

A Strategic Economic Dialogue: Bulgaria–Ukraine Fact Sheet

For Bulgaria, Ukraine is an important market for fertilizers and flat glass, and an even more important supplier of steel and agricultural products. This trade supports food security in both countries and provides important industrial inputs for Bulgaria.

Ukrainian refugees accounted for around 45% of all foreigners in Bulgaria in 2025, while their spending has driven much of the growth in Bulgaria's services exports to Ukraine since 2022.

About 70 active Ukrainian companies are linked to Bulgaria, with Euromarket Group businesses accounting for more than half of their combined revenues in 2025.

Despite the war, Bulgaria's FDI stock in Ukraine has continued to grow, with equity investments increasing by 25% annually on average in 2023-2025.

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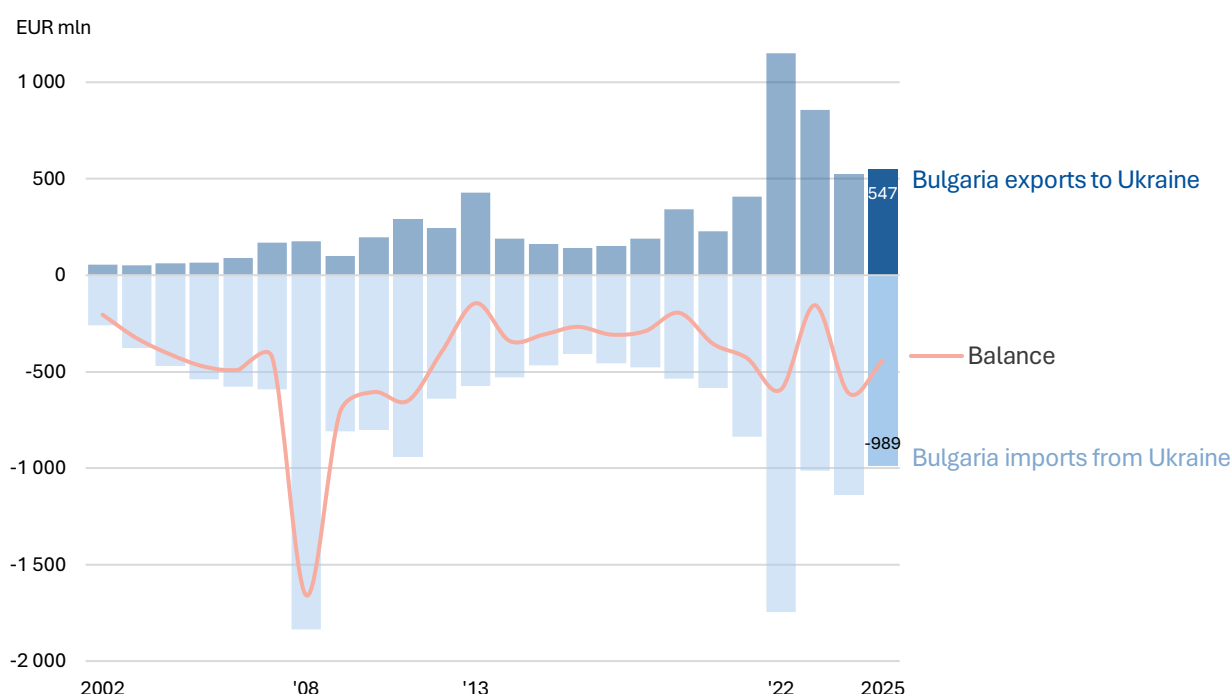
MOVEMENT OF GOODS

Bulgaria-Ukraine trade in goods has historically favoured Ukraine, as Bulgaria has been buying more products from its partner than selling. Since 2022, trade has expanded substantially in both directions, with Bulgarian exports reaching almost €550 million and imports €990 million in 2025 (Figure 1).

In 2025, 3.6% of Bulgaria's extra-EU exports went to Ukraine – up from 3.1% on average over the previous 10 years, with Bulgaria ranking 10th out of 27 EU member states by this indicator. As for Bulgaria's extra-EU imports, Ukraine accounted for 4.3% in 2025, slightly down from an average of 4.9% over the previous decade, but still the second-highest share among EU countries.

Figure 1. Trade in goods between Bulgaria and Ukraine, EUR million

Bulgaria has consistently been a net importer of goods from Ukraine



Source: [Eurostat](#), CES calculations

Over the last two years, the main Bulgarian exports to Ukraine have been fertilisers. In 2025, almost a third of all Bulgarian exports to Ukraine fell into two groups: mixed fertilisers (€138 million) and nitrogen fertilisers (€42 million) (Figure 2). Additionally, in 2025, Bulgaria exported €52 million of packaged medicaments to Ukraine, and €37 million of flat glass. The rise in flat glass trade was possibly driven by damage and destruction caused by Russian attacks in Ukraine.

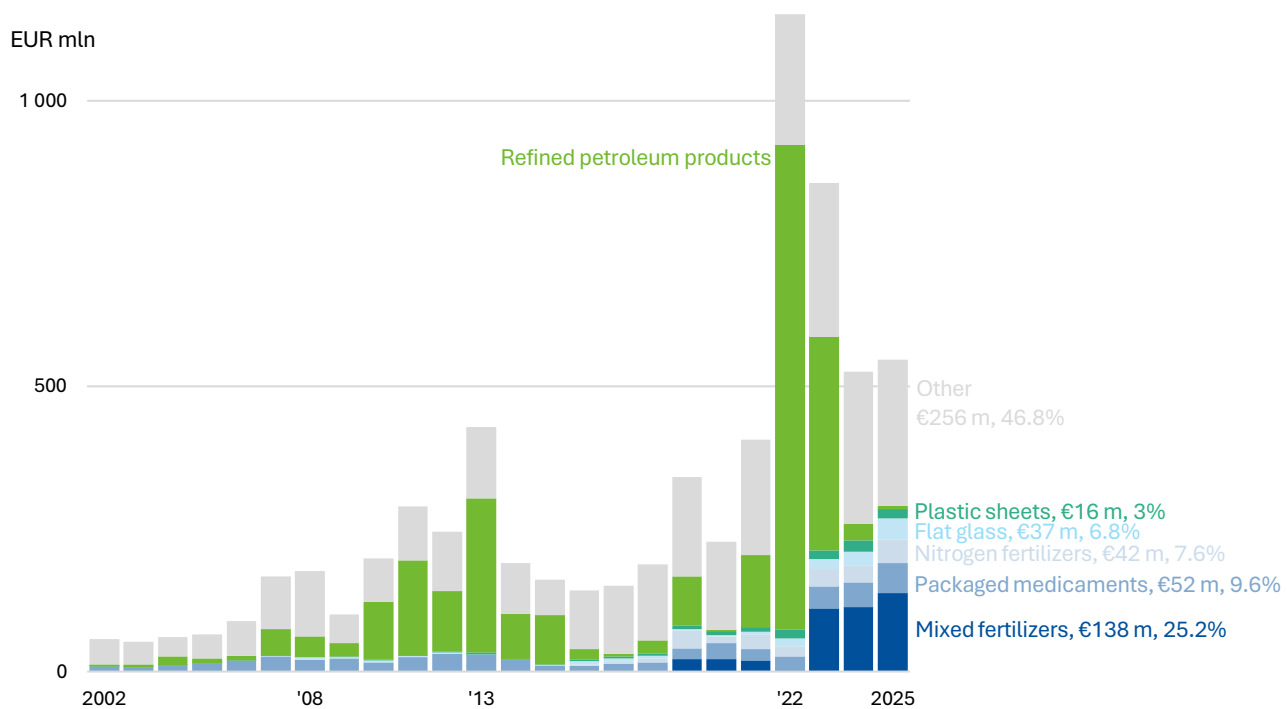
After Russia’s invasion in 2022, Ukraine faced severe fuel shortages. Bulgaria’s Russian-owned LUKOIL Neftochim Burgas refinery partly filled this supply gap by exporting to Ukraine gas oil processed predominantly from Russian Urals crude. Bulgaria’s exemption from the EU embargo allowed it to continue importing Russian crude, while a special EU derogation subsequently allowed certain petroleum products produced from this crude to be exported to Ukraine.^{1 2 3}

As Ukraine overcame the initial fuel shortage, diversified its supply routes, and tightened controls over the origin of imported petroleum products in late 2023, Bulgaria’s role as a fuel supplier diminished.⁴ Bulgaria then completely stopped imports of Russian crude oil ahead of schedule in early 2024.

All these factors led to petroleum products almost disappearing from Bulgaria–Ukraine goods trade.

Figure 2. Bulgaria’s exports of goods to Ukraine by product group, EUR million

Fertilizers dominate Bulgaria’s exports to Ukraine



Source: [Eurostat](#), CES calculations

¹ [Investigation: Ukraine buys huge amounts of Russian fuels from Bulgaria. Euractiv](#)

² [LUKOIL’s Bulgarian refinery may shut down if it cannot export. Euronews](#)

³ [Minister Nikola Stoyanov. Republic of Bulgaria Ministry of Economy, Investments and Industry](#)

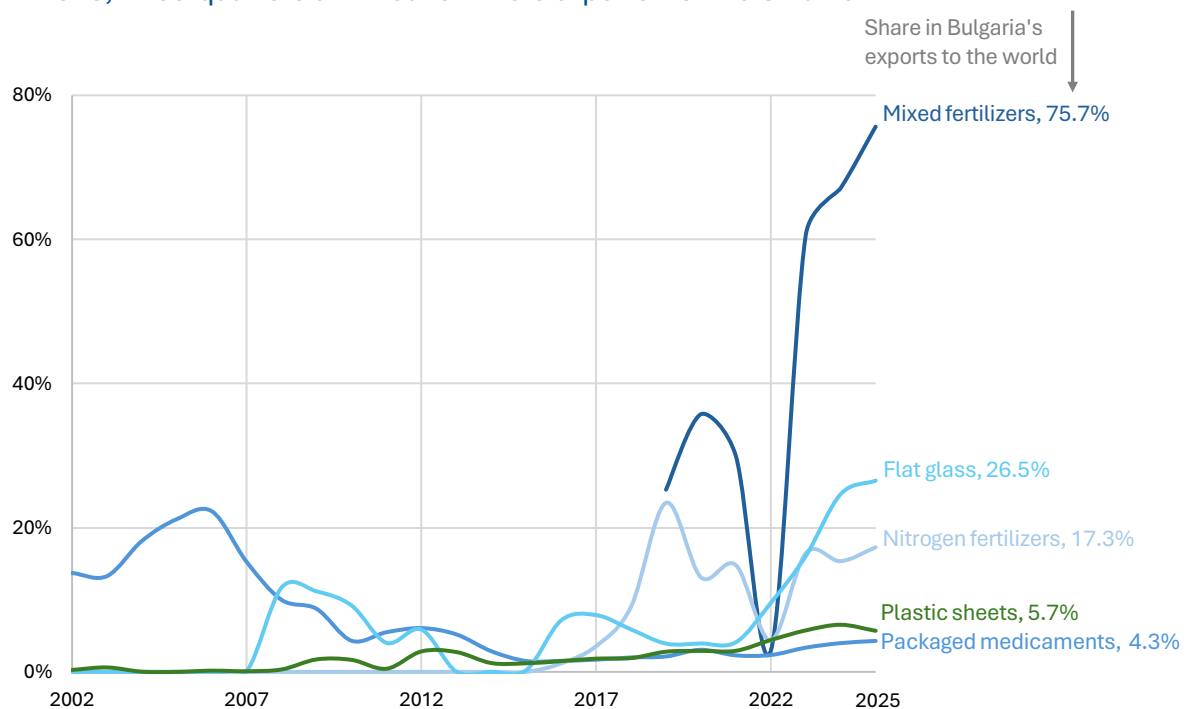
⁴ [Government approves measures to prevent Russian fuel from entering Ukraine. Ministry of Energy of Ukraine](#)

Ukraine is the main buyer of mixed fertilisers from Bulgaria, receiving three quarters of the country's total exports of these products in 2025 (Figure 3). [Agropolychim](#) (Devnya, Varna province) and [Neochim](#) (Dimitrovgrad, Haskovo province) are two major Bulgarian producers of nitrogen and mixed fertilizers. Together, the two companies employ more than 1,500 people.

From Ukraine's perspective, Bulgaria is the second-largest supplier of mixed fertilizers (223 kt in 2024, or 21% of Ukraine's imports), behind only Poland, and the fourth-largest supplier of nitrogen fertilizers (102 kt, or 7%) after Poland, China, and Turkmenistan. Together with these countries, Bulgaria has taken a share of the Ukrainian market that was once overwhelmingly dominated by Russia and Belarus.

Figure 3. Bulgaria's exports of goods to Ukraine as a share of total exports, by value

In 2025, three-quarters of mixed fertilizers exports went to Ukraine



Source: [Eurostat](#), CES calculations

Note: Shares are calculated by export value (EUR)

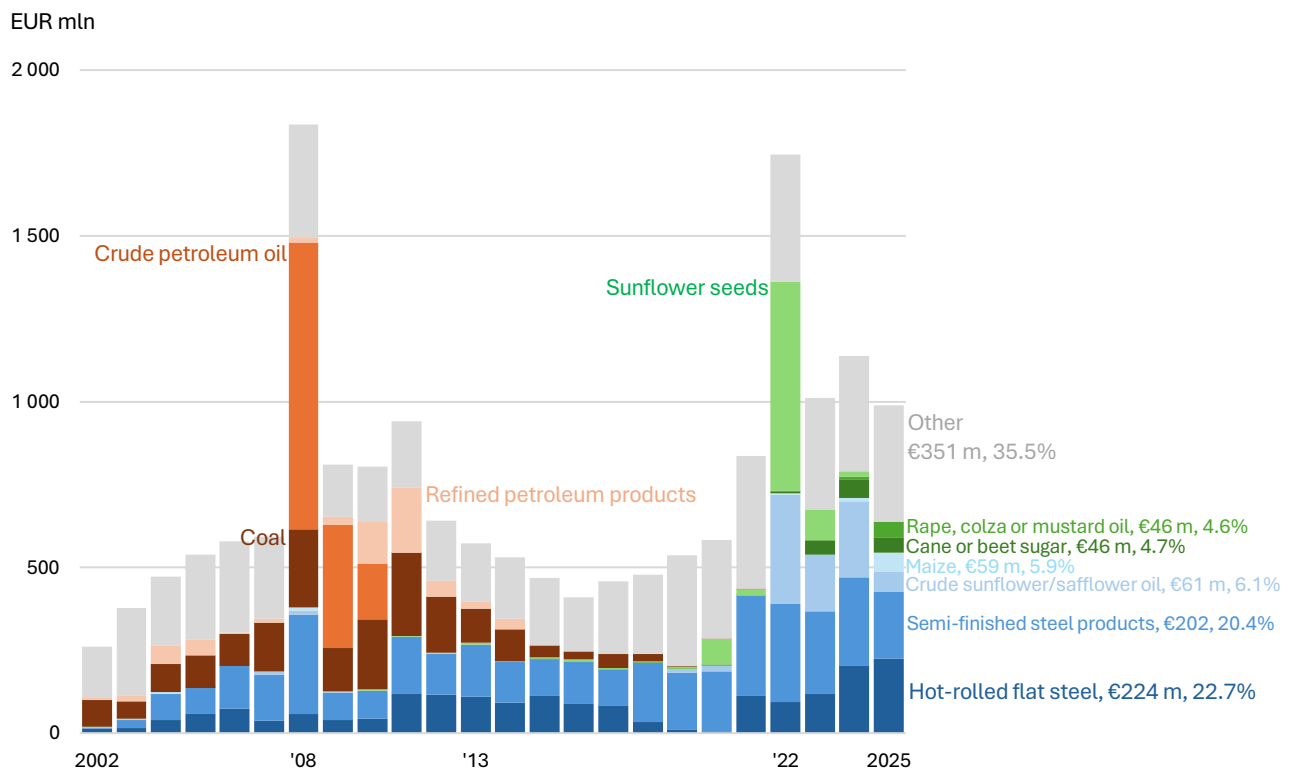
The figures show by how much Ukraine is important for Bulgaria as buyer whose replacement will be tangible.

Read it as follows: in 2025, out of all mixed fertilizers exports from Bulgaria, 75.7% went to Ukraine.

Bulgaria's largest and most stable imports from Ukraine are hot-rolled flat steel and semi-finished steel products, reaching €224 million and €202 million in 2025, respectively (Figure 4). These two groups have been essential to bilateral trade for the last two decades, as Ukraine is the main supplier of both products to Bulgaria, accounting for about 83% of its total semi-finished steel imports and 69% of hot-rolled flat steel imports in 2025 (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Bulgaria's imports of goods to Ukraine by product group, EUR million

Steel dominates Bulgaria's imports from Ukraine



Source: [Eurostat](#), CES calculations

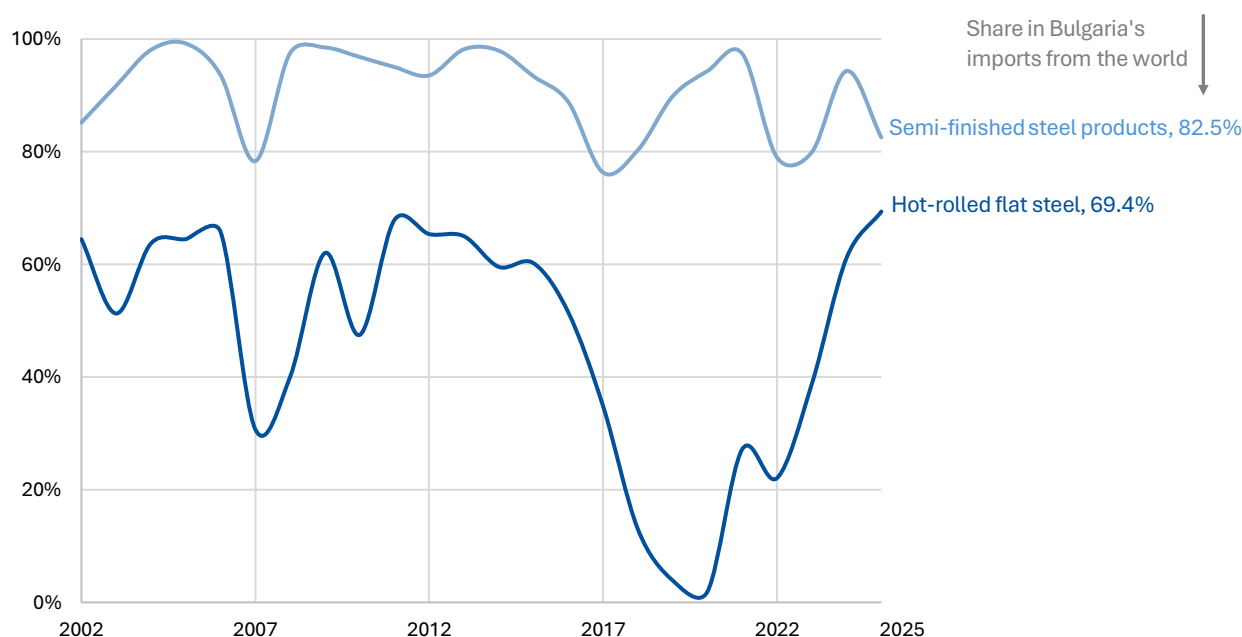
Note: the surge in sunflower seed imports in 2022 was associated with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The anomalous increase in imports of crude petroleum oil, refined petroleum products and coal from Ukraine around 2008 differs substantially from Ukraine's official export statistics. The discrepancy may be related to Russian energy resources passing through Ukraine, although the exact reason for the difference in bilateral statistics remains unclear, as Eurostat generally records extra-EU imports by country of origin rather than by the country through which goods were re-exported.

In January 2026, the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) came into effect, placing an additional price on imported steel products based on their greenhouse gas emissions. According to GMK Center analysis, CBAM was expected to significantly affect the industry, especially imports of semi-finished steel products, as prices increased.^{5 6}

Despite this, in May 2026, a senior representative of Ukraine's [Metinvest Group](#) stated that EU demand for Ukrainian steel had not changed, while the main supply challenges were related to wartime disruptions – electricity cutoffs, security and logistics constraints, as well as targeted Russian strikes on mining and steel production facilities.⁷ Russian attacks on Ukraine's steel industry continued during the summer, and in September 2026, attacks knocked out the country's three remaining major steel plants across the Zaporizhzhia and Dnipropetrovsk regions, which together accounted for around 90% of national steel production.^{8 9 10} As of now, the future of Ukraine's metallurgical sector, as well as its related trade links with Bulgaria, remains uncertain.

Figure 5. Bulgaria's imports of goods from Ukraine as a share of total imports, by value

Ukraine is a key supplier of semi-finished steel products



Source: [Eurostat](#), CES calculations

Note: Shares are calculated by import value (EUR).

The figures show by how much Ukraine is important for Bulgaria as supplier whose replacement will be tangible.

Read it as follows: in 2025, out of all semi-finished steel products imports to Bulgaria, 82.5% were supplied by Ukraine.

⁵ [CBAM impact on iron and steel industry of Ukraine. GMK Center](#)

⁶ Ukrainian hot-rolled flat steel became subject to the EU's tariff-quota regime in June 2026, with a 25% duty applied once the quota was exceeded. Since July 2026, a new regime has increased the duty to 50%, with Ukraine receiving a country-specific quota but no exemption from the measure. [EUR-Lex](#)

⁷ [EU demand for Ukrainian steel holds firm despite CBAM pressure. Fastmarkets](#)

⁸ [ArcelorMittal statement regarding missile strikes on its Ukraine plant. ArcelorMittal](#)

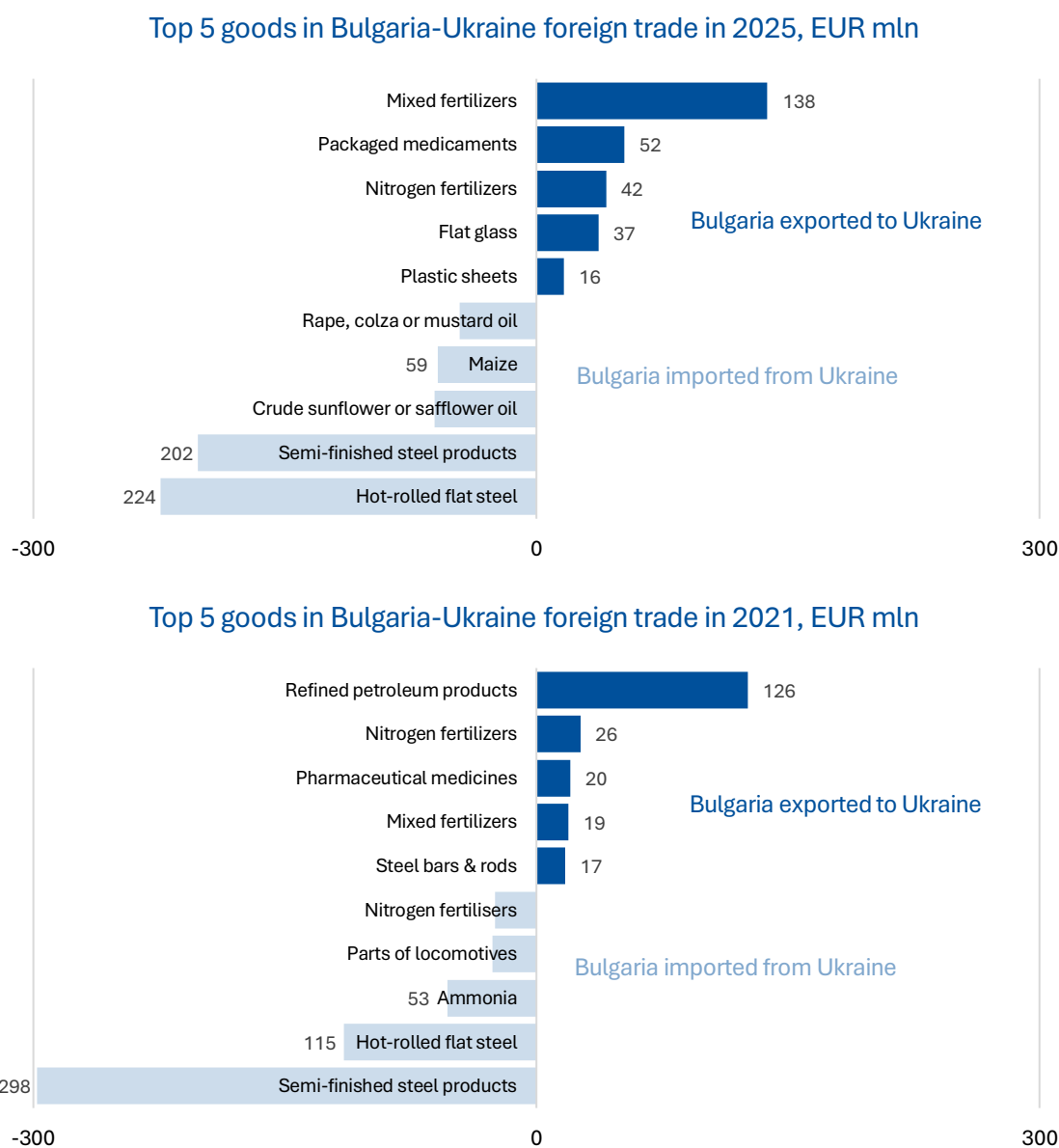
⁹ [Civilian Production Hit: Russia Strikes Zaporizhstal Again. Metinvest](#)

¹⁰ [Russian Strikes Stop 90% of Ukraine's Steel Output. Kyiv Post](#)

In recent years, other major import goods have emerged: cane or beet sugar (€46 million in 2025), crude sunflower/safflower oil (€61 million), maize (€59 million), and rape, colza or mustard oil (€46 million). All are also important for Bulgaria in terms of their shares in the country's total imports, ranging from 34% for sugar to 71% for rape, colza or mustard oil in 2025.

Overall, the structure of Bulgarian exports to Ukraine has shifted heavily towards fertilisers, packaged medicaments and flat glass in recent years – all closely related to Ukraine's shift away from trade with Russia before 2022 and the ongoing war. Imports, apart from shock years, have remained relatively stable around hot-rolled flat steel and semi-finished steel products, with agricultural and food products added in the last couple of years: maize, sugar, sunflower, rape, colza and mustard oils. The top five products in Bulgaria–Ukraine imports and exports in 2021 and 2025 are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Top 5 goods in Bulgaria–Ukraine bilateral trade in 2025 and 2021, EUR million



Source: [Eurostat](#), CES calculations

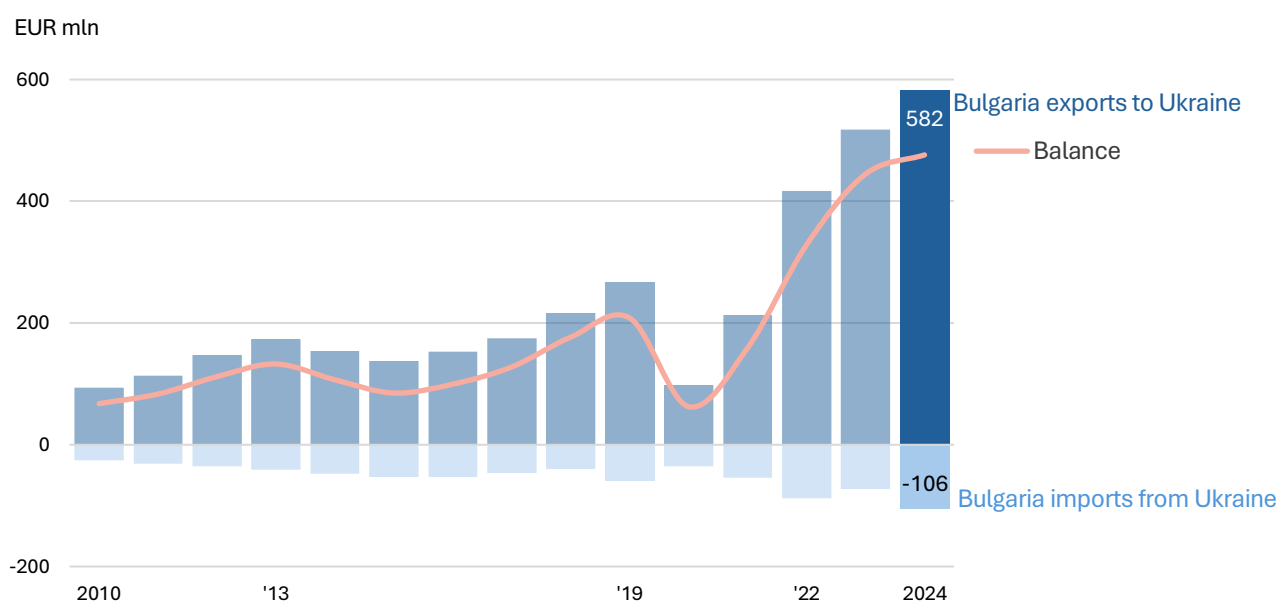
MOVEMENT OF SERVICES

In services trade, the situation is opposite to goods trade – Bulgaria consistently runs a net surplus, with exports reaching €580 million and imports €106 million in 2024 (Figure 7).

In 2023–2024, Ukraine accounted for 8.1% and 8.5%, respectively, of Bulgaria’s extra-EU services exports – up from 5.1% on average over the previous 10 years, with Bulgaria ranking first among the 27 EU countries by this indicator in 2024. Meanwhile, the share of Ukraine in Bulgaria’s extra-EU services imports also increased, from an average of 2.7% over the previous decade to 3.7% in 2024 – the second-highest share among EU countries.

Figure 7. Trade in services between Bulgaria and Ukraine, EUR million

Bulgaria increased its net surplus in service trade with Ukraine



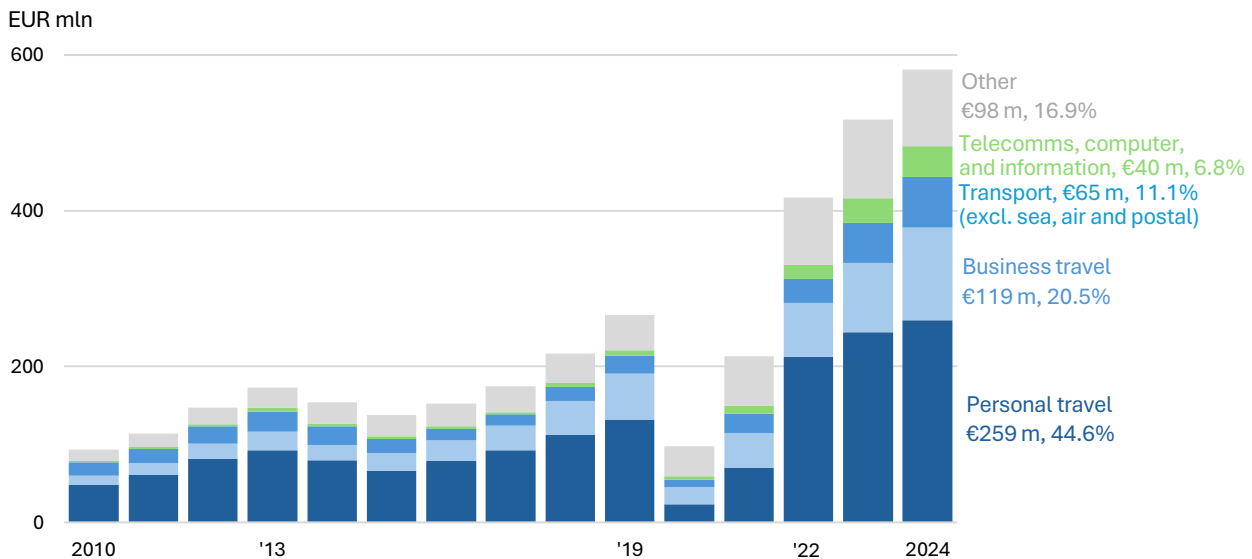
Source: [Eurostat](#), CES calculations

Due to spending by Ukrainian refugees, the main component of Bulgarian services exports to Ukraine since 2022 has been travel, with personal travel reaching €259 million and business travel €119 million in 2024 (Figure 8). When a Ukrainian resident spends money in Bulgaria, this is recorded as Bulgaria exporting travel services to Ukraine.

The other two major services export categories in 2024 were transport (€65 million, excluding sea, air, and postal transportation) and telecommunications, computer and information services (€40 million).

Figure 8. Bulgaria's exports of services to Ukraine by service category, EUR million

~2/3 of Bulgaria's services exports to Ukraine are travel services

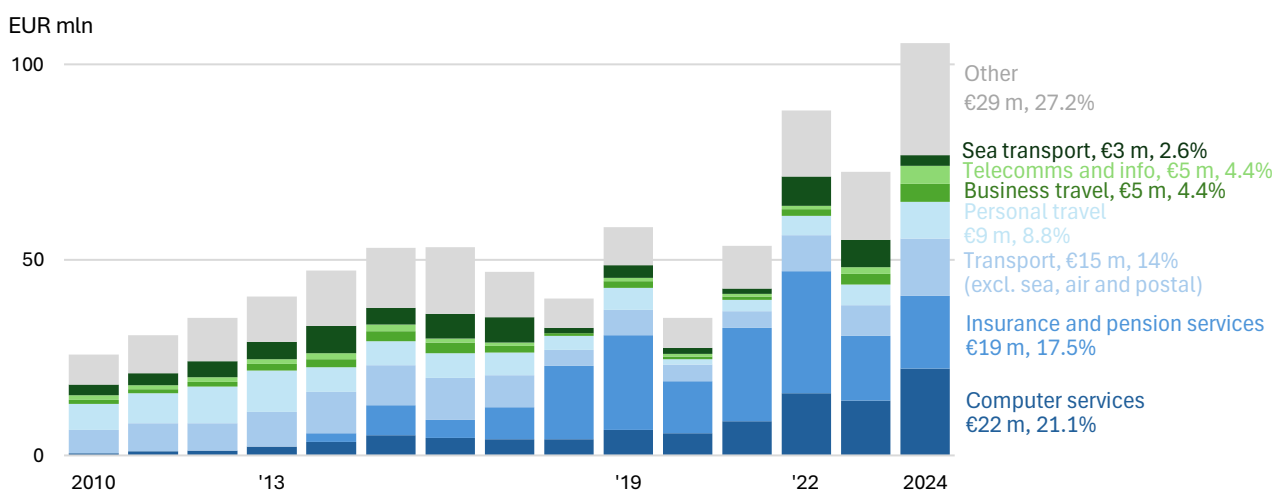


Source: WTO, Eurostat, CES calculations

In turn, Bulgaria's three main types of services imports from Ukraine in 2024 were computer services (€22 million), insurance and pension services (€19 million), and transport (€15 million, excluding sea, air, and postal transportation) (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Bulgaria's imports of services from Ukraine by service category, EUR million

Computer and transport services dominate imports from Ukraine



Source: WTO, Eurostat, CES calculations

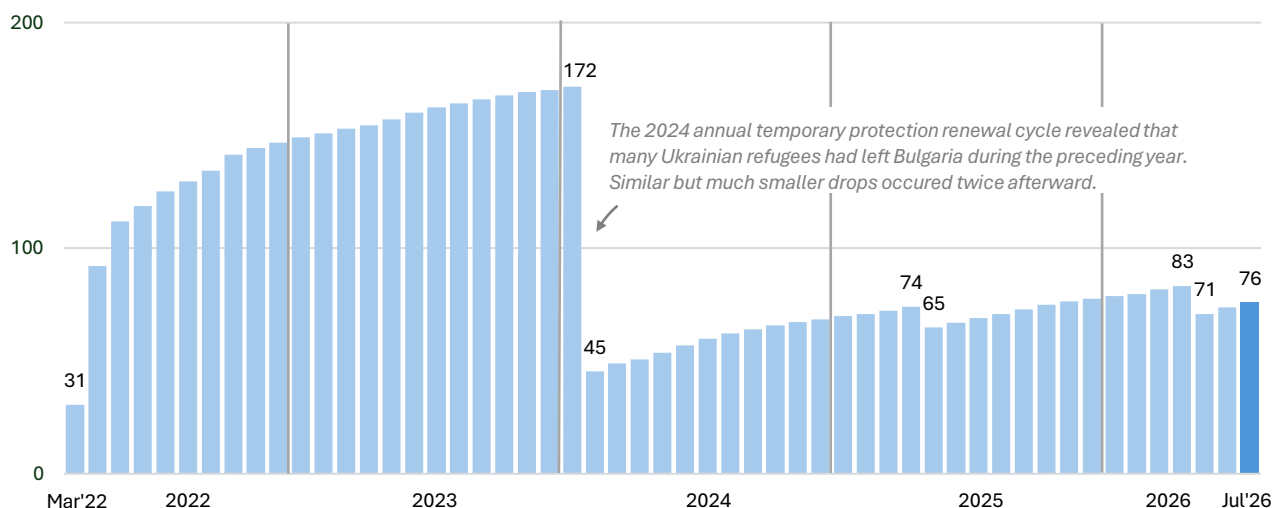
Over the last decade, insurance services have consistently accounted for a significant share of Bulgaria's services imports from Ukraine. However, this does not necessarily represent insurance directly purchased by Bulgarian residents from Ukrainian insurers. Due to Eurostat's methodology, part of this category may reflect estimated insurance costs associated with cross-border trade in goods, which are separated from the value of transported goods and recorded as insurance services.¹¹ Another part may reflect actual purchases of cargo and other types of insurance, reinsurance, and insurance-related services from Ukrainian providers, although available bilateral statistics do not provide a more detailed breakdown and should therefore be interpreted with caution.

MOVEMENT OF PERSONS

By the end of 2022, following Russia's full-scale invasion, almost 150,000 Ukrainians had fled to Bulgaria and received temporary protection (Figure 10). However, during the following year, the majority either relocated to another European country or returned to Ukraine. Since February 2024, the number of Ukrainians under temporary protection in Bulgaria has gradually increased. As of mid-2026, about 76,000 Ukrainians remain under temporary protection in Bulgaria, which, among other rights, allows them to legally reside and work in the country. With almost 1.7% of all Ukrainian refugees in Europe, Bulgaria ranks 12th among 31 European countries by the number hosted.

Figure 10. Ukrainians under temporary protection in Bulgaria, thousands

~76,000 Ukrainians remain in Bulgaria



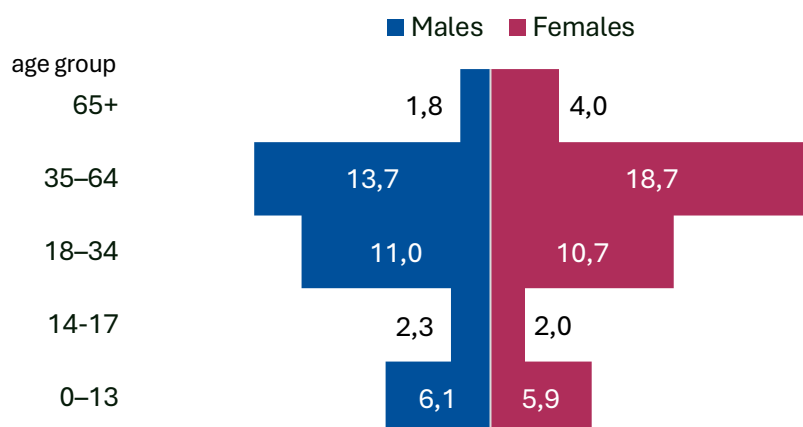
Source: [Eurostat](#), CES calculations

¹¹ [Balance of payments. Eurostat](#)

In terms of age and gender composition of Ukrainians in Bulgaria, there are slightly more women than men among those aged 35 and above, while the opposite is true for those under 35 (Figure 11). Overall, most Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria are of working age.

Figure 11. Age-sex pyramid of Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria, thousand persons

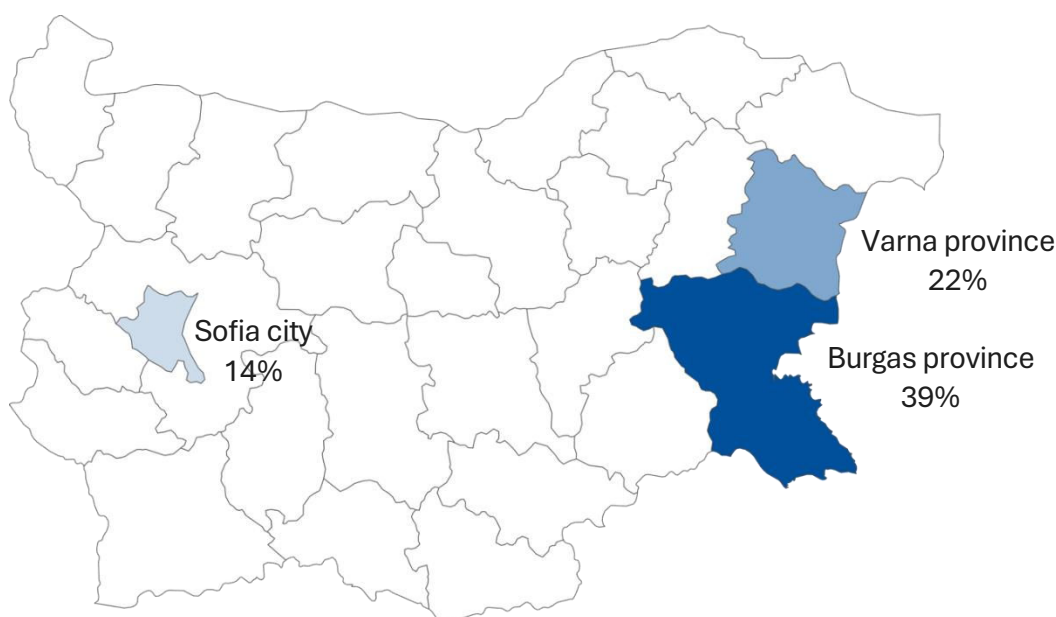
~70% (54,000) of Ukrainian refugees are in working age 18-64



Source: [Eurostat](#), CES calculations

In 2025, Ukrainians accounted for approximately 45% of all foreigners in Bulgaria.¹² As of October 2025, around 60% of Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria lived along the Black Sea coast, while another 14% lived in Sofia city (Figure 12). These figures show that the Ukrainian refugee community that emerged after 2022 is concentrated mainly in a few parts of the country, where Ukrainians represent an even more noticeable share of the foreign population.

Figure 12. Geographical distribution of Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria, October 2025



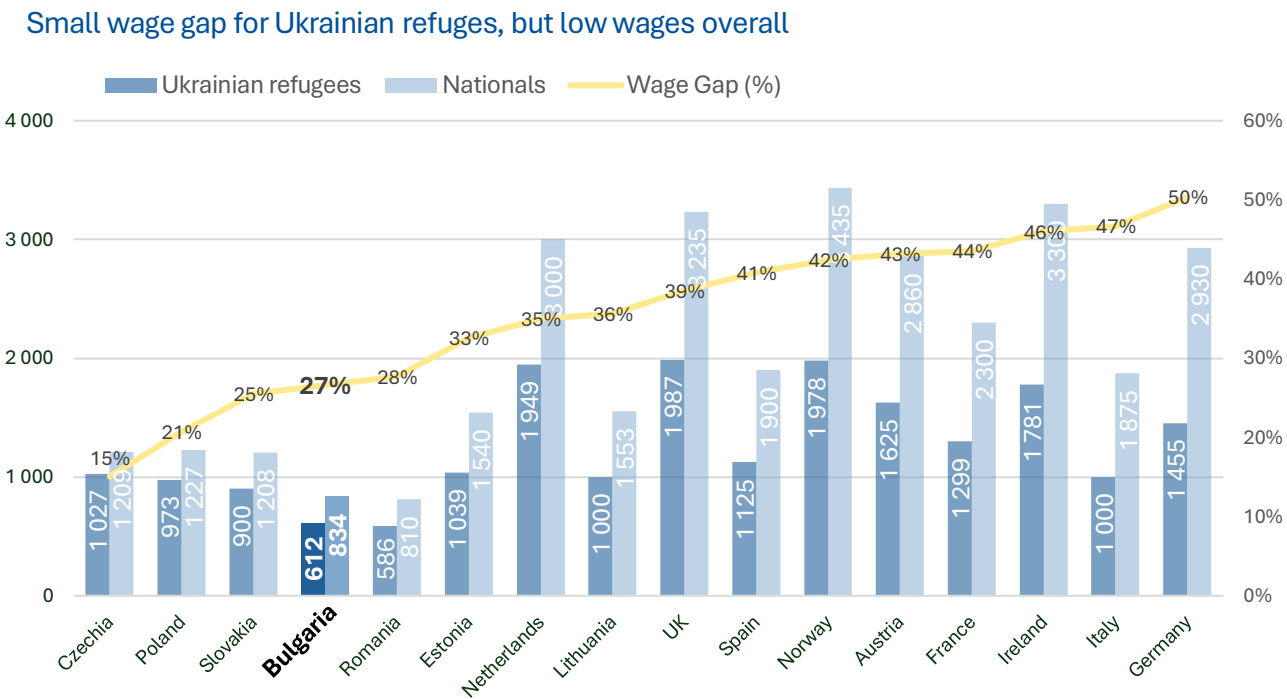
Source: [UNHCR](#)

Note: the remaining 25% are distributed across the rest of Bulgaria without a detailed geographical breakdown

¹² [Bulgaria National Statistical Institute](#), CES calculations

According to surveys and OECD analysis, Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria have one of the smallest wage gaps relative to nationals (Figure 13), indirectly suggesting more equal labour market outcomes for Ukrainians compared with those observed in many other European countries. However, the average wage level of Bulgarian nationals itself is the second lowest among the countries covered by the analysis, ahead only of neighbouring Romania.

Figure 13. Median monthly wages of Ukrainian and European nationals in 2024, EUR per month



Source: [UNHCR](#), [OECD](#)

Overall, qualitative assessments of Ukrainian citizens living in Bulgaria suggest that they have already become part of the country’s social and economic reality, studying, working, setting up businesses, and being actively involved in the life of local communities.¹³

¹³ [Friedrich Ebert Foundation Director on a forum “Ukrainian Refugees in Bulgaria.” Bulgarian News Agency](#)

MOVEMENT OF CAPITAL

According to YouControl, about 70 active Ukrainian companies are linked to Bulgaria either through Bulgarian ownership from the outset or through M&A deals. However, only a few of these companies are sizeable players in the Ukrainian market.

The largest Bulgarian business network in Ukraine in terms of both revenues and profits consists of four companies controlled by Dimitar Ilchev and Boriana Radeva, co-founders of [Euromarket Group](#) – one of Bulgaria’s leading suppliers of industrial, construction and logistics equipment. Their main operating company in Ukraine, [Construction Machinery LLC](#), generated about €94 million in revenues and €11.5 million in net profit in 2025.

Another notable case is [Plastchim Ukraine LLC](#), which generated around €32 million in revenues in 2025, although the company has recorded net losses since 2022. Today, it is part of Plastchim-T, one of Europe’s major producers of polypropylene packaging films. The group has been expanding beyond Bulgaria, investing in production capacity in Ukraine and acquiring Italy’s Manucor in 2024.¹⁴ Despite the ongoing war, Plastchim-T implemented a sizeable investment project of around €5 million in Ukraine, completing the relocation of one of its production lines from Bulgaria to Lutsk in 2024.¹⁵

Other Bulgarian-owned businesses in Ukraine worth highlighting are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of major Bulgarian-linked companies in Ukraine

Major Bulgaria-linked companies in Ukraine, 2025	Ownership	Revenue, EUR mln	Main activity, as % of Revenue	Profit, EUR mln	Number of employees
Construction Machinery LLC Compressors International LLC FORX LLC Instruments LLC	Dimitar Ilchev and Boriana Radeva, co-founders of Euromarket Group	127	Industrial machinery and equipment distribution	16.6	439
Plastchim Ukraine LLC	Aydyn, Faik and Beyan Faik, Plastchim Group	32	Manufacture of plastic packaging films	-0.7	98
Vitamins JSC Sopharma Ukraine LLC	Ognian Donev, Sopharma Group	29	Pharma manufacturing - 30% Pharma distribution - 70%	3.5	269
Arcus Ukraine LLC	ARCUS AD - 70% Oleksandr Kalynchuk (Ukraine) - 30%	10	Defence manufacturing	-0.4	57
Easy Credit LLC	Stanimir Vasilev and Nedelcho Spasov, Management Financial Group	3.2	Consumer lending	0.1	183
Prista Oil LLC	Atanas and Plamen Bobokov, Prista Oil Group	3.1	Automotive and industrial lubricants distribution	-0.4	8
Grand Oil-8 LLC	Yuliyana Baldzhiyski	2.8	Grain trading	0.05	4
European Travel Insurance PJSC Euroins Ukraine PJSC	Assen and Velislav Hristov, Euroins Insurance Group	0.0	Insurance	3.0	274
Other 60 companies		11	Wholesale trade - 38% Real estate activities - 18% Transportation/Logistics - 10% Other - 33%	-0.1	291

Source: [YouControl Market](#), CES calculations. Note: In 2025, annual UAH/EUR exchange rate was 47.06

¹⁴ “Plastchim-T” with a goal of 1 billion leva turnover by 2027. [Forbes Bulgaria](#)

¹⁵ [A multimillion-hryvnia investment project. VSN](#)

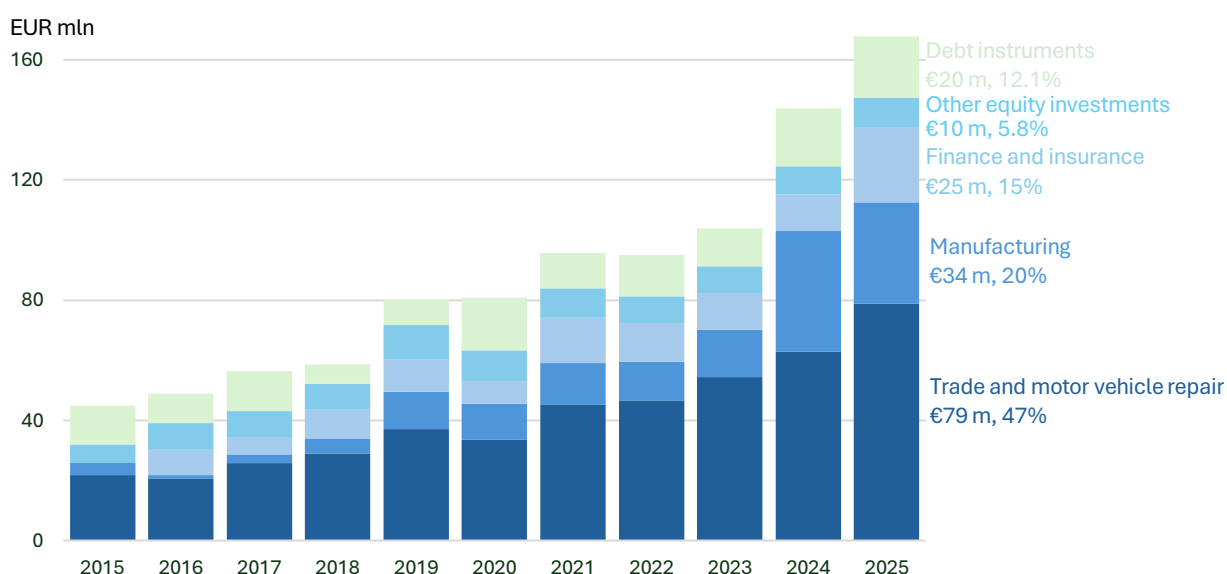
Among the most notable Ukrainian-linked businesses operating in Bulgaria are [Promet Steel](#), part of Ukraine’s Metinvest Group, engaged in metallurgical production and previously receiving billets from Ukraine’s Kamet Steel plant, which was destroyed by Russian strikes in 2026; [Sigmatech](#), specializing in metal processing and coatings for aerospace and gas-turbine components; and a number of IT companies with Ukrainian roots: SoftServe, Ciklum, Intellias, N-iX, Sigma Software, and Speedflow.

Ukrainian postal and logistics operator [Nova Post](#) planned to enter the Bulgarian market in 2024. However, following a shift in the company’s strategy from “growing wide” to “growing deep” in its existing markets, the launch did not take place and has since been postponed indefinitely.¹⁶

The war in Ukraine did not lead to a substantial decline in Bulgaria’s foreign direct investment stock in the country. On the contrary, FDI has grown since 2023, reaching about €168 million in 2025 – 6.9% of Bulgaria’s total extra-EU foreign investment stock, placing Bulgaria fifth among the 27 EU member states by this indicator. The main sectors are trade and motor vehicle repair (€79 million), manufacturing (€34 million), and finance and insurance (€25 million). Around 88% of total Bulgarian FDI is held in equity investments, while the remaining 12% is in debt instruments (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Bulgaria’s FDI stocks in Ukraine, EUR million

Trade and manufacturing investment stocks are on the rise



Source: [National Bank of Ukraine](#), CES calculations

Geographically, most of the Bulgarian equity FDI in Ukraine in 2025 was concentrated in Kyiv city (€102 million), followed by Vinnytsia Oblast (€18 million).

At the government level, Bulgaria also joined the ‘EU for Ukraine Fund’ with a €10 million guarantee, supporting Ukraine’s reconstruction and access to finance for Ukrainian businesses.¹⁷

¹⁶ [Nova Post abandoned its ambition to enter every EU country but expanded into the US. Forbes Ukraine](#)

¹⁷ [Parliament Ratifies Bulgaria-EIB Contribution Agreement of 'EU for Ukraine Fund.' Bulgarian News Agency](#)

IMPLICATIONS FOR INTEGRATION POLICY AND STRATEGIC BILATERAL DIALOG

Bulgaria-Ukraine economic relations show positive signs of development and improvement across all major areas.

Bulgaria's current government is widely seen as more Russia-friendly than its predecessor.^{18 19 20} Prime Minister Rumen Radev's Progressive Bulgaria holds 131 seats in the 240-member National Assembly, while another 12 seats belong to the openly pro-Russian Vazrazhdane (Revival).²¹ The remaining 97 seats (40%) are held by generally pro-European parties that have supported Ukraine. Together with pro-European voices within the ruling party, they could help preserve the positive trend in Bulgaria's relations with Ukraine and its broader European orientation, rather than a return to Moscow's geopolitical orbit.

Ukraine remains a critically important export market for Bulgarian fertilizers, while in the opposite direction it is likely to lose its role as a major supplier of steel products from this year onward. During the war, Bulgaria could provide a safer location for cooperation in the defence industry, following the example of Sigmatech in Burgas.

The Danube transport network has the potential to increase the role of transport services in both directions of Bulgaria-Ukraine services trade.

The Ukrainian refugee community has opportunities to develop business ties along Bulgaria's Black Sea coast, creating a land-based Bulgaria-Romania-Ukraine connection through the Odesa region.

Bulgarian business is represented in Ukraine by several influential players that continue to invest in Ukrainian production despite the war. There is room for further business links between these companies and Bulgarian businesses operating in Bulgaria.

¹⁸ [Bulgaria's election tests how for the EU can contain pro-Russia drift. Euractiv](#)

¹⁹ [Is Bulgaria's next prime minister Moscow-friendly? RTE](#)

²⁰ [Bulgaria's new PM unveils roadmap, balancing pro-European and pro-Russian interests. Le Monde](#)

²¹ [A nationalist voice of protest: the resurgence of radical parties in Bulgaria. Centre for Eastern Studies](#)

The Centre for Economic Strategy (CES) is an independent centre for state policy research. CES is tasked with supporting reforms in Ukraine to achieve sustainable economic growth in the country. The Centre contributes to the development of Ukraine's economic growth strategy, analyses the most important aspects of public policies, and works to strengthen public support for reforms. It was founded in May 2015.

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