

Are migrants disadvantaged in the New Zealand job market?



RESEARCH

‘Global mobility and bias in the workplace’

by Astrid Podsiadlowski and Professor Colleen Ward (2010)

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Background

During 2012/13, just under 39,000 skilled migrants were granted residency in New Zealand. However, these migrants are both more likely to be unemployed or underemployed than their New Zealand peers, even though they are often more highly qualified.

With New Zealand working hard to attract and retain skilled migrants, tackling unemployment and underemployment are important issues that need to be addressed.

The Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, part of Victoria University of Wellington, undertook a study to understand why migrants experience disadvantage in the New Zealand job market.

Main research findings

Often employers have a bias against migrants in the pre-screening of applicants. For example applicants with a Chinese name are less often invited to interviews than people with English names, even if they have equivalent qualifications.

New migrants do not have access to networks, which might help them get a job, e.g. word-of-mouth recruiting.

During interviews and assessments, migrants are disadvantaged in that selection methods are often not culturally sensitive. The testing process does not appropriately assess skills and talents of people from different cultural backgrounds.

Recruiters have more positive views of migrants who are similar to them e.g. in ethnicity.

Migrants are viewed less positively than New Zealanders e.g. favouring the ‘in-group’ over the ‘out-group’.

Relevance of findings to New Zealand

Once in the work environment, contact with New Zealand peers will help to increase familiarity with cultural differences and help migrants overcome cultural boundaries. Opportunities for positive contact should be provided by employers, such as orientation sessions.

It is recommended managers are specifically trained in cultural awareness and model that behaviour to other staff.

Setting common goals increases cooperation and leads to an appreciation of the skills and perspectives a diverse workforce brings to the table.

Recruitment agencies and government settlement programmes can provide information about different cultures in the workplace in order to help overcome prejudice and negative stereotyping.

Emphasising the mutual benefits of cultural diversity helps to create common ground. For example, multiple perspectives in business are critical in a globalised world.