

# Lack of skilled workers threatens recovery: Manpower

By Nick Zieminski

On Wednesday August 25, 2010, 12:00 pm EDT

<http://finance.yahoo.com/news/Lack-of-skilled-workers-rb-1457929627.html?x=0>

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Workers with specialized skills like electricians, carpenters and welders are in critically short supply in many large economies, a shortfall that marks another obstacle to the global economic recovery, a research paper by Manpower Inc (NYSE:[MAN](#) - [News](#)) concludes.

"It becomes a real choke-point in future economic growth," Manpower Chief Executive Jeff Joerres said. "We believe strongly this is really an issue in the labor market."

The global staffing and employment services company says employers, governments and trade groups need to collaborate on strategic migration policies that can alleviate such worker shortages. Skilled work is usually specific to a given location: the work cannot move, so the workers have to.

The shortage of skilled workers is the No. 1 or No. 2 hiring challenge in six of the 10 biggest economies, Manpower found in a recent survey of 35,000 employers. Skilled trades were the top area of shortage in 10 of 17 European countries, according to the survey.

While the short-term way to address to shortages is to embrace migration, the long-term solution is to change attitudes toward skilled trades, Manpower argues.

Since the 1970s, parents have been told that a university degree -- and the entry it affords into the so-called knowledge economy -- was the only track to a financially secure profession. But all of the skilled trades offer a career path with an almost assured income, Joerres said, and make it possible to open one's own business.

In the United States, recession and persistent high unemployment may lead parents and young people entering the workforce to reconsider their options.

## WELDERS NEEDED

The skilled trades category also includes jobs like bricklayers, cabinet makers, plumbers and butchers, jobs that typically require a specialist's certification.

Older, experienced workers are retiring and their younger replacements often do not have the right training because their schools are out of touch with modern business needs. Also contributing to the shortage is social stigma attached to such work, Manpower argues in its paper published on Wednesday.

A poll of 15-year-olds by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found only one in 10 American teenagers see themselves in a blue-collar job at age 30. The proportion was even lower in Japan.

Education could address that stigma. Students should be reminded that blue-collar work can be lucrative: skilled plumbers can make upwards of \$75,000 a year, Manpower argues.

Overall, Manpower's fifth annual talent shortage survey found 31 percent of employers worldwide are having difficulty filling positions due to the lack of suitable workers available in their markets, up one percentage point over last year.

For a link to Manpower's research papers, click on: <http://www.manpower.com/research/research.cfm>

#### AN EMOTIVE ISSUE

Although the proportion of employers seeing shortages is still below pre-recession levels, shortages in some countries are more critical than the global average.

Majorities of those surveyed in Poland, Singapore, Argentina and Brazil reported shortages. In Japan, 76 percent had trouble finding the right workers, the highest reading among the 36 countries and territories.

Examples of successful, targeted migration include an Ohio shipbuilder that brought in experienced workers from Mexico and Croatia, and a French metal-parts maker that hired Manpower to find welders in Poland.

Obstacles to such migration include differing standards for certification in skilled trades, as well as political barriers to immigration, which remains an "emotive" subject in many countries, Manpower's CEO said. Japanese employers, for example, have difficulty attracting skilled workers.

Sweden, on the other hand, is innovative and aggressive about strategic migration, for example by removing obstacles to workers being recertified in their specialty, Joerres said.

(Reporting by Nick Zieminski, editing by Dave Zimmerman)