



AUSTRALIA ANNOUNCES MEASURES TO IMPROVE VISA 457 SCHEMES

The Government of Australia has recently announced several measures aimed at improving the integrity of the country's temporary skilled migration program (Visa 457 Scheme) amid concerns on the possible exploitation of overseas workers and the undermining of local wages and conditions. These measures, which were developed prior to the slow down in the Australian economy due to the global financial crisis, include the following:

- Starting 01 July 2009, the minimum salary level for all new and existing 457 holders will be indexed by 4.1% to ensure that the wages of overseas workers will keep pace with local wages.
- Starting mid September 2009, a market based minimum salary will be implemented for all new and existing 457 visa holders to ensure that overseas workers are not exploited and local wages and conditions are not undermined.
- The existing minimum language requirement will be increased to 6.0 (in each of the four components of IELTS) for 457 visa applicants in trade occupations and chef positions.
- Starting 01 July 2009, a formal skill assessment will be progressively introduced for 457 visa applicants from specified countries (including the Philippines) in trade occupations and chef positions.
- Australian employers seeking access to the 457 visa program will be required to show strong record of, or demonstrated commitment to, employing local workers and non-discriminatory employment practices.
- Training benchmarks will be developed to clarify the existing requirements on employers to demonstrate a commitment to train local workers.

The Australian government believes that these measures represent fundamental and long term improvements to the 457 visa program, which will continue to play an important role in addressing skills shortages in the Australian economy.

At present, the Philippines is a major source country for temporary skilled workers in Australia, with over 6,000 Filipino workers and accompanying family members traveling to Australia last year, under the program.