

Evaluating knowledge migration 28/02/2006 00:00



Our resident immigration expert Patrick Rovers looks at the first year of operation of the knowledge migrant system for professionals.

Yes, the Dutch knowledge migrant (KM) scheme does have interesting advantages. Permit me to elaborate on the current state of affairs.

The KM system allows for easy access into the Dutch labour market for non-EU nationals, if and when the minimum annual gross salary requirements are honoured, and the Dutch employer is officially accepted by the Dutch immigration service as a participant of the 'kennismigrant' system. If all the conditions of the KM scheme are met, it is possible to legally bypass the general Dutch work permit requirement. In certain cases that is a huge advantage.

In January 2006 the Dutch cabinet evaluated the entire KM system that came into effect during the last months of 2004. The ministers were pleased with the results.

According to the evaluation the knowledge migrant scheme improves the attractiveness of the Netherlands for knowledge migrants and their families from all over the world, and it boosts the competitive strength of the Dutch economy and Dutch companies.

During the first eleven months of 2005 a grand total of 1,393 knowledge migrant residence permits was issued. That is an average of 127 KM residence permits per month. The Dutch cabinet is particularly pleased because the KM scheme successfully taps into the scarce numbers of talented professionals available on the international labour market.

What an interesting approach the Dutch cabinet has taken. The KM scheme was introduced to lower the threshold of the Dutch labour market, and make it easier for Dutch employers to bring in non-EU employees. The 'old-fashioned' work permit/entry visa/residence permit route sometimes proved too bothersome and too time consuming, and so the KM scheme was wished into existence.

It is interesting to see that the number of Dutch work permits issued hasn't dropped dramatically since the introduction of the KM scheme. In 2005 a total of 46,114 work permits was issued. In 2004 the number was 44,113.

One could therefore argue that the impact of the KM scheme is small, or better non-existent. Had the KM scheme been truly successful, the number of work permits issued should have plummeted. However, one may conclude that the number of Dutch work permits has risen, and that the KM scheme is nothing more than an interesting alternative

for some Dutch employers. A total of 1,393 KM residence permits for the first eleven months of 2005 confirms this.

The minimum annual gross salary requirement for most prospective knowledge migrants was recently changed from EUR 45,000 EUR to EUR 45,495 EUR (30 years and above), and from EUR 33,000 to EUR 33,363 (under 30 years).

I have always wondered how the annual gross salary requirement guarantees the influx of genuine knowledge migrants from abroad. In my humble opinion formal qualifications and/or an impressive work history should be taken into consideration too, in order to ascertain a person's qualities and potential.

Recently *Intermediair*, a leading Dutch magazine, published an interview with the Dutch minister of Economic Affairs Laurens Jan Brinkhorst.

The minister stated that the political conclusion is that the KM scheme has preformed very well. It is favourable to foreign companies that already have ties to Dutch companies.

What an interesting thing to say. The KM scheme demands a Dutch employer, so having ties with a Dutch company is not sufficient. He goes on in saying that the Netherlands should review the possible introduction of a green card system. He refers to the successful immigration countries such as the US.

Minister Brinkhorst seems to ignore the fact that the US Green Card system is not very flexible, takes ages to process, and is usually very expensive due to the specialised legal assistance required.

The minister stated that he is an advocate of the green card system, but admits that the Netherlands is still a long way from implementing such a system, because this country has not positioned itself as an immigration country.

Perhaps Brinkhorst is putting up a few political kites to see if they will fly? The Netherlands has taken in many immigrants and asylum seekers over the last three decades, and with 10 countries joining the EU in 2004, and Bulgaria and Romania in the near future, it is likely that many new immigrants will land on our shores. In essence the Netherlands is an immigration country.

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