

Skilled migrants struggling for jobs

SA's skilled migrant population has skyrocketed more than five-fold in the three years since the start of the Skilled Independent Regional visa.

Almost 1500 new migrants arrived in the state last year under the SIR program.

But according to a recent Department of Immigration and Citizenship survey, one-third of the people who arrived in SA on a SIR visa are not working in a skilled occupation.

The SIR visa is part of a federal program under which the government "recognises that balanced migration plays an important role in the economic, demographic and social development of regional Australia and low-population-growth areas" such as Adelaide.

It started in 2004 to encourage a more balanced settlement of the skilled migrant intake.

The highest number of SIR grants is sponsored by SA, and

Sharifah al-Attas

nearly two-thirds of the nation's SIR migrants live here.

Intriguingly and perhaps frustratingly, SA's SIR migrants are least likely to be satisfied with their sponsor. While praising the State Government's on-arrival service, SIR migrants question the emphasis on settlement at the expense of employment services.

They say recruitment agencies are unwilling to suggest an SIR migrant as a potential employee.

"The State must heighten head-hunter awareness," says skilled migrant Sandra Klein.

"These agencies are under pressure to present employers with the perfect candidate, one whose qualifications are instantly recognisable, whose professional and personal networks are immediately traceable, whose language is unimpeachable and

whose pronunciation is unfailingly understandable."

"Theoretically," continues the native of Brazil's Sao Paulo, "a migrant's a risk. His employment is foreign. His qualifications are foreign. He looks foreign. He sounds foreign. He is foreign.

"Recruitment agencies are unwilling to run the risk of sending skilled migrants to a potential employer. Yet employers may prefer a migrant – we're dynamic, we're industrious, we're adaptable, we're tenacious."

The newly-arrived migrant has no SA network. "And here," says Ms Klein, "networking's everything." Her sentiments are echoed by 32-year-old countryman Jorge Nogueira. In Adelaide on a SIR visa since January, Mr Nogueira attended state-facilitated English-language classes for three months.

"I'd thought it'd be a good idea to network, find new friends, make new contacts. But the

people I met were in the same boat as I – they knew no-one, their qualifications were regarded with amusement at best and suspicion at worst; and their language was considered curious."

"It's a vicious circle," says a 32-year-old skilled migrant who spoke on condition of anonymity. "We aren't employed because we lack local experience, and we don't gain local experience because we're unemployed."

There are enlightened employers and progressive recruitment agencies, says Ms Klein. But, for the migrant, finding them is a challenge. The Minister Assisting the Minister for Industry and Trade, Karlene Maywald, has announced a funding boost to bolster SA's settlement service and "sharpen its employment focus." But with the planned program perceived as being focused on the migrant and not on the environment they enter, it is feared the new steps may miss their mark.