

Brazil announces changes to immigration law

Rising demand for labor has prompted Brazil to announce that it will amend immigration laws to make it easier for foreign nationals to seek a job in the country.

Strategic affairs minister **Marcelo Neri** told press assembled in Brasilia that engineers, doctors, and professionals in the technology sector are the primary targets of the scheme, which indicates the extent to which skills gaps in these areas are beginning to bite in a rapidly developing economy.

According to Associated Press, recent research from the Fundacao Dom Cabral business school showed nine out of ten companies have trouble finding qualified project managers, administrators and technicians.

Interestingly, Brazil is also looking to avoid the issues caused by language barriers when foreign workers move into new countries. In fact, Mr Neri says Brasilia is targeting professionals from nations such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and elsewhere around Latin America - all countries where the official language is either Portuguese or a language closely related to it.

The nation is remarkably close to full employment in lower-skilled sectors, but that demand for additional workers is unlikely to slow down. Moreover, skilled and high-value disciplines are also in short supply. As a result growth in the nation's economy, which is one of the fastest growing in the world, could potentially be held back in the future by a lack of capacity, the minister said.

Mr Neri explained that the government will seek to streamline the process involved in obtaining a work visa. Brasilia will also seek to simplify the process of changing roles once immigrants are in the country by removing the requirement for a new visa application with every job move.

Unemployment in the country was found in November to be as low as 4.6 per cent, a rate not seen since 2002. It seems quite possible that in the future, Brazil could reach a point where it requires more workers than its population can provide.

The nation already benefits from the skills of foreign specialists through a range of initiatives, such as last year's More Doctors program. That scheme saw over 5,000 doctors come into the country from Cuba to work in poor areas.

Posted by Sarah Dixon

