

Labour migration: Dutch need to change approach 27/03/2007 00:00



"I understand the Dutch government is actively looking at ways to improve the situation for knowledge migrants? Can you provide me with some information about that?" Immigration expert Patrick Rovers answers your questions.



"As an HR manager I am constantly looking at the developments within the Dutch and European labour markets. I am responsible for coordinating a part of the recruitment strategy of one of the biggest multinationals of Europe with a head office in Amsterdam. In my opinion it is getting harder and harder to find suitable candidates in the Netherlands and Europe even though the economy is on the rise.

High potentials from Asia, South America and Africa are a welcome source for our constant staffing challenges. In the Netherlands the knowledge migrant system has made it a bit easier to access candidates from outside of the EU. In the United Kingdom the HSMP system is often used to our advantage.

I understand the Dutch government is actively looking at ways to improve the situation for knowledge migrants? Can you provide me with some information about that?"

On the 16 March, the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands, SER for short, unanimously issued groundbreaking advice regarding the future labour migration policy of the Netherlands. The SER is the main advisory body to the Dutch government and the Dutch parliament on national and international social and economic policy, and is wholly independent from the government. It represents the interests of trade unions and industry, advising the government - upon request or at its own initiative - on all major social and economic issues. The SER consists of three groups, each with eleven members, making up a total of thirty-three members. The first group consists of members representing the employers, the second consists of members representing the trade unions, and the third consists of independent or 'Crown' members appointed by the government.

For the first time in the history of the SER, the government has asked the SER for advice on labour migration policy. The SER recommendations are straightforward. The Netherlands needs a totally different approach to its labour migration issues. For instance,

the Netherlands should be more welcoming to highly skilled migrants. Unnecessary barriers with regard to middle and lowly skilled migrants should be erased, where possible. The SER furthermore pleads for the establishment of a single organization that focuses on the entry and employment procedures of labour related migrants.

It is unclear what the new government (based on a coalition of CDA, PvdA and Christen Unie) will actually do with the SER advice. However, it is likely that the government will implement a majority of the SER recommendations as long as the Dutch economy remains healthy. When these new rules and regulations will come into force is another matter all together.

Three weeks ago a Dutch research organization known as SEO Economisch Onderzoek (SEO) issued its findings on the effects of the ageing challenge and migration vis-à-vis the European labour market. SEO was asked by Randstad Holding, a leading recruitment agency, to reflect on possible developments till 2050. According to SEO, as a result of ageing alone, in 2050 the EU employment level will have decreased by 31 million persons if the employment rate remains at its current percentage. If no net migration is allowed, the overall EU employment gap in 2050 will be 55 million persons.

On another note: a recent Dutch internet survey shows that a large portion of the population of the Netherlands is not in favour of the arrival of more knowledge migrants. Having said that, I wonder if the new government will be able to combine the 'voice of the people' with the SER recommendations and - for instance - the interesting research results of SEO.

These are interesting times we live in.

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