Union (EU) and the European Economic Area (EEA) were expanded, taking on ten new member countries. Norway introduced a transitional scheme for nationals from eight of these countries (Cyprus and Malta the exceptions). The transitional rules mean that nationals of the countries covered by the scheme must still have a residence and work permit to hold a job with a Norwegian employer, but it is easier for persons from these countries to have their application processed than for nationals from countries outside the EU and EEA area.

In 2004, the EU/EEA expansion and the consequences this could have for labour immigration were a main focus of the debate on labour immigration at the political level, in the media and at the UDI. It was also a hot topic of debate in Norway and elsewhere in Europe. On 1 May 2004 ten new countries became members of the EU, thus also joining the EEA cooperation. Norway introduced transitional rules for eight of the ten new countries: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Hungary. The rules stipulate that employees from the new member countries must have a work permit before commencing work, and that pay and working conditions must correspond to Norwegian pay scales or collective agreements where such exist.

In 2004, 25 100 first-issue work permits were granted, four of five pursuant to the transitional rules. The three largest countries of origin in this context were Poland (16 100), Lithuania (6100) and Latvia (1200). The permits granted in accordance with the transitional rules are mainly short-term permits for seasonal work in agriculture. The majority of the EEA permits granted to nationals from these eight new member countries are such short-term permits; the duration of 62 per cent of them was up to three months.

The conclusion so far when it comes to the transitional rules is that they have not had any moderating impact on labour immigration from the new member countries. Moreover, in the UDI's view, the simplified and rapid procedures have led many of those who might have opted to work without registration to choose instead to work legally. In connection with the EU/EEA expansion, in addition to monitoring the consequences in its field of responsibility, the Directorate was expected to obtain an overview of the effects in the areas of other important agencies/organisations affected by the expansion and transitional rules. The UDI published a special report on this towards the end of the year.

Major effort to speed up case processing

Prior to the EU expansion, the Directorate of Immigration received clear political signals that applications would have to be processed very rapidly. The Directorate's evaluation shows that case processing times have been very short, and that the restructuring of the police and the Directorate of Immigration has been very successful. Towards the end of 2004 case processing times were as follows:

- 60 per cent of the cases were completed after one day
- 70 per cent of the cases were completed after two days



Ben (40) is a senior doctor with a PhD in medicine who works at the Radiumhospitalet Comprehensive Cancer Center in Oslo as a pathologist and cancer researcher.

"I came to Norway in 1998 to work as a junior doctor, but I have later specialized as a pathologist," says Ben, who trained as a doctor in Israel, his country of origin.



"I wanted to work in a different environment and since I had acquaintances in Norway, it was natural to apply for a work permit here."

"I generally work with cancer diagnostics by studying patient biopsies (samples of tissue or organs removed from patients). In addition, I am doing research on cancer of the ovaries."



"Needless to say, working and settling in another country involves challenges. There are many cultural differences, but it helps if you have an open mind. For me it has been a good experience to work in Norway. I enjoy being here and am happy," the doctor adds.

- 80 per cent of the cases were completed after five days
- 90 per cent of the cases were completed after 14 days

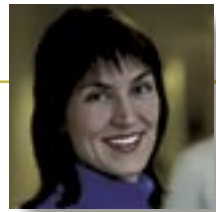
When it comes to other case processing times, in 2004 the UDI has put a great deal of resources into reducing the number of unprocessed cases, and due to this effort, the number of unprocessed cases declined by 40 per cent. Together with further improvements in our service, we will continue to concentrate efforts on speedy and efficient processing of uncomplicated cases in our activities in connection with work permits and other residence cases in 2005.

The lowest number of specialists since the quota was introduced
In 2002 the rules for specialist immigration were relaxed. For example, the requirement that there must be no available domestic labour was dropped. The aim of the change in the rules was to make it easier for Norwegian companies to recruit expert workers from abroad. In connection with the change in the rules a quota of up to 5000 persons a year was introduced for specialists.

In 2004, a report prepared by NUPI (the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs) on assignment from the UDI drew the following conclusions:

- Norway is encountering stiff competition for labour from other countries
- The Norwegian authorities are not good enough at marketing both the specialist scheme and Norway in countries that could have specialists that are of interest to Norway
- Companies must work more actively to attract foreign specialists, and inform interested parties about the relaxation of the rules related to specialists

A total of 747 persons were granted specialist permits in 2004. Since 2000 Norway has welcomed more than 4500 specialists. A specialist in this connection is a trained worker who has been offered employment in Norway. The largest group of applicants pursuant to the specialist provision consists of craftsmen: joiners, carpenters, painters and bricklayers. Other large groups are health service personnel and engineers.



Name: Anna Katarina Grova

Age: 35 years

Education: Lawyer

She has worked as a consultant for four and a half years in the Residence Department in the Employment and Education Office. She processes work permit applications from all over the world, but primarily from the EU.

"What I like best about my job is that there are always new challenges and issues to contend with. Last spring I worked on the EU expansion and the transitional rules for the new EU countries. It was really interesting to be part of a project where we had to respond to submissions and clarify many issues of principle relating to the rules. New cases keep surfacing that neither we nor the legislators had considered. This means that my workdays are very varied. One day I will work on applications that are simple and uncontroversial. That allows me to complete many cases. The next day an application might land on my desk involving issues that need to be clarified before the case can be processed. Moreover, the good working environment and pleasant colleagues make the UDI a good place to work."

Specialists

Specialists are persons who are trained in a particular field or have special qualifications needed in Norway. Their expertise must be critical for the enterprise seeking to hire them.