

Skilled Migration Review

Submission by the Skilled Migrant Network, Auburn, Sydney

We would like to present to you regarding skilled migrants in Australia and their ability to settle well.

The Australian Federal Government permits skilled professionals to migrate to Australia depending on the demand of the economy and the employment market. However, from the survey carried out by us on skilled migrants it was revealed that neither migrants nor the Australian economy is getting optimum benefit of our skills and experience due to a hostile and uneducated job market and limitations on state employment programs.

The Auburn Skilled Migrant Network carried out a survey on settlement difficulties of skilled migrants and have interviewed more than 100 skilled migrants and have obtained written evidence from around 20 people. We are able to provide more written case studies on request. We found that 90% have sent more than 200 job applications within the first 6 months in Australia, but they were not called for an interview with little or no feedback provided by employers. We have observed that most skilled migrants face serious difficulties in finding employment in their respective disciplines. Many are forced to give up the struggle and return to their countries with an unfavourable impression of Australia as destination for quality permanent skilled migrants.

We have identified the following as the main reasons for our inability to find a job related to our overseas qualifications and experience.

1. Employers do not know about the skilled migration program and do not recognize overseas experience and qualifications, especially from developing countries. As feedback for not being called for interviews by employers and recruitment agents, 99% give lack of local experience. Even when engineers have secured full membership of the Institution of Engineers Australia employers are still sceptical. Once migrants have found their first job in Australia, it is easier to get another one, but breaking into the job market is extremely hard for newly arrived migrants.
2. Due to lack of local experience skilled migrants apply for entry level positions to try and get this experience. At this time we receive the feedback that we are over qualified for these roles.
3. As skilled migrants we face cultural issues in finding a job. For many of us the Australian job market is alien and confusing. For many cultures even the idea of promoting your skills and qualities is a culturally alien thing to do and would be looked on unfavourably in our own countries. "An empty vessel makes a lot of noise" and in many countries

quietness is seen as a sign of intelligence. These ideas are ingrained in us and it takes a lot for us to overcome this cultural "programming". For this reason it is difficult for Australian employers to see our potential at an interview.

4. Lack of professional networks is another barrier to employment for us. When you arrive in a new country and do not know anyone from your profession it is difficult to know how employment opportunities can be accessed and any special training needed for the Australian market. Networking is an essential element to finding a job in Australia
5. Skilled migrants face economic hardship as we are not eligible for government assistance. It is difficult for us to find even unskilled labour, as no one wants to employ an accountant to do process work. For this reason we end up having to accept the worst paid manual jobs that are hard to fill. Many of these jobs are casual and so like many Australians we are unable to make plans or borrow money. Some members only know if they are needed at work an hour before they start. Economic hardship also makes it difficult for us to undertake unpaid work experience through state funded schemes and means we are not able to focus on the task of finding suitable employment.
6. Employment in government jobs is also difficult. Despite merit selection being designed to select the candidate with the best skills for the job, addressing selection criteria often demands a higher level of English than the job we are applying for. Also overseas experience is not recognised.
7. The Skilled Migrant Placement Program and Skillmax are excellent state funded programs to help skilled migrants in NSW to find work relevant to their overseas qualifications and experience. However they are under resourced to deal with all the skilled migrants in need of their service. There is a long waiting list for each program.
8. Many migrants who come under skilled migration do so on the basis of their skills in professions such as IT where there are few jobs. So having migrated on the basis of their skills and qualifications being in demand in Australia some professionals then find that this is not the case when they arrive.

We have identified the following recommendations to help skilled migrants to find a job related to our overseas qualifications and experience. We migrated to Australia on the basis of these skills and it is a shame for Australia and for us that they are going to waste in many cases.

1. The federal government must educate Australian businesses about the reason behind their skilled migrant program and show them the benefits of employing skilled migrants. Those of us who have found suitable employment are doing very well. Our employers are happy

with our skills and we bring new ideas from other countries. Most of us accessing suitable jobs have had to undertake unpaid work experience to prove our skills.

2. They should also give private companies some financial incentive to employ skilled migrants as they do for trainees. This is happening in the NSW state government through the Migrant Career Development Program. State departments receive financial incentives to give skilled migrants 6 months paid work experience. This would not solve the unemployment problem for skilled migrants, but it would help some and also educate companies about the value of our skills and experience in the work place.
3. The government should recognise that many skilled migrants come from cultures different to the Australian culture. Cross cultural training should be provided to skilled migrants to help us to present ourselves favourably to Australian employers and recruitment agencies. Also Australian companies doing business in Asia could benefit from employing people who understand the culture there.
4. Skilled Migrant Networks similar to our own should receive help to be set up in local government areas where skilled migrants live to give newly arrived migrants support, information and help them to meet people from their profession.
5. As many skilled migrants experience severe economic hardship it is important that the government provides some assistance to families. Migrants have made a major investment in leaving good jobs in our own countries and migrating to Australia.
6. There should be more support for schemes like the Migrant Career Development Program. A Federal program would be a good idea to help newly arrived migrants gain experience in working for the federal government.
7. State government programs to help skilled migrants find suitable employment urgently need more resources. Some national coordination is also important so that migrants can find out about employment opportunities in different parts of the country. Many migrants are willing to move around to country areas, but there is no information about jobs nationally.
8. Skilled Migration policy should really be in touch with the Australian job market. Information on the job market should be provided to potential migrants to allow them to make an informed decision about coming to Australia. It takes so long to process visas that the job market can change. If this is the case migrants should be informed before they leave their countries.
9. There should be more coordination and communication between the federal and state governments regarding skilled migrants and their

ability to settle well in Australia. We recommend an investigation into how many skilled migrants are unemployed, underemployed or who give up and leave Australia. The whole migration process from visa processing to settlement should be coordinated with communication between state and federal bodies to help Australia to obtain maximum benefit from skilled migrants.

About our Skilled Migrant Network

We are a voluntary group of skilled migrants who have started a network in the Auburn area in Sydney. We are independent skilled migrants, humanitarian entrants, spouses of Australians and TPV holders, all with qualifications and valuable experience from overseas. Auburn is an area of Sydney that many migrants choose to live when they arrive. It is extremely culturally diverse with high unemployment, low socio economic rating and affordable rental accommodation. Our formation was facilitated through the Skilled Migrant Placement Program funded by the Department of Education and Training and delivered by Inner West Skills Centre – Job Futures in Auburn. This organisation provides us with limited funds to run our network and hold meetings. We started the network in response to the isolation of skilled migrants and the difficulties they face in finding employment related to their overseas qualifications and experience. We meet once a month and have guest speakers from companies, government departments, recruitment consultancies and a chance for member to share our experiences.

Our aims and objectives are:

- To provide **information** about the Australian job market to skilled migrants. This information is provided by employers and recruitment consultants themselves and by skilled migrants who have accessed the market
- To help skilled migrants to establish social and professional **networks** which are important for finding a job in Australia
- To provide **support** to skilled migrants who find being unemployed probably for the first time and in a new country a very stressful and frustrating experience
- To provide migrants with a **link to our local community**, a way for us to participate in that community. As newly arrived migrants we may not know how to get involved with what is happening in our local area
- To act as a **voice** for skilled migrants, to advise government at all levels of some of the issues relating to skilled migrants