

SA job market may improve in 2010

An employment market is under severe strain but there is hope for recovery early next year, say human capital analysts.

Certain skills are still very much in demand in light of infrastructure development projects, including a strong demand for skills in the fields of technology, science, mathematics and education, says Werner Smith, head of strategic research at staffing solutions provider Adcorp Holdings.

The Department of Home Affairs recently released its quota list of professional and occupational classes which the government permits sourcing from abroad. These include actuaries and economists; engineers; health and education professionals; telecommunication trades workers; and information and communication technology professionals.

Smith says the decline in the mining sector bears similarities to those last seen in 1961. He says research recently carried out by the company shows manufacturing has had its biggest decline in the country's history.

Smith says the sectors that have remained robust and show growth of employment are construction, logistics and warehousing, and the government and personal services.

He says it will take some time before unskilled people can expect much hope from employment growth. Because movement in employment (up or down) tends to lag economic growth by two to three quarters, overall employment growth can only be expected in the second or third quarters of next year, he says.

Landelahni Recruitment Group CEO Sandra Burmeister says there are skills shortages in areas such as mining, infrastructure and telecommunications.

Burmeister says there are thousands of vacancies at junior level that need to be filled in the government sector. "The new government is pushing for these posts to be filled," she says.

Burmeister says black economic empowerment has not taken a back seat, although skills remain the top priority for companies when recruiting. "Preferential procurement had become more critical for companies, particularly for economic survival purposes," she says.

Burmeister says there are several countries in Africa where a great deal of investment and hiring was taking place, such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe where mining for minerals was taking place on a large scale. For instance, mining for gold, copper and coal is taking place in Mozambique.

In Zimbabwe there was large scale mining for coal and most commodities including copper and platinum. Burmeister says these countries were recruiting on a large scale.

About \$22bn worth of projects invested in the African continent are under way or starting up.

In other countries such as Ghana, Algeria, Nigeria and Kenya large construction projects were being carried out.

Burmeister says a lot of projects were funded by bodies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in countries that were politically stable. "A lot of technical skills were required on such projects."

An estimated R800bn is invested in infrastructure in South Africa, although previously announced projects, mainly in the mining and manufacturing sectors, have been put on hold or scaled down.

Lawrence Wordon, MD of Professional Assignments Group (PAG), says companies are also hiring in the energy, cellular and petrochemical sectors.

Wordon says: "In a scarce skills environment, empowerment is not the most important factor, it's finding the skill and very often this means moving global talent so BEE cannot be inherent to the job. Having said that, should the position not fall within the scarce skill categories, then empowerment is still very relevant as companies are still striving to achieve their employment equity targets."

He says PAG's international division focuses on the movement of talent into the Middle East and Africa, which offers many opportunities. - I-Net Bridge

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