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Demand for 457 visas plummets

NATASHA BITA THE AUSTRALIAN AUGUST 25, 2014 12:00AM

NEW APPLICATIONS FOR 457 MIGRANT WORK VISAS

	2012/13	2013/14	Change %
MANAGERS	16,570	9720	-41.40 ▼
PROFESSIONALS	35,560	24,810	-30.20 ▼
TECHNICIANS/TRADES	22,860	11,950	-47.70 ▼
TOTAL	81,800	49,150	-39.30 ▼
Industry			
ACCOMMODATION/ FOOD SERVICES	10,700	5330	-50.20 ▼
CONSTRUCTION	8990	4490	-50 ▼
MINING	4670	2600	-44.40 ▼
MANUFACTURING	4270	2180	-49 ▼
HEALTH/SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	7650	5020	-34.3 ▼
RETAIL	4660	2150	-53.90 ▼

Source: Immigration Department (selected qualifications and industries)

457 migrant visa applications. Source: TheAustralian

RISING unemployment has dampened demand for migrant workers, with 40 per cent fewer foreigners seeking visas to work here last financial year.

The number of foreigners applying for a four-year work visa fell below 50,000 during 2013-14 — and the number of foreign tradies looking for work halved to 12,000.

Thousands of migrant workers flocked back to their home countries during the year, triggering the cancellation of nearly 29,000 work visas.

Visa applications from foreigners for clerical and administrative jobs crashed 80 per cent to just 660 during 2013-14, compared with 3370 the year before.

As Australia's unemployment rate rose to 6.1 per cent last financial year, the number of foreign managers applying to work here fell 41 per cent to 9720. Visa applications from professionals fell almost a third to 24,810.

The biggest employer of foreign workers — the tourism and hospitality sector — saw applications halve to 5330 during the year.

Migrant work visa applications also halved in the construction sector — down to 4490 — and fell 55 per cent in the mining industry, to 2600 applications.

Despite the slump in new applications, the number of migrants already working in Australia on the four-year 457 work visas crept 0.8 per cent higher last financial year to 108,870

workers.

More than 40,000 backpackers, foreign students and migrants on 457 work visas had their visas cancelled during 2013-14, The Australian can reveal.

Unpublished Immigration Department data shows it cancelled 27,904 of the 457 visas during the year — 45 per cent more than in 2012-13.

A spokesman for Assistant Minister for Immigration Michaelia Cash yesterday said most of the 457 visas had been cancelled “following the voluntary departure of a visa holder as a result of their employers advising of the end of employment”.

“Given this is a demand-driven program, the total numbers of cancellations generally reflect the demand for overseas labour,” he said. “This slowdown in growth of the program is likely due to the softening labour market as well as a combination of regulatory reform and better targeted monitoring and compliance activities.”

Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union national secretary Michael O’Connor said the fall in job applications from migrant workers proved that labour market testing was helping Australians find jobs.

Under changes introduced by the former Labor government last year, employers must advertise for local staff before hiring migrant workers.

The “labour market test” only covers a quarter of the 457 visa occupations, including the trades.

“Labour market testing should be extended and monitored,” Mr O’Connor said.

“At the moment, labour market testing can involve putting an ad on a Facebook page for five minutes.”

Monash University demographer Bob Birrell, of the Centre for Population and Urban Research, said foreign students, backpackers and 457 visa workers accounted for one million workers in Australia. “Graduates are finding it tough because of competition from skilled migrants, particularly in nursing, ICT, accounting and engineering,” he said.

“Most of the net growth in jobs in the past three years has been taken up by people who arrived from overseas in that period, putting enormous pressure on young people seeking entry-level jobs.”

Employment Minister Eric Abetz has instructed his department to investigate CFMEU claims that employers have tried to hire foreign workers despite Australians being available to do the work. He urged unions to contact the Fair Work Ombudsman about any loopholes allowing employers to exploit 457 temporary work visas. Senator Abetz said he was concerned by a report in The Australian that labour market testing had resulted in the Immigration Department knocking back nearly one in 10,457 visa applications.

He insisted that employers should hire “Australians first”.

“We should be testing the job market,” he said. “Everybody in this government is committed

to providing jobs for Australians first, if at all possible. If we do have labour shortages in certain areas it makes good sense to open up the opportunities to people from other countries but first and foremost we have an obligation to provide employment opportunities to our fellow Australians.”

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