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Financial Post Executive **Careers & HR**

CAREERS & HR

International workers drawn to Canada

Derek Sankey Dec 28, 2011 – 5:36 PMET



Mohammed Sarker chose Canada "because life is very secure here and you can get a better job." Dean Bicknell/Postmedia News

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CALGARY – Workers from all over the world are increasingly targeting Canada to find jobs in the wake of sluggish economies elsewhere, according to some recruiters who report noticing a recent spike in the number of workers coming to Canada from struggling countries with high unemployment rates.

"We started noticing it in 2010 [and] what was really noticeable was the number of people coming from Ireland," says Sandra Miles, president of Vancouver-based Miles Employment Group. "I have never seen so many people from other parts of the world –

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from all over.”

Since January, an “unprecedented” 6,500 applicants from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand have applied to Ms. Miles.

Mohammad Sarker targeted Canada as a place to live and work because the Bangladeshi, who is trained in mechanical engineering with a master’s degree in materials engineering, saw good job opportunities in the energy sector.

“Canada is the most stable compared to the U.S. and some other countries,” says Mr. Sarker, an intermediate transmission line engineer with SNC-Lavalin Group Inc.

“This is the first world, so that’s the reason [for immigrating] because life is very secure here and you can get a better job with better opportunities,” says Mr. Sarker, who immigrated to Calgary in May 2009.

Part of the reason for the rise in the number of international workers coming to Canada is recent changes to the working holiday visa program, which makes it easier for people from Commonwealth countries to come and work in Canada while travelling or studying.

The B.C. provincial government will take steps to increase the number of international students allowed to study in the province by 50% in the next four years as countries and provinces compete for a larger pool of foreign students and foreigntrained, skilled workers.

Even Americans, who face higher unemployment levels than Canadians, are contacting agencies in Canada in the hope of finding a job. Based on last year’s trend, Ms. Miles expects numbers to increase at the beginning of the year. “There is generally a spike from January to March,” she says.

Amid global uncertainty about the eurozone and a continued sluggish U.S. economy, Canada is emerging as a bright spot for employment prospects – at least for now. A protracted downward trend elsewhere would inevitably affect Canada, but it has fared the best when measured against many developed nations.

For highly skilled, global workers such as Mr. Sarker, it makes sense to choose Canada over other countries.

Mr. Sarker said he knew it wasn’t going to be a free ride. After arriving, he took a job working at a grocery store to pay his family’s bills before finding a higher-paying job that allowed him to save money while getting his engineering credentials recognized.

He contacted the International Qualification Assessment Service in Alberta and did some education upgrading to get equivalent certification in Canada.

He later applied to the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta for professional accreditation and was hired by SNC-Lavalin in June.

Shahid Ahmad also saw the value of Canada’s “booming” economy. He trained as an electronics engineer in his native Pakistan, and immigrated to Canada in 2004 when he landed in Mississauga, Ont., but had to go back to Pakistan for family reasons. In 2008, he moved to Calgary from Pakistan because of the city’s vibrant job market and economy.

“I saw a number of other countries offering immigration, but Canada is one of the safest countries in the world,” says Mr. Ahmad, who also works for SNC-Lavalin. “I know Calgary is one of the most booming cities in the world due to this oil exploration and the immense resources Alberta has.”

He found it difficult to acclimatize at first, but eventually overcame the barriers of lack of Canadian experience, a network or a full understanding of cultural nuances.

Posted in: **Careers & HR** Tags: **Canada, Canadian Economy, Job Searching, Jobs And Labor, Labor Market, Mohammad Sarker, SNC-Lavalin Group Inc., Unemployment Rate**



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