

Report on the results of the survey

# Investigation of Migration-Related Issues for PhD Students and Researchers at Uppsala University

A joint endeavour by DN, UUPA, JF, IFSS and the internationalisation department of UU - 2023



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UPPSALA  
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UUPA Junior  
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Doktorandnämnden

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# 1. Introduction

As part of the 2022-2023 Action Plan of the doctoral board of Uppsala University (Doktorandnämnden, DN), a working group focused on investigating migration issues of PhD students at the university. After contacting the Junior Faculty (JF) and Uppsala University Postdoc Association (UUPA), it became clear that PhD students, postdocs and researchers at the university all face significantly common migration issues and obstacles, resulting in joining forces to investigate this matter from different perspectives. Consulting with the experts at the internationalisation department of the university, it was decided to design a joint survey to identify migration-related issues experienced alike by PhD students, postdocs and researchers at UU.

The survey was designed as a result of several meetings between members of DN, JF, UUPA, the internationalisation department, and international faculty and staff services (IFSS). It was conducted using Kurt, Uppsala University web-based form system, and distributed separately by DN, JF and UUPA, between and including 1 to 30 June 2023 via their respective email lists. This way, the survey was sent out to 2990 PhD students via DN, 2500 researchers via JF, and 550 postdocs via UUPA, in total about 6040 recipients. The data of each group was analysed by parts of DN, JF and UUPA, each focusing on their respective target groups between 16 Aug 2023 and 15 Jan 2024.

The aggregate information presented in this report is to form part of the supporting evidence for proposals to the university demanding practical approaches to help the affected groups at the university level and adopting policies more in line with present needs.

This report was made available online on the DN, UUPA and JF websites in March 2024.

## 1.1. Format of the survey

The survey consisted of 11 questions in different forms. The respondents were asked to select a single answer out of multiple options (*single choice*), multiple answers out of multiple options (*multiple choice*) or respond with an open text. The questions were as follows:

1. What is your nationality? - Required [*Single choice*]
  - a. Swedish
  - b. EU/EEA
  - c. Non-EU/EEA
2. Which year did you move to Sweden? Please specify in the field below with the format of yyyy. - Required [*open text*]
3. What is your disciplinary domain of studies at Uppsala University? - Required [*Single choice*]

- 
- a. Science and Technology
  - b. Medicine and Pharmacy
  - c. Humanities and Social Sciences

4. What is your official position? - Required *[Single choice]*

- a. PhD student - contract
- b. PhD student - scholarship
- c. Postdoc - contract
- d. Postdoc - scholarship
- e. Researcher - permanent
- f. Researcher - short-term contract
- g. BUL/Associate Senior Lecturer
- h. Other. Please specify: *[open text]*

5. If you are in a position of hiring people, are there negative consequences of long processing time for resident permits? (e.g. for you, your organization, funding agency etc.) *[Single choice]*

- a. Yes. Please specify if you would like: *[open text]*
- b. No
- c. Do not want to answer.
- d. I am not in such position.

6. How long processing time for resident permits is acceptable given the recruitment time frames in your project? Please write the number of months in digits. *[open text]*

Please answer the following questions only if relevant to you. Multiple options can be selected for each question.

7. Have you had any of the following issues before coming to Sweden? *[Multiple choices]*

- a. Unclear information on the Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) website
- b. Problem with the Swedish embassy (e.g. long waiting time for appointments)
- c. Residence permit processing time
- d. Lack of support from UU (e.g. preparing the required documents for the residence permit/visa application) Please specify: *[open text]*
- e. Others: *[open text]*

8. Have you had issues with any of the following steps once you were in Sweden? *[Multiple choices]*

- a. Finding accommodation
- b. Getting personal identity number (Personnummer)(if applicable)
- c. Getting ID card
- d. Opening a bank account
- e. Getting a bank ID
- f. Getting a time slot for biometrics at Tax Agency (Skatteverket)

- 
- g. Registration at the Insurance Agency (Försäkringskassan)
  - h. Information/support from local HR/department about routines (e.g. checklist of important agencies to register for such as registration for health insurance including dental care)
  - i. Others: *[open text]*
9. Have you had any issues during your stay in Sweden? *[Multiple choices]*
- a. Long waiting time for resident permit extension at Migration Agency (Migrationsverket)
  - b. Lack of time slots for biometrics at Migration Agency (Migrationsverket)
  - c. Not being able to leave and re-enter Sweden while waiting for the new resident permit
  - d. Not being able to get a visa for your family members to visit you in Sweden
  - e. Others: *[open text]*
10. If you intend to stay in Sweden after finishing your contract/scholarship, are there any obstacles you face? *[Multiple choices]*
- a. Migration issues. Please specify: *[open text]*
  - b. Length of the next contract
  - c. Lack of career support by UU for you
  - d. Lack of career support by UU for your partner
  - e. Getting a job offer
  - f. Lack of academic positions
  - g. Lack of non-academic positions
  - h. Others: *[open text]*
11. If you do not intend to stay in Sweden after finishing your contract/scholarship, where do you intend to go, and what are the reasons you considered when making this decision? *[open text]*

## 1.2. Format of this report

The analysis of this survey is divided into five thematic sections. Each section consists of three subsections focusing on either PhD students (written and analysed by DN), postdocs (written and analysed by UUPA), and other positions including, but not limited to permanent/short-term contract researchers and associate senior lecturers (written and analysed by JF). For convenience, the latter positions are named *Researchers* in the following. The authors' contributions are explained in detail in the next subsection.

The next section, section 2, covers questions 1-4 of this survey and demonstrates the demographics of this survey. In section 3, regarding questions 5 and 6, the consequences of residence permit processing time have been analysed. Issues before coming to Sweden are presented in section 4, followed by issues during the stay in Sweden in section 5. Section 6 investigates obstacles to staying in Sweden for the next step. In the last section, section 7, a brief executive summary of the survey results is presented.

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### 1.3. Author contributions

Profound gratitude to those who dedicated their time to designing the survey, analysing the collected data and writing this report.

Inspired by the fruitful discussions with Leif Eriksson, an expert at the internationalisation department of Uppsala University in April 2023, the members of DN, including Jila Shams-Latifi, Oreste Affatato and Lennart Spode initiated this survey. After contacting the other associations at the university, Laia Caja Puigsubirà, Alexandra Petrulevich and Victor Gray from JF, and Aikeremu Ahemaiti from UUPA, together with Leif Eriksson, Jila Shams-Latifi, Oreste Affatato and Lennart Spode formed the main basis of the survey. Jennifer Holst and Stella Forsberg from IFSS as well as Anna Borlund, Human Resources Strategist at the human resources division provided feedback and commented on the questions and structure of the survey. Jacob Håkansson, the Data Protection Officer of Uppsala University confirmed that the survey questions complied with GDPR.

The PhD students' subsections were written and analysed by the members of the DN, Ayesha-Mae Bilal, Lennart Spode, Qinya Feng and Jila Shams-Latifi.

The postdocs subsections were written and analysed by the UUPA- chair, Aikeremu Ahemaiti.

The researchers' subsections were written and analysed by the members of JF, Victor Gray, Paulina Rajkowska and Laia Caja Puigsubirà.

This report was organised and edited by Jila Shams-Latifi, Ayesha-Mae Bilal and Lennart Spode, and was presented for comments to DN, UUPA, JF, IFSS and Leif Eriksson.

**None of these efforts would have led to any results without the respondents who invested their time and trusted us to share their perspectives in the open text answers. Thank you all sincerely!**

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## 2. Demographics

The respondents to the survey were asked about several aspects of their demographic. The following is a recollection of the results. Care was taken not to ask any questions that could lead to identifying the exact individual respondent.

### 2.1. PhD students

386 PhD students answered this survey which is about 13% of the total number of PhD students reached through the DN’s email list. The distribution of these participants in nationality, migration period, scientific domain and job title was as follows.

**Nationality Distribution:** The majority of PhD student respondents (58%) were from outside the EU/EEA. Approximately 32% of these respondents were from the EU/EEA, and 10% were Swedish (Fig. 1).

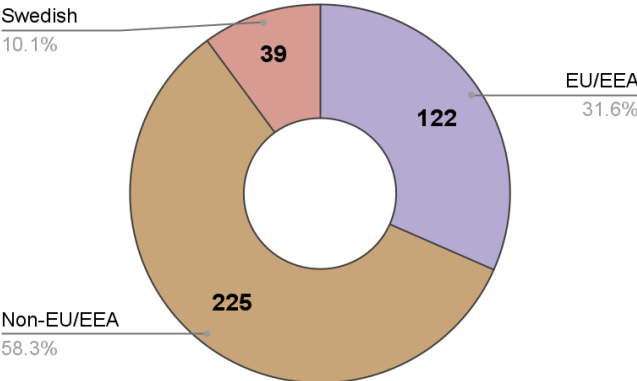


Fig. 1. Nationality distribution of PhD student respondents.

**Migration Period:** Nearly all PhD students (99.7%) in this survey moved to Sweden within the last 10 years, with approximately 45% moving here in the period between 2015-2019, and 42% in 2020 or later (Fig. 2).

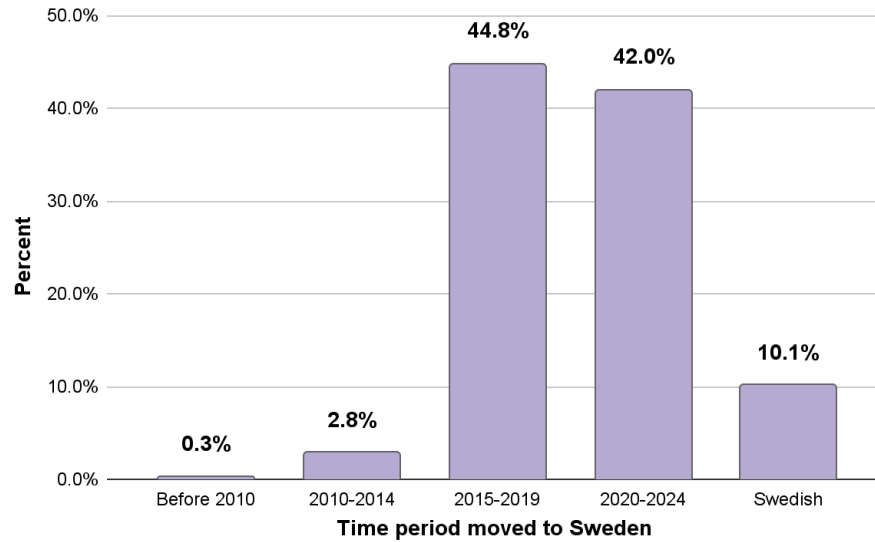


Fig. 2. Distribution of the time period PhD student respondents moved to Sweden.

**Scientific Domains:** Most PhD student respondents (54%) were from the Disciplinary Domain of Science and Technology (TEKNAT). 24% of the respondents were in the Disciplinary Domain of Medicine and Pharmacy (MEDFARM), and about 22% were from the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSAM)(Fig. 3).

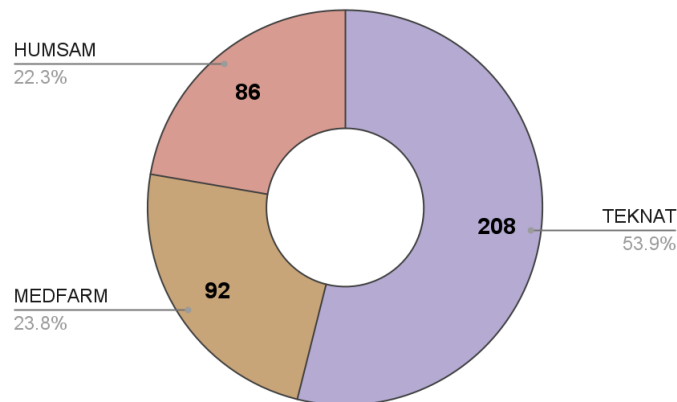


Fig. 3. Distribution of the disciplinary domains that PhD student respondents belong to.

**Job Titles:** Most PhD student respondents were contract-based (94%). A few PhD students were employed on a scholarship basis (5%). The other 5 respondents were either recently graduated contract-based PhD students, industrial PhD students, PhD students on leave, or one person as they wrote “doctoral student in combination with an occupation as assistant professor”. (Fig. 4).

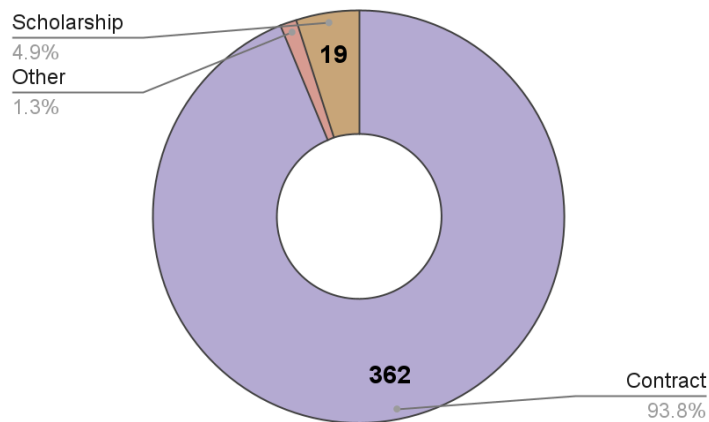


Fig. 4. Distribution of the employment type of the PhD student respondents.

## 2.2. Postdocs

In total 142 postdocs answered the survey, corresponding to ca. 26% of all members of the UUPA email list. Their distribution along the same criteria as above was as follows.

**Nationality Distribution:** The majority of postdoc participants (59.2%) were from outside the EU, more than one-third (36.6%) were from EU-EEA, and only 4.2% were from Sweden (Fig. 5).

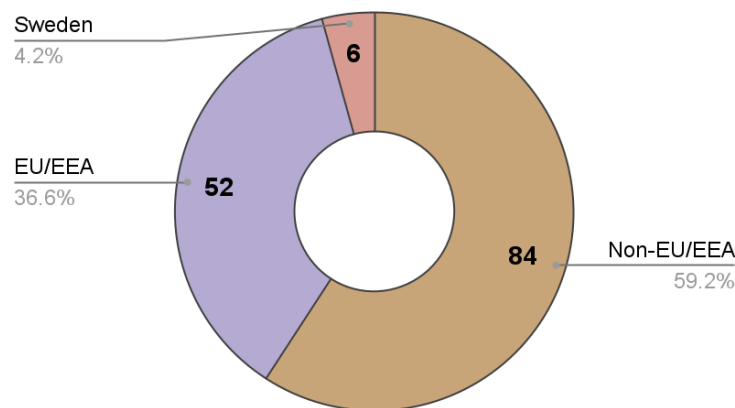


Fig. 5. Nationality distribution of postdoc respondents.

**Migration Period:** About three-quarters of postdoc respondents (77%) came to Sweden after 2020, 21% moved to Sweden between 2015-2019 and 11% between 2010-2014 (Fig. 6).

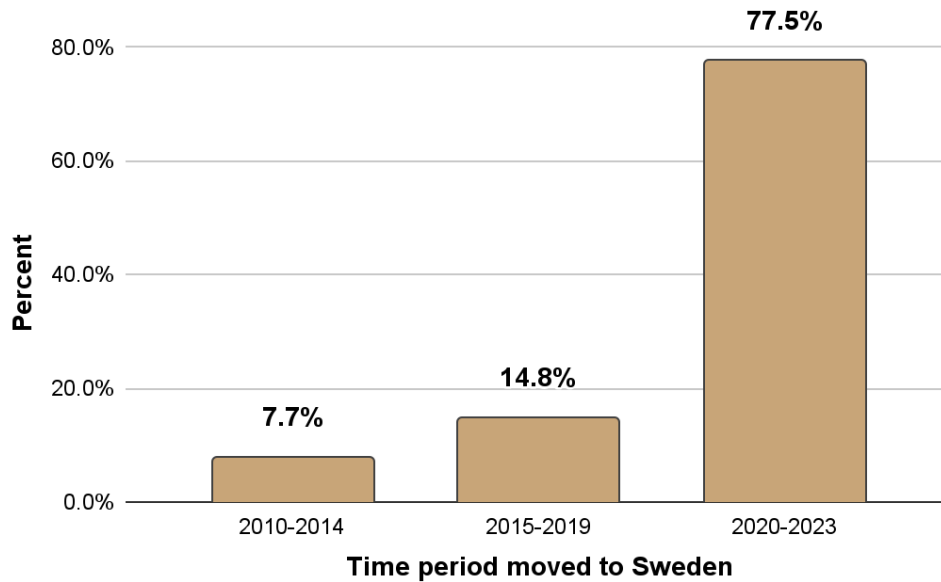


Fig. 6. Distribution of the time period postdoc respondents moved to Sweden.

**Scientific Domains:** Among all postdoc respondents, 62.7% were from the Disciplinary Domain of Science and Technology (TEKNAT), 24.6% were from Medicine and Pharmacy (MEDFARM), and only 12.7% were from Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSAM)(Fig. 7).

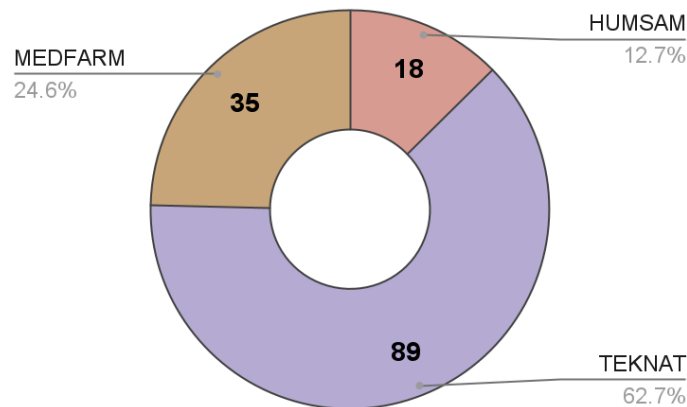


Fig. 7. Distribution of the disciplinary domains that postdoc respondents belong to.

**Job Titles:** There are two types of postdoc contracts. One is an employment-based contract, while the other one is based on scholarship. More than one-third (71%) of the respondents were on employment, while the rest (29%) were on scholarship (Fig. 8).

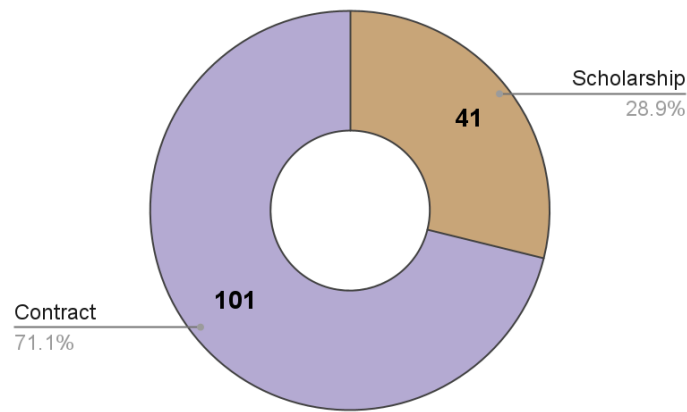


Fig. 8. Distribution of the employment type of postdoc respondents.

### 2.3. Researchers

149 individuals responded from various academic and research roles at Uppsala University. These participants are categorised as researchers, who comprise ca. 6% of the researchers on the JF’s email list. This category included individuals with the following job titles: researchers on permanent contracts, researchers on temporary (short-term) contracts, associate senior lecturers, senior lecturers, and professors. The distribution of this participant group was as follows.

**Nationality Distribution:** Among the researcher participants, 45% were non-EU/EEA nationals, 30% were from the EU/EEA, and 25% were Swedish (Fig. 9).

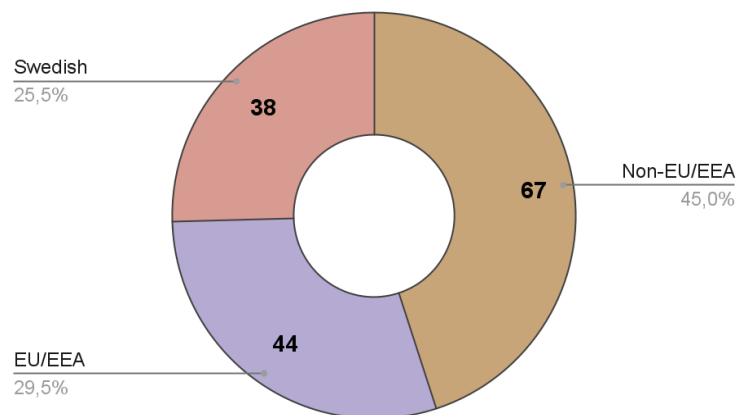


Fig. 9. Nationality distribution of researcher respondents.

**Migration Period:** Of the 149 researcher participants, 4 were born in Sweden, 40 had moved to Sweden since 2020, 46 arrived between 2015-2019, 23 moved from 2010 through 2014, 18 relocated between 2005-2009, and another 18 participants had migrated to Sweden between 1970-2004. The statistics are summarised in Fig. 10.

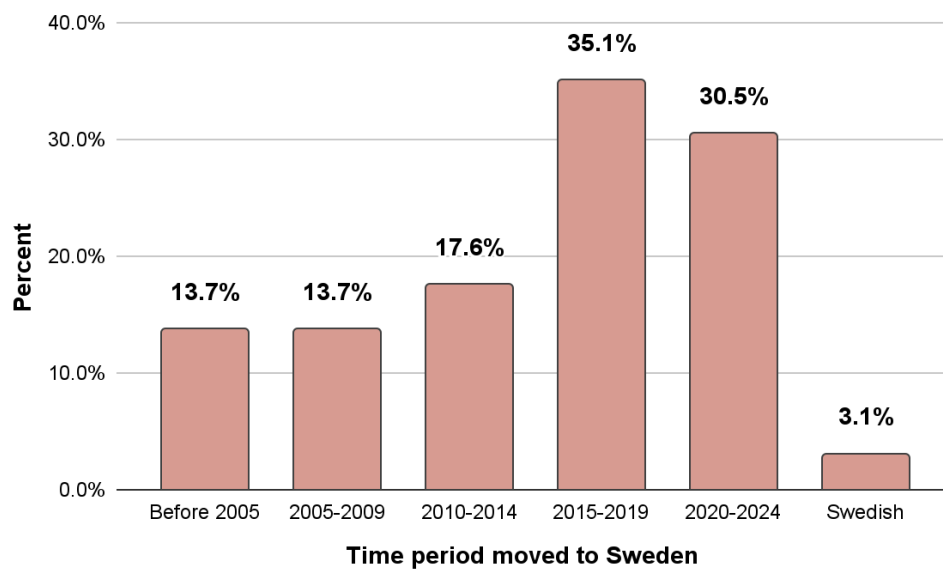


Fig. 10. Distribution of the time period researcher respondents moved to Sweden.

**Scientific Domains:** The researcher participants were distributed across all three scientific domains, with 52% from Science and Technology (TEKNAT), 30% from Medicine and Pharmacy (MEDFARM), and 17% from Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSAM)(Fig. 11).

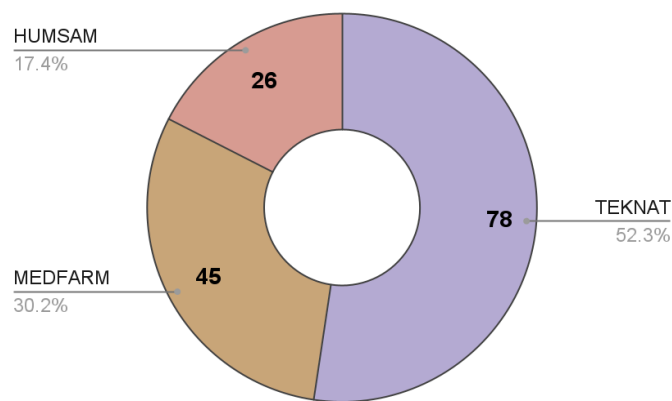


Fig. 11. Distribution of the disciplinary domains that researcher respondents belong to.

**Job Titles:** Job titles within this participant group were 11% (18) as BUL/Associate Senior Lecturers, 40% (59) as researchers on permanent contracts, 34% (51) as researchers on temporary contracts and 15% (23) identified as "other," encompassing roles like adjunct teacher, senior lecturers, professors, and research assistants (Fig. 12).

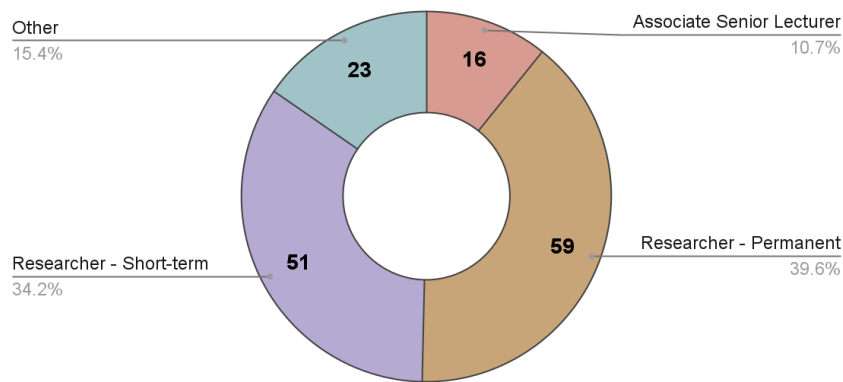


Fig. 12. Distribution of the employment type of researcher respondents.

## 2.4. Conclusions

Most of the respondents to this survey were non-EU/EEA citizens who are active in the science and technology domain (TEKNAT) and have moved to Sweden in the past 10 years. When interpreting these results, one should keep in mind that, in general, the TEKNAT domain comprises the largest part of Uppsala University's population which may introduce a sampling bias to this kind of report. For instance, when referring to local HR departments, it should be taken into account that it largely regards those of TEKNAT due to this sampling bias. However, a more exact discrimination of comments beyond what is already presented in this report is not possible within this project.

## 3. Consequences of residence permit processing time

Respondents were asked about their perception of the negative consequences of long processing times for residence permits if they are in a position to hire employees. Respondents were also asked what they considered to be acceptable time frames for residence permit processing, during recruitment in their projects.

### 3.1. PhD students

The majority (87%) were not in a position to hire employees, as would be expected of a PhD student. Among the rest, 8% indicated that they have not experienced any negative consequences of the long processing times for residence permits, and 5% stated that they have experienced negative consequences. It is unclear whether those who answered are indeed in a position to hire employees. These respondents are likely to have given their perspectives and thoughts on the questions as employees which should be remembered when interpreting their comments.

Those who found negative consequences mentioned the **loss of qualified candidates** due to candidates accepting other positions in other places instead. One respondent mentioned having to subsequently “rush through a new hiring process [so as] to not lose the possibility of hiring

someone else.” It also leads to hiring non-EU/EEA candidates being considered a **waste of time and resources for employers**, as well as **uncertainty for candidates about their employment**. Delays in granting residence permits can also **compromise the timeline and organisation of a project**, and make it challenging for employers to support candidates in **applying for permanent residence permits**. Respondents also mentioned that long processing times have led employees to be **unable to leave Sweden for work opportunities** during their employment time.

Regarding acceptance time frames for residence permit processing, 171 PhD students responded with an answer. A majority considered 3 months or less an acceptable time for residence permit processing. Most (36%) felt that 1.5-2 months is a reasonable maximum. Close behind was a maximum time frame of 1 month (ca. 28%), and 3 months (22%). Only 2 respondents (1%) felt that a time frame longer than 6 months is acceptable. Fig. 13 summarises these numbers in a bar chart.

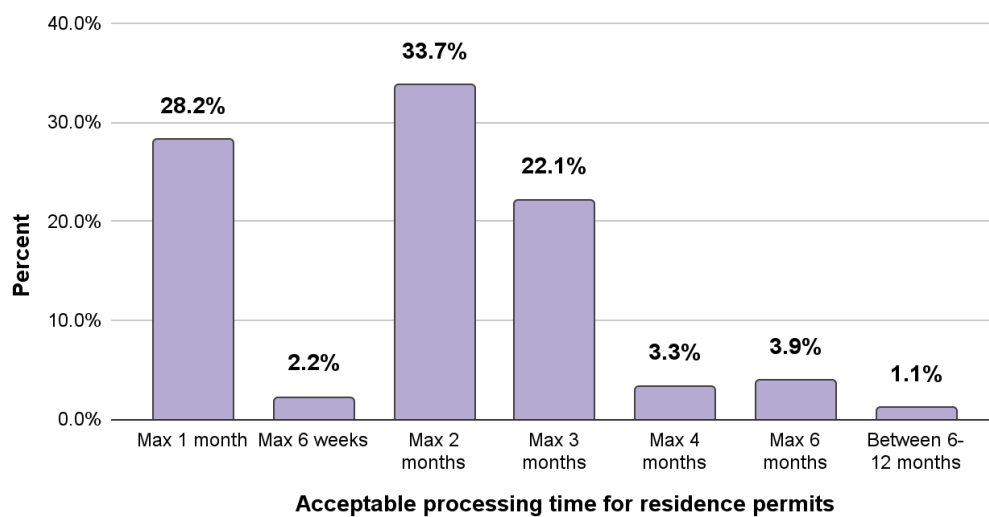


Fig. 13. Acceptable time frames for residence permit processing from PhD students' perspective.

### 3.2. Postdocs

Postdocs are not in a position to hire, so the majority (92%) of the participants responded “I am not in such a position”, while the rest 8% commented that a **long process time would affect the starting of their project since their presence in Sweden is required** to do so. Regarding the acceptable period for the residence permit process time, the most acceptable time was 3 months or less, voted by 91% of the participants, while only 9% expressed acceptance of more than 3 months to be reasonable (Fig. 14).

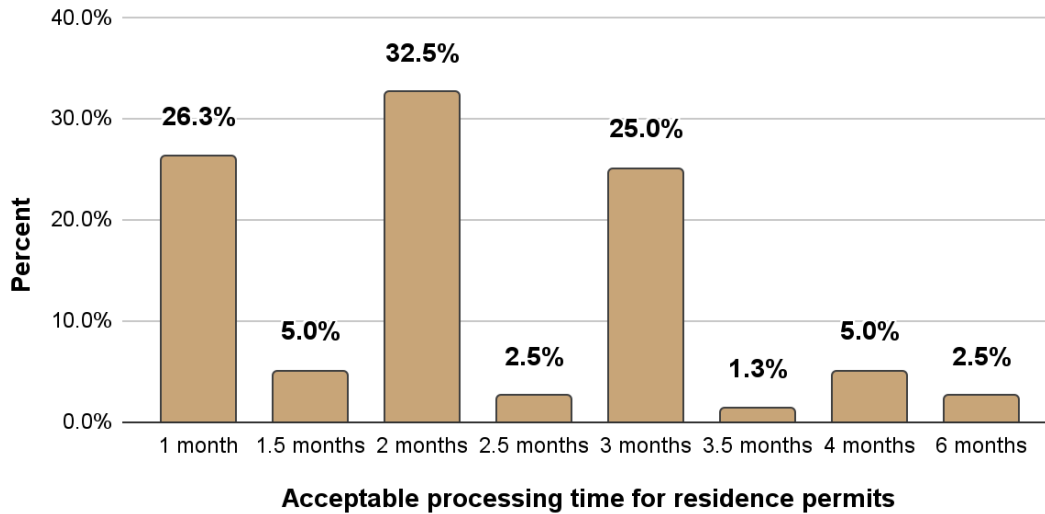


Fig. 14. Acceptable time frames for residence permit processing from postdocs' perspective.

### 3.3. Researchers

Among the answers were researchers, BUL, but also research assistants, senior lecturers, and professors. As mentioned earlier, in total 149, of which 42% were in a position to hire. Those considered that an acceptable processing time for residence permits would be between 1 and 3 months. If we consider all the answers, from researchers who can hire and those not in a position to hire, the acceptable time remains the same (Fig. 15).

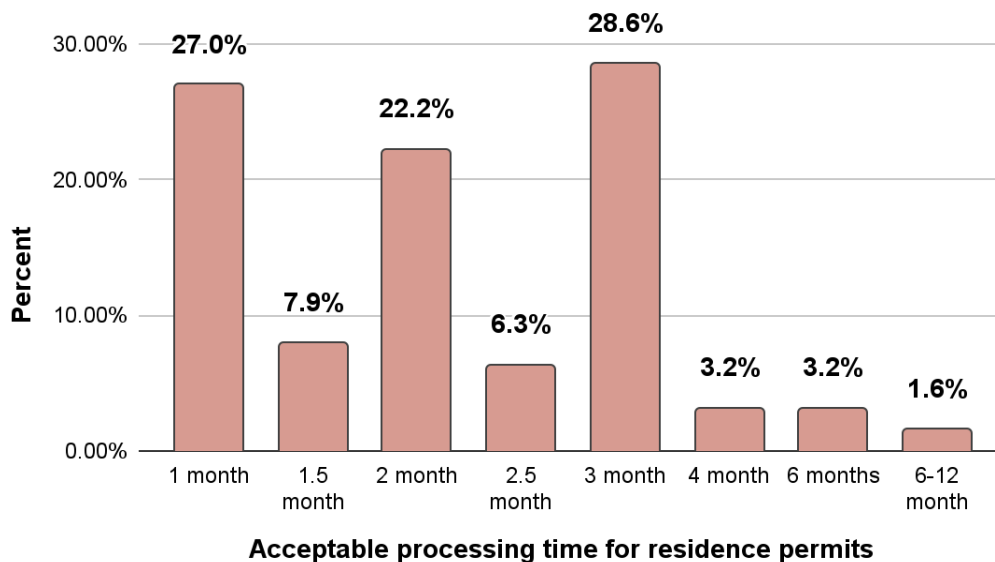


Fig. 15. Acceptable time frames for residence permit processing from researchers' perspectives.

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One of the main consequences of the long waiting time to process residence permits is that it **delays project implementation** and creates **difficulty in using research funding in the time frame**; as one of the answers explains:

*“External-funded grants are time limited and any potential delay in project starting date due to visa issues may hinder the project deliverables. This, unfortunately, may also impact candidate selection as well in order not to delay project starting dates.”*

Several respondents mentioned that they have **lost candidates** who had chosen other opportunities due to the long processing time, as well as the **high amount of extra work on the Principal Investigator** during the process. Moreover, it also impacts the recruited person negatively; it can **hinder their ability to go to conferences**, do research visits, and **travel back home**, as well as all the stress that it generates. Another consequence is that it impairs the overlap between leaving personnel in a lab/group and the newcomers; therefore, it **affects information and experience transfer** between new members of the lab/group and those that were in the lab/group.

Another relevant comment is that the combination of the migration requirements with the fixed-term contracts in the Employment Protection Act (Lagen om anställningsskydd, LAS) makes it **more difficult to recruit international candidates** unless one has funding for several years to provide permanent positions. The Employment Protection Act has established that after 12 months of a contract, one needs to get a permanent position; unless it is a postdoc contract (3 years) or a contract that is established according to the Higher Education Ordinance (Högskoleförordningen), for instance BUL and doctoral students.

### 3.4. Conclusions

Whether the answers came from PhD students or researchers, the majority find that 3 months is a reasonable maximum time to get or renew a residence permit. This time influences research project implementation, the ability to use money from the granting agency, and the person who is awaiting the permit and cannot travel to Sweden to start the new position or leave Sweden while waiting for the renewal. No matter whether knowingly or unknowingly, this directly affects the rate of hiring international non-EU/EEA employees which means losing the diversity of expertise and experience at the scientific level of the universities in the long term and losing their international competency.

## 4. Issues before coming to Sweden

Respondents were asked about issues they experienced before coming to Sweden and were given multiple choices as well as an open text option.

## 4.1. PhD students

A total of 199 PhD students responded to this question. Around 72% of respondents experienced issues related to the **residence permit processing time**. This included *long waiting times for themselves as well as their accompanying family members*. Half of the respondents also felt that **information provided on the Migration Agency's (Migrationsverket) website was unclear**, and 28% experienced **problems with the Swedish embassy**, such as *long waiting times for appointments and biometrics* and a *general lack of support or help* regarding the immigration procedure. A few respondents mentioned other issues related to the Migration Agency, like *administrative mistakes leading to delays* in their application.

Many respondents (28%) also experienced a *lack of support from Uppsala University*. A *general lack of support and guidance* from the university related to the immigration process was experienced by 12% of our PhD respondents. Several participants felt that their *supervisors and department HR lacked experience with international hires*. This was often accompanied by *misleading, contradictory or confusing communication* from the supervisors, administrative and HR staff. For a few students, this resulted in *delays with their work contract* being set up, due to the staff having to wait until a residence permit was granted, or being on holiday over the summer period. Other issues related to the university included the *necessary paperwork for residence permit purposes not being prepared* in a correct and timely manner, or even at all.

Some of the students expressed an expectation of support for moving to and resettling in Sweden, for example with relocation costs, housing, and other essentials related to relocating, which they did not get from their respective departments. Only 3 participants (1.5%) reported experiencing no problems at all (Fig. 16).

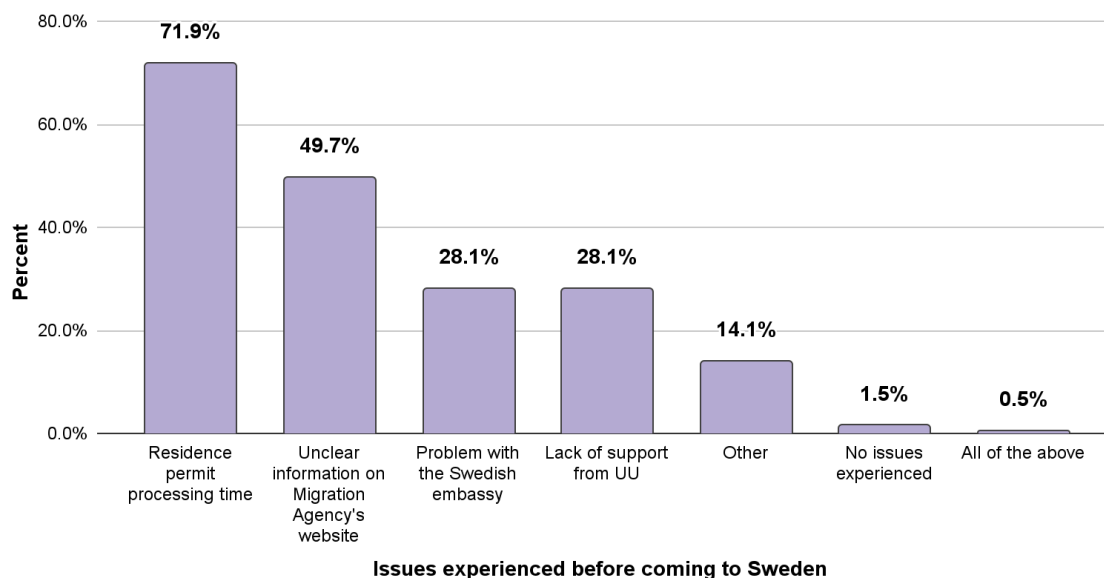


Fig. 16. Issues experienced by PhD student respondents before coming to Sweden (n=199).

## 4.2. Postdocs

The major problems for postdocs before coming to Sweden were related to the Migration Agency including **long residence permit processing time, unclear information on the Migration Agency's website**, and **problems with the Swedish Embassy**. For instance:

*“The guidelines on the Migration Agency websites [are] proxy to the migration law. [In] enactment of [the] new law, [these] proxy guidelines are not updated accurately. No accurate information about the application forms to be submitted for family members of the researcher and child born [of] a researcher in Sweden.”*

*“Migrationsverket misspel[t] my name on my decision letter, so I had to get a new one.”*

In addition to the Migration Agency-related issues, the **lack of support from UU** was also specifically commented on the “other” option:

*“My department [...] does not provide any support regarding moving in to a new country. The hiring process was too long - I signed the contract and got the official documents after I started working; I did not get enough information about staying/working in Sweden and some of the information I got was inaccurate. Couldn't get an official contract until I had an official Swedish living space, but Swedish housing wants to see a contract. So you're stuck.”*

It is noteworthy that more than one-third (37.3%) of the postdocs did not experience issues worth mentioning (Fig. 17).

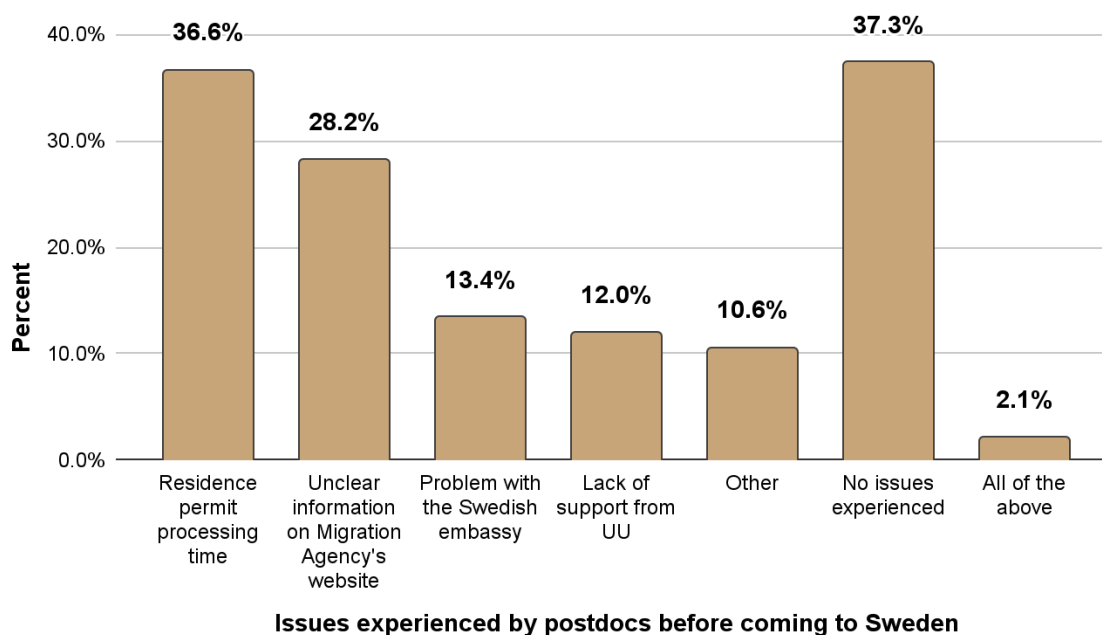


Fig. 17. Issues experienced by postdoc respondents before coming to Sweden (n=142).

### 4.3. Researchers

For researchers, the most common problems before moving to Sweden relate to interaction with the Migration Agency. **Long waiting times for residence permit processing** are reported by 41.6% of survey participants and **lack of information relating to the Migration Agency** has been an issue for 23.5% of the researcher respondents (Fig. 18).

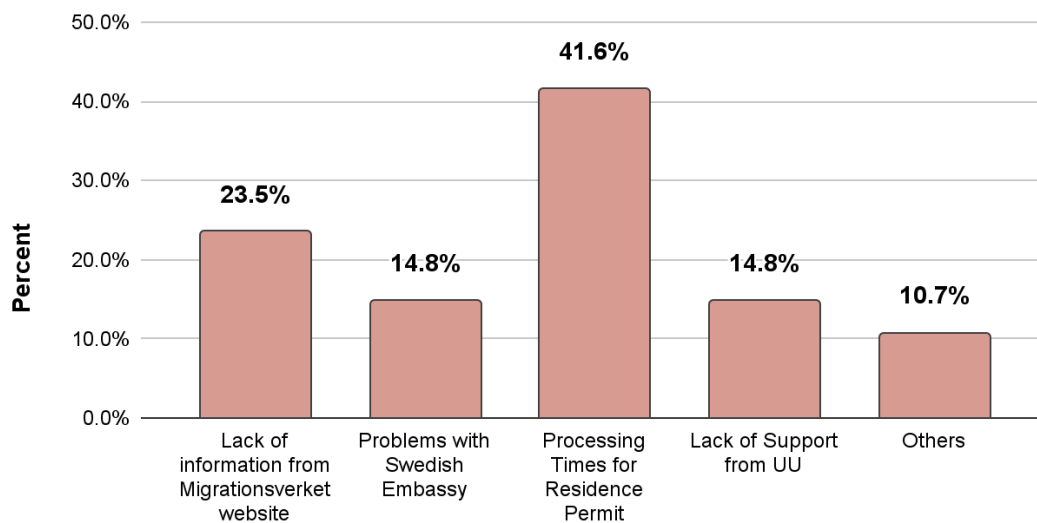
In open text answers, respondents also pointed out problems with a **lack of knowledge of specific case handlers**:

*“Different responses were received from different personnel from the Migration Agency, which often confuses both the HR/employers and the employees.”*

*“The MV [migrationsverket] officers don’t have a good knowledge about the rules for researchers, and they misdirect people.”*

The **lack of support from the university**, although reported by only 14.8%, was often received as particularly harsh. In open text comments, participants shared their experiences:

*“The HR at UU that I was in contact with did not respond to my emails unless absolutely essential. It showed a lack of empathy on their part.”*



**Issues experienced by researchers before coming to Sweden**

Fig. 18. Issues experienced by researcher respondents before coming to Sweden (n=149).

*“When one moves to a new place, it is natural to have many questions, and a reply can go a long way in reassuring people. But a complete silence (as I faced) is simply callous behaviour (and that’s putting it very mildly).”*

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Furthermore, some of the participants flagged the ***lack of knowledge within the local HR departments*** which results in shifting responsibility rather than helping with finding solutions as expressed:

*“The HR doesn’t have knowledge of non-standard parts of migration law. The problem is when they don’t know, instead of finding out for you, from an expert within the university, they put the onus of responsibility back onto you.”*

Another respondent summarises it very aptly saying:

*“There is a discrepancy between the info you get and the info you need.”*

#### **4.4. Conclusions**

Putting all the responses together shows that no matter the position the respondents were hired for, issues related to the Migration Agency always stood out before coming to Sweden. These issues included but were not limited to the long processing time for residence permits and unclear information on the Migration Agency’s website. It is noteworthy to remember that most of the participants had come to Sweden in the past 10 years and there might have been changes or improvements in, for example, the Migration Agency’s website since their arrival.

The next issue that came up for respondents before coming to Sweden was related to the Swedish embassies. This is quite an interesting result as the respondents have various nationalities, yet many of them found difficulties dealing with Sweden’s embassy in their countries. However, since the exact nationality of participants was not collected in this survey, most of the responses related to this option might be related to one specific country where the embassy of Sweden may need improvements.

Another issue which was mentioned similarly among PhD students, postdocs and researchers was the lack of support from Uppsala University. Responses related to this issue mainly pointed out a general lack of knowledge regarding hiring international employees at the local HR departments as well as a lack of empathy to newcomers. The workload on the local HR departments may not be completely adjusted to the number of staff they have. However, certainly, by introducing an up-to-date checklist specifically for hiring internationals and communicating it to the applicants at the very early stages of their recruitment process, the workload on the local HR departments can be reduced to leave space for unexpected matters that require direct contact with the to-be-employees of UU. This way, the international to-be-employees also significantly save time and energy by not surfing all over the *“This is how Sweden works”* websites to find updated information which may not be reliable and needs to be cross-checked with the HR at UU, hence adding more workload on them. All in all, it would be beneficial for all parties that UU dedicates the required resources to increase the number of HR staff to be trained and particularly focus on these cases.

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## 5. Issues during the stay in Sweden

This section of the report focuses on issues occurring for international employees during their stay in Sweden after overcoming initial hurdles such as acquiring residence permits and application times. The respondents were asked to identify the steps for settling down in Sweden that they found challenging. They were given 9 options, 8 of which were concrete and essential steps and the “other” option allowed respondents to further give open text responses.

### 5.1. PhD students

A total of 317 PhD students expressed that they faced issues once they arrived in Sweden with at least one choice out of the given options, including 197 non-EU/EEA PhD students.

On average, each respondent selected approximately three challenging steps.

The most frequently mentioned steps were **opening a bank account and finding accommodation**, selected by over half of all PhD student respondents. Around 37.5% of respondents experienced **difficulties obtaining a personal identity number** (Personnummer). Other logistical steps essential for living in Sweden during their PhD studies were mentioned by one-fifth to one-third of all respondents. These included **obtaining a bank ID** (31%), **registering with the Insurance Agency** (Försäkringskassan) (30%), **obtaining the physical ID card** (23%), and **securing a time slot for biometric information collection** for the ID card at the Tax Agency (Skatteverket) (19.6%). Furthermore, respondents indicated that the **information and support provided by the University regarding these logistical procedures**, which involved interactions with various public agencies, were inadequate. Specifically, about 37% of the respondents found that information and support from their local HR or department had been an issue when they were settling down in Sweden, making it the fourth selected issue among all 9 options (Fig. 19).

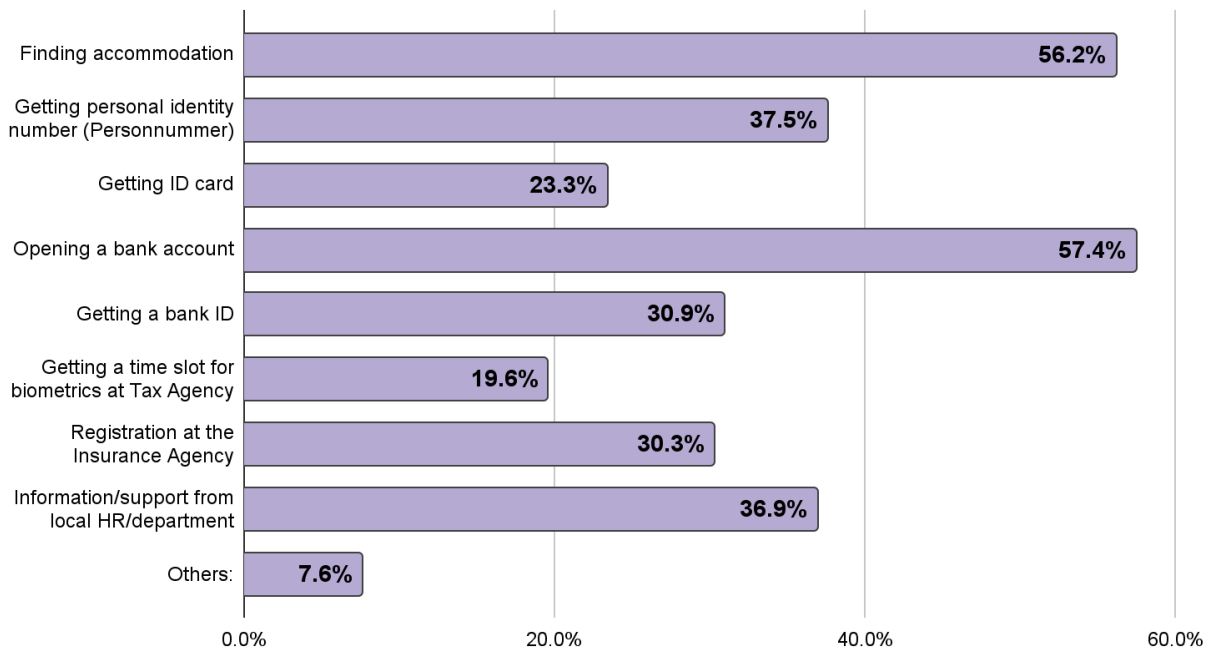


Fig. 19. Issues experienced by PhD students after arriving in Sweden (n=317).

Of those who left open text answers, almost half of the respondents (10 out of 23) found that the low availability of public agencies and bank services caused delays and inconveniences in the initial period of their lives in Sweden.

About one-third of comments (7 out of 23) expressed concern about not receiving adequate guidance on navigating the steps of properly settling down in Sweden from the beginning, including information on services and benefits such as the EU health insurance card and the unemployment insurance A-kassa that are available to PhD students and residents in Sweden. One respondent wrote:

*"[...] Until today, especially in the last four years, I have not received any information from them (HR department) on matters such as immigration administration or insurance. [...]"*

Concerning the complexity of essential procedures, one respondent wrote:

*"It would have been way easier if UU helped with a simple to-do list."*

One thing that could be pointed out is that the lack of orientation and availability of services essential to new PhD students might lead to collateral issues. For instance, bank accounts and bankID are essential to many everyday services in Sweden. One respondent mentioned that since it takes time to set up the bank account, the respondent *did not receive a salary until 4.5 months into the PhD*, since the salary could not be transferred to the respondent's bank account in their home country. Starting a new life in a new country is already challenging, but issues like the latency in receiving salary further increase obstacles.

In addition, one respondent commented about the difficulty for non-EU citizens in all areas listed in the multiple choices section:

*“My partner who is not an EU citizen has had troubles with all of the above.”*

In another question, the respondents were given multiple choices of possible issues they experienced during their stay in Sweden together with an open text option to write any further comments. A total of 210 PhD students (54% of all the PhD student respondents to the survey) selected at least one given issue, including 190 (90%) of the non-EU/EEA PhD students. This result is easily explained by the fact that the travel and change of residence within the EU/EEA area is extremely simplified. Many steps, like applying for residence permits or the requirement of a visa to enter a country, create a lot of hardship for many students.

Fig. 20 illustrates a summary of all responses given by PhD students who experienced issues during their stay in Sweden. The average respondent selected between 2 to 3 different options. **Long waiting times for residence permit extension at the Migration Agency** was selected by a total of 162 PhD students (77%), and **Not being able to leave and re-enter Sweden while waiting for the new residence permit** was reported by 136 PhD students (65%). 103 PhD respondents (49%) mentioned a **Lack of time slots for biometrics at the Migration Agency** and 39 PhD respondents (19%) reported **Not being able to get a visa for their family members to visit them in Sweden** as an issue they faced during their stay in Sweden.

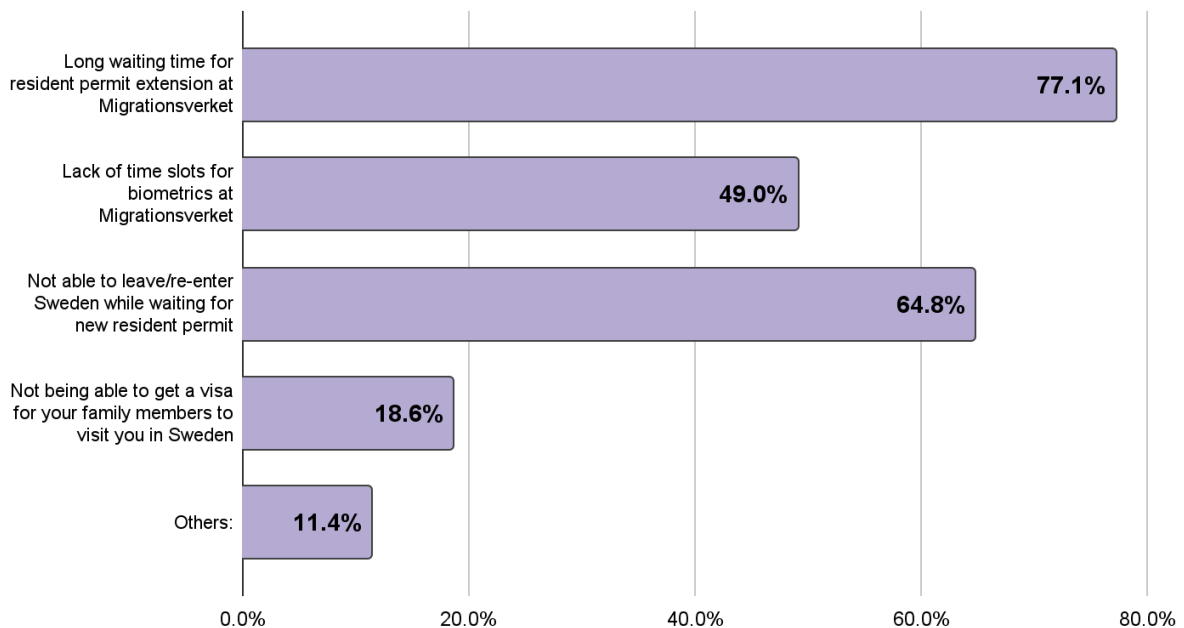


Fig. 20. Issues experienced by PhD students during their stay in Sweden (n=210).

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24 PhD students (11.4%) left additional comments which touched many different areas.

The major issue by far, mentioned in more than one-third of comments (7 out of 24) was the negative consequences of long process times at the Migration agency. One respondent wrote:

*“My daughter was born during the third year of my PhD. Her residence permit was applied but I already waited for 7 months with no news. This forbid us to travel anywhere.”*

Waiting times for residence permit decisions can reach as much as half a year or longer, during which the student often receives no information on what is going on until the final decision is made. The reasons for the final decisions are oftentimes poorly reasoned despite being life-changing for the student. Another PhD student wrote:

*“My doctoral student residence permit was rejected because the migration did re-classify my visa type from student to visitor without informing me [...]. Now I have to leave Sweden and make a new application after being in Sweden for approximately 2 and half years.”*

This was not the only case where the Migration agency gave out inconsistent information that ultimately led to trouble for the PhD student.

*“I am to leave Sweden over the summer for an internship, but my residence permit expires in the meanwhile (I applied several months ago). Migrationsverket is completely inconsistent, they first suggested me a tourist visa (which I cannot technically apply to come back [...]), then a D-1 visa (which is not applicable [...]). They also suggest contacting the border police. There does not seem to be any document allowing re-entry for PhD students, which is hard to understand. [...] (my home and family is in Sweden for the past 6 years). [...]”*

Not being able to receive visits and support from family and friends can be tough. One student, hoping to welcome their mother during their PhD in Sweden, wrote:

*“[...] Since we lost my father and she is a widow now, Sweden considers her as a threat and potential refugee no matter how many legal documents we provide against this wrong assumption. So, they rejected her visa request two years in a row which makes it even harder for the next time she applies to come to my defense. [...]”*

Only one student reported how relieved they were to get a single residence permit for the full 4 years of their PhD.

*“[...] I was among the first to get a 4-year residence permit for PhD studies, and it is a huge weight off my shoulders to not have to worry about renewal until then.”*

## 5.2. Postdocs

The biggest problem for postdocs after arriving in Sweden was **opening a bank account** which more than half of the respondents (65.9%) experienced, and was accompanied by difficulties with **finding accommodation** (54.3%) and **getting a personal identity number** (54.3%)(Fig. 21). The **lack of information/support from the local HR/department** about routines

(38%) made the situation even worse:

*“Initially I was a postdoc on a stipend and I feel like there was much less support from UU in that case. Even though those contracts do not have benefits and benefits might depend on agreements established with the PI, I think UU should have guidelines or standards for sick leave, parental leave, and vacation. It would be very helpful if UU had a document that would state what to arrange when moving detailing the different places one needs to register etc.”*

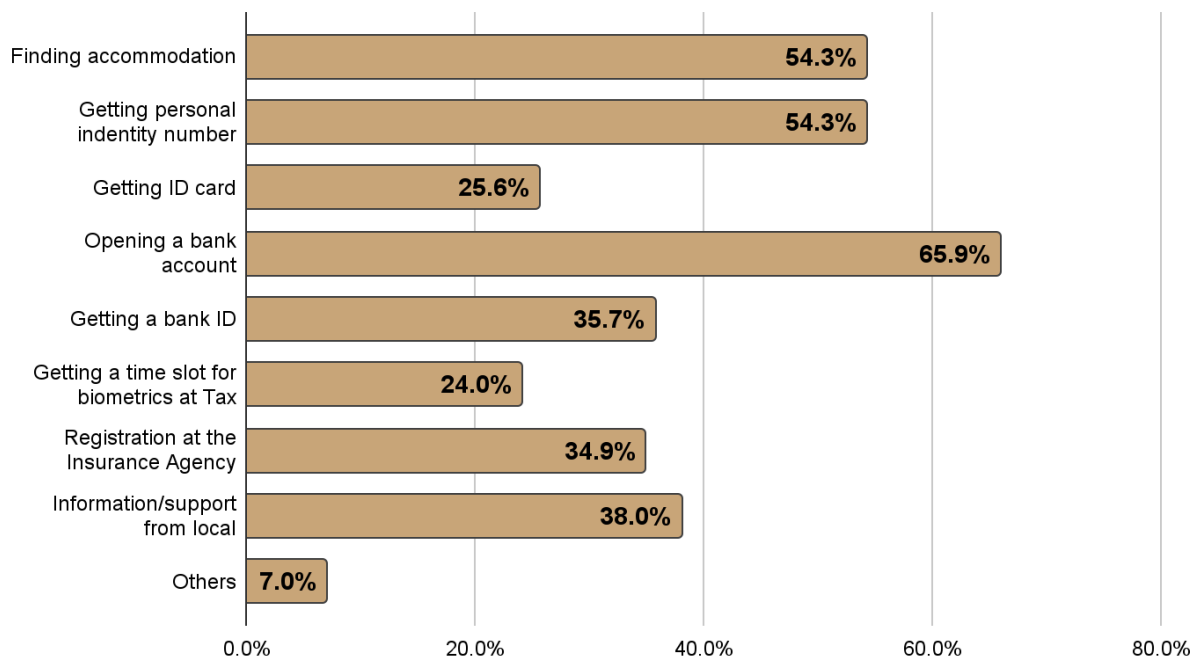


Fig. 21. Issues experienced by postdoc respondents after arriving in Sweden (n=129).

During their stay in Sweden, postdocs also experienced major issues of **long waiting time for residence permit extension** (62.1%), **travel restrictions** while waiting for the permit (54.5%), and **lack of time slots for biometrics at Migrationsverket** (48.5%)(Fig. 22).

The other issues included:

The **lack of support from UU**:

*“Lack of support from the university when dealing with long wait times for residence permit extension. Lack of support from the university when dealing with the paperwork for the residence permit extension (contact person asking me how to fill out the paperwork; errors in the paperwork).”*

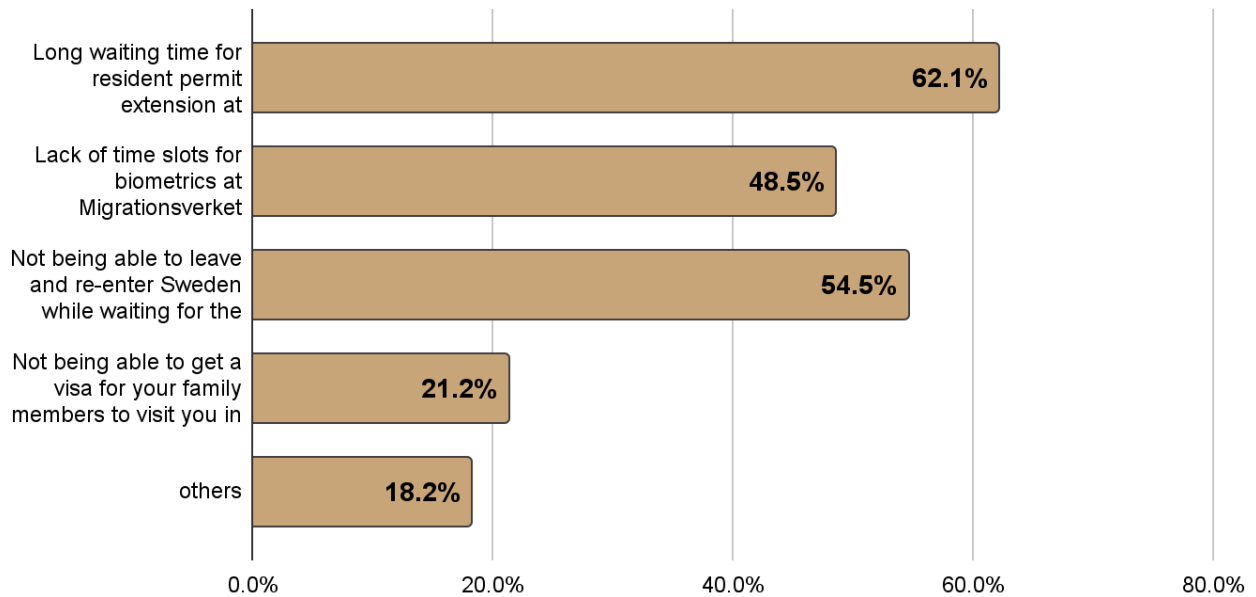


Fig. 22. Issues experienced by postdoc respondents during their stay in Sweden (n=66).

### The **difficulties with the medical care system:**

*“Difficulties in navigating the public health care system. I have felt that I was not taken seriously on some occasions, and was told I should resign to having certain symptoms instead of continuing to find help to treat my symptoms. Eventually, I had to visit a private doctor.”*

### The difficulties for **getting a residence permit for their children born in Sweden:**

*“Long waiting time to get a residence permit for a child to non-EU parents born in Sweden.”*

*“One of the ridiculous situations I faced for my son was due to the mindless aliens act, July 2021, which has been enforced for almost 2 years. My son, who was born in Sweden, faced an unusual situation when we submitted an application for his residence permit, following communication and guidance from the migration agency help center support. I received a strange letter when the application was assigned to the case officer. The letter stated that my son had to leave the country in order to process his residence permit application, despite both parents holding legal residence permits.”*

## 5.3. Researchers

The biggest problems among all groups of researchers after arriving in Sweden were **finding accommodation** (48.3%), **getting a bank account** (45%) and **getting a personal number** (34.9%). This was also further made worse by the **lack of information provided by the local HR** as reported by 34.2% of respondents. There is very little help with the practicalities of moving to a new country and responsibility for understanding the local system is up to the respondent.

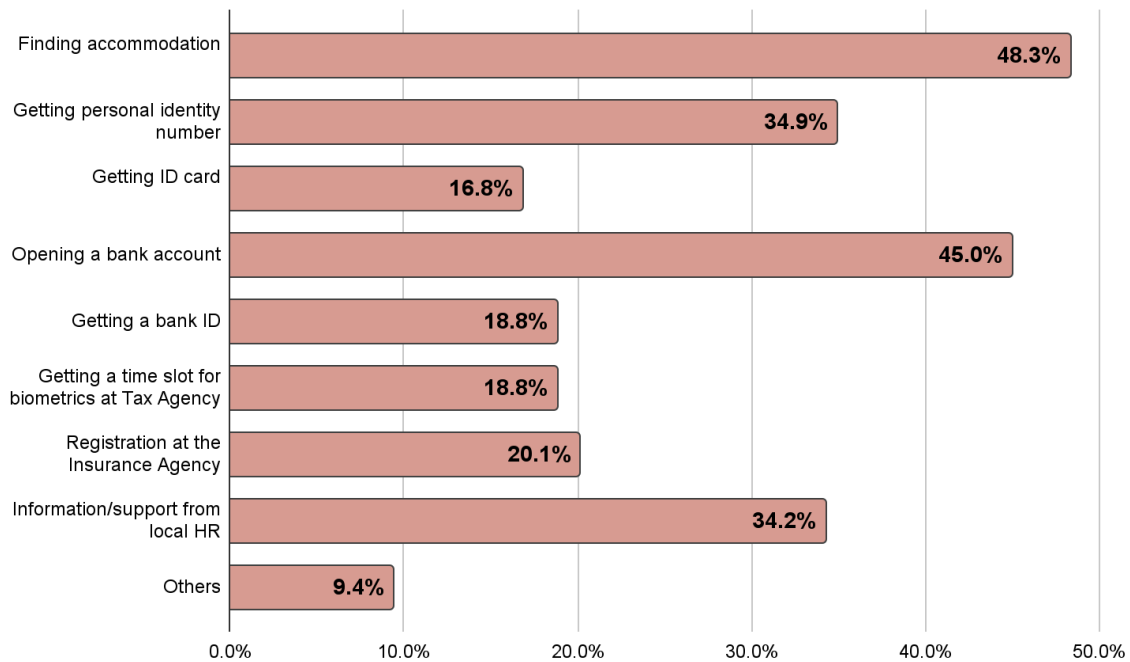


Fig. 23. Issues experienced by researcher respondents after arriving in Sweden (n=125).

In the open text, participants highlighted that this caused them problems with signing contracts and/or receiving their salaries upon arrival. As described by one:

*“There was basically no information from the HR regarding what I should do to settle in Sweden. I had to spend a lot of working hours to figure it out on my own or ask my colleagues.”*

The experience of employees on short-term contracts can be even more drastic as reported by another respondent:

*“Because I was hired so close to the beginning of my contract, my SINK decision did not go through and I was not paid my salary for the first three months. I had to take out a loan to pay my bills. I asked staff at UU for help over and over, but was dribbled between different actors and offices. It was horrible and at one point I was considering just leaving Sweden because I did not have money for food. This was a general problem which several people who started at the same time as me had. However (luckily) most of them were not working full time so they had other sources of income.”*

The majority of issues that occurred after settling but during the stay in Sweden were related to **long processing times** (41.6%), **travel restrictions** and rules of re-entry for visa applicants (37.6%) as well as **lack of available time slots for collecting biometrics at the Migration Agency** (23.5%).

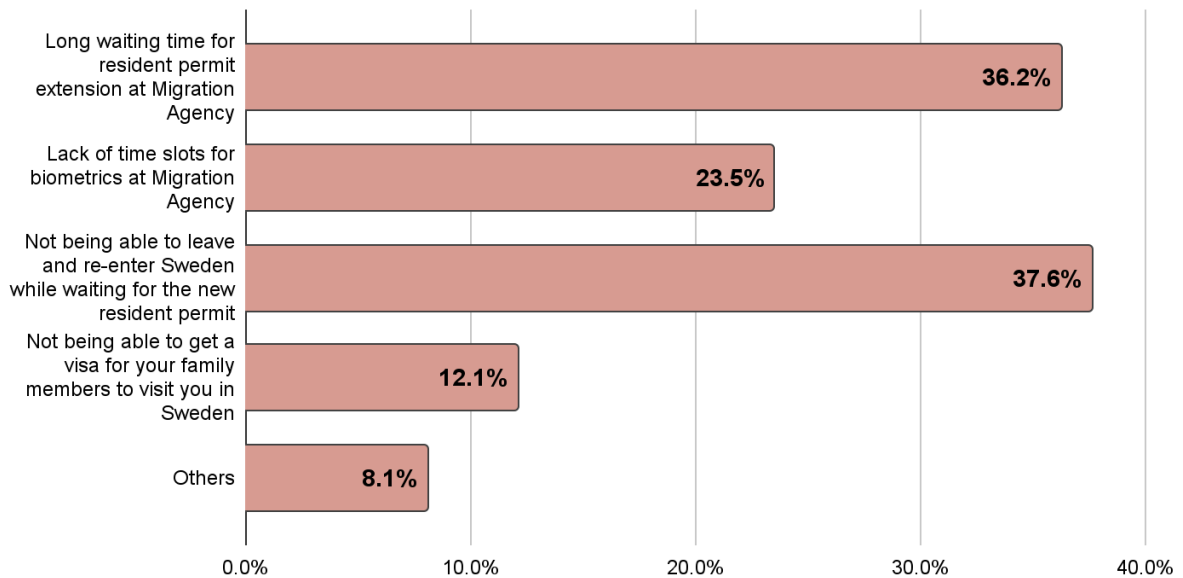


Fig. 24. Issues experienced by researcher respondents during their stay in Sweden (n=82).

Respondents clearly pointed out how these **affected their professional and personal lives** creating **extra stress**. The delays mean **disruption to possible research activities** that require international travel as well as attendance at conferences and other public dissemination events. As expressed by one of the respondents:

*“Not being able to leave and re-enter Sweden while waiting for the new resident permit is a big issue for my group, and has prevented early-career members from attending conferences and participating in international research exchanges.”*

Furthermore, every application for a permit is tied to **extra financial costs** explained by one of the participants:

*“Every extension of a permit is considered as a new application and we have to pay 1500 sek every time. This in my case amounts to about 5000 sek which is unfair. I’ve missed invited conference talks due to unreasonably long processing times, and haven’t had a chance to meet my family due to such issues.”*

## 5.4. Conclusions

Overall, the results of this section show that regardless of the position the respondents hold at Uppsala University, finding accommodation, opening a bank account and obtaining a social security number comprise the main obstacles to overcome while staying in Sweden. These obstacles are accompanied by the lack of provided information and support by the local HR departments. Other logistical steps for settling down in Sweden such as acquiring a BankID and registration at the Insurance Agency were among the common problems that PhD students, postdocs and researchers at UU faced upon their moving to Sweden.

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No employer can expect maximum levels of productivity from their employees who have to be constantly worried about finding a roof to stay under, avoid getting sick as they have no insurance to cover them, and cannot pay for any of their expenses as they do not receive salary for the first several months of their employment. While Uppsala University is not responsible for delays in matters related to public organisations such as Tax Agency cases, many of these issues can be alleviated or completely solved by establishing new routines at the University level to guide new employees in the right direction from the beginning and avoid waste of their time.

Furthermore, UU can help its international employees for a less painful settlement in their new home country. Based on the above results, this can be done by investing more in HR department routines to provide new international employees with up-to-date and on-time information such as communicating a checklist that can be followed without the need for constant contact with HR and dependence on the availability or knowledge of individual HR staff. One should note that there is already a significant amount of useful information on the Staff Gateway (previously Medarbetarportalen), however, it needs to be categorised, communicated and advertised more efficiently, specifically, to the newly employed members of UU at their very early stage of employment.

Applications for residence permits often come with incredibly long waiting times of several months. These waiting times are a nightmare in the life of non-EU/EEA PhD students, postdocs and researchers at UU. Without a valid residence permit card, one cannot re-enter Sweden before a decision is made on their extension application. If one has to leave Sweden during this waiting period, they must go back to their country of origin and wait for the decision to be made and to receive the newly issued residence permit card to be able to come back to their home and job in Sweden. The resulting delay from the months of waiting time or repercussions of leaving the country causes a cascade of problems for non-EU/EEA employees including missing out on attending international conferences and research activities. Therefore, they miss opportunities to present their research internationally and potential collaborations with experts in other countries, all of which are essential for any academic person.

A considerable number of participants have stated their family members were not granted visas to visit them in Sweden. This significantly influences the mental health of many non-EU/EEA employees due to a lack of family support in their lives. Combining this deprivation of sharing their new lives with their families with not being able to leave Sweden when waiting for the decision on their residence permit extension does not illustrate a fair and decent way of living in comparison to the EU/EEA employees; adding to the cascade of problems.

## **6. Obstacles to staying in Sweden for the next step**

Respondents were asked to report any obstacles they faced towards staying in Sweden after the end of their contracts and if they planned on doing so. Furthermore, respondents were asked to report their reasons for not wanting to stay in Sweden if they planned to leave after their contracts ended, as well as what alternative countries or regions they considered moving to.

## 6.1. PhD students

A total of 276 PhD students responded to the first question. The results show that the predominant obstacle faced by PhD students towards staying in Sweden after completing their PhD programs appears to be **finding a contract that meets the contract length requirement** set by the Migration Agency. **Getting a job offer** is another major obstacle encountered by approximately two-thirds of the respondents. About half of the respondents felt that there is a **lack of job opportunities in academia**, whereas, only about a quarter of the respondents reported feeling a **lack of job opportunities outside of academia**. Respondents also experienced a **lack of career support from the university** for themselves (38%) as well as for their partners (8.7%). Almost half of the respondents (42%) reported **migration issues** to be a barrier to staying in Sweden. Migration issues reported in open text by respondents included complicated and **unpredictable immigration policies, long processing times for applications** by the Migration Agency, and **uncertainty about their partner's residence**. Finally, a small number of respondents reported experiencing other obstacles, such as a **lack of support with Swedish language acquisition** or reported experiencing **no barriers at all** (Fig. 25).

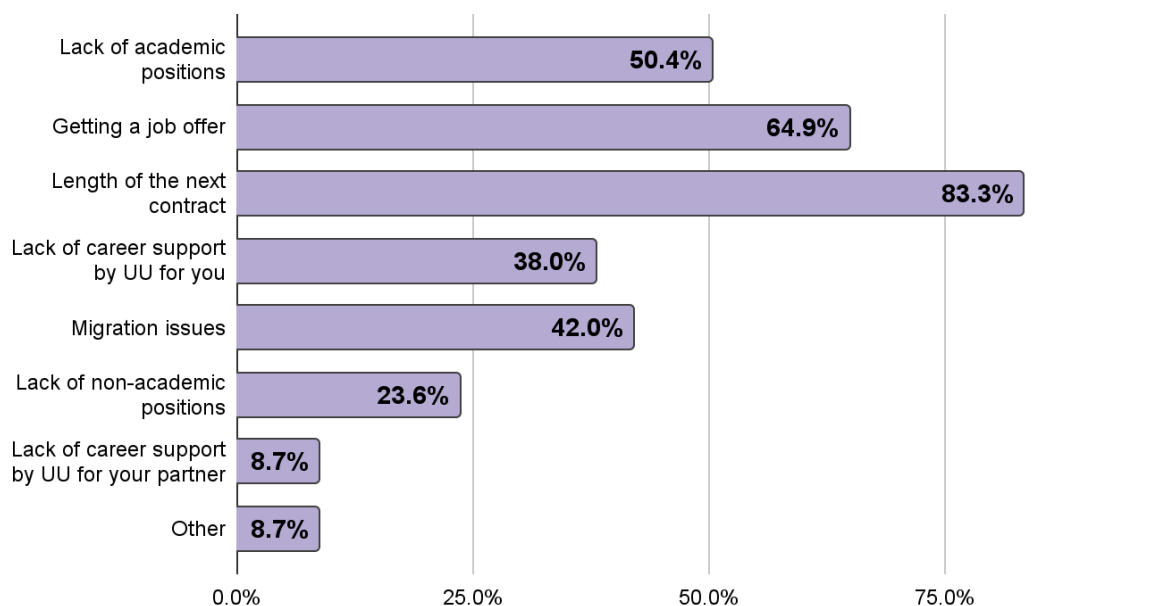


Fig. 25. Obstacles experienced by respondents for staying in Sweden after finishing their PhD programs (n=276).

Of the 123 respondents who reported their reasons for leaving Sweden, **27% said they would stay if it was possible**, but felt pessimistic about the likelihood. Approximately **60% planned to leave**. Various reasons for wanting to leave were reported and are displayed in Fig. 26 below, with the challenging immigration process being the leading reason. Most often respondents considered moving elsewhere within Europe (27.6%). North America (USA or Canada) was another top choice. Fig. 27 represents all the preferences for this question.

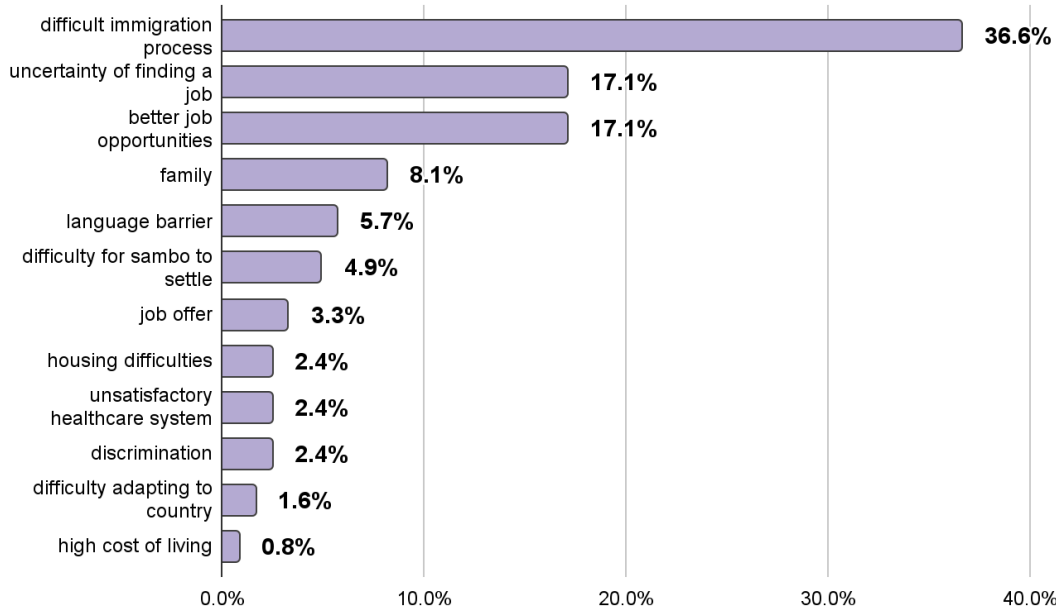


Fig. 26. Reasons reported by PhD student respondents for planning on leaving Sweden after finishing their contract (n=123).

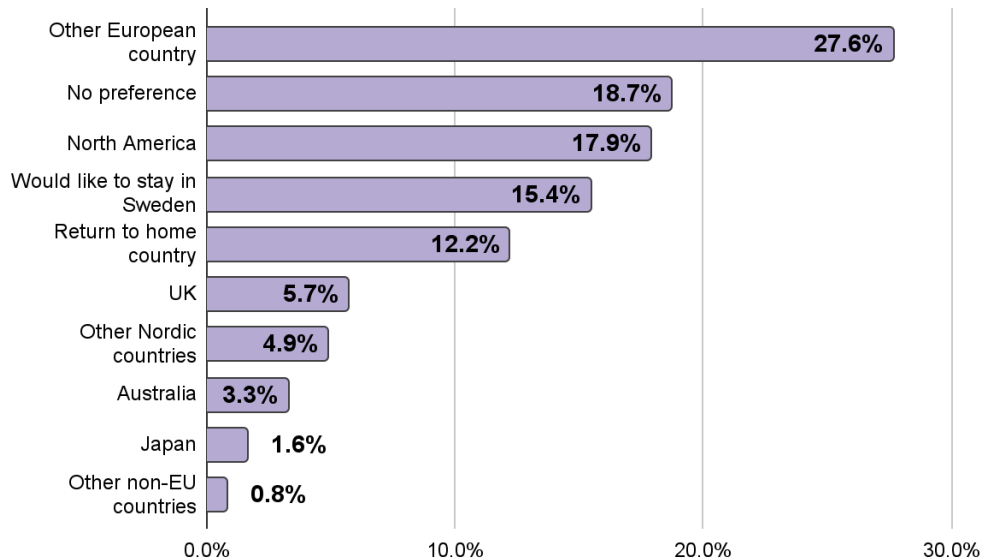


Fig. 27. Countries PhD student respondents consider as alternatives to move to after finishing their contract (n=123).

## 6.2. Postdocs

The majority of postdoc respondents pointed out that **finding an academic position** (69.7%) or a **job offer** (64.6%) was the major obstacle to staying in Sweden after finishing their postdoc programs. More than one-third of the postdoc respondents also considered the **length of the**

**next contract** (38.4%) regarding the new Migration law and the **lack of career support by UU** (37.4%) as obstacles to their staying in Sweden (Fig. 28).

Complex and uncertain migration issues also obscure and discourage more than a quarter of the respondents (26.3%) from staying in Sweden:

*“The migration policies change frequently and are extremely difficult to navigate. I need to find a permanent job to stay here which requires a work permit. My partner is non-EU so our decision to stay might depend on his ability to get a visa/job.”*

*“Rules are very variable, long processing time, which can go well beyond after the expiry date of the current visa, Permanent resident permit card with permanent job contract, The migration policies just don’t make sense.”*

*“As a non member of EEA/EU I need a contract job to stay here. I know that I can stay if I apply for other jobs and extend the residence permit, but again, I don’t know how long it will take the extension [to] be here and getting the job offer. I am currently waiting for over 1 year for a visa case to be concluded. I applied for “long-term resident status” and this was denied after 8 months because I travelled too much for work. I am “fighting against” migrationsverket and I have a clear feeling that I am not wanted in the country and it is a displeasure to process my visa applications. I am really interested in staying in Sweden to work, but this is very discouraging and I started looking for jobs abroad.”*

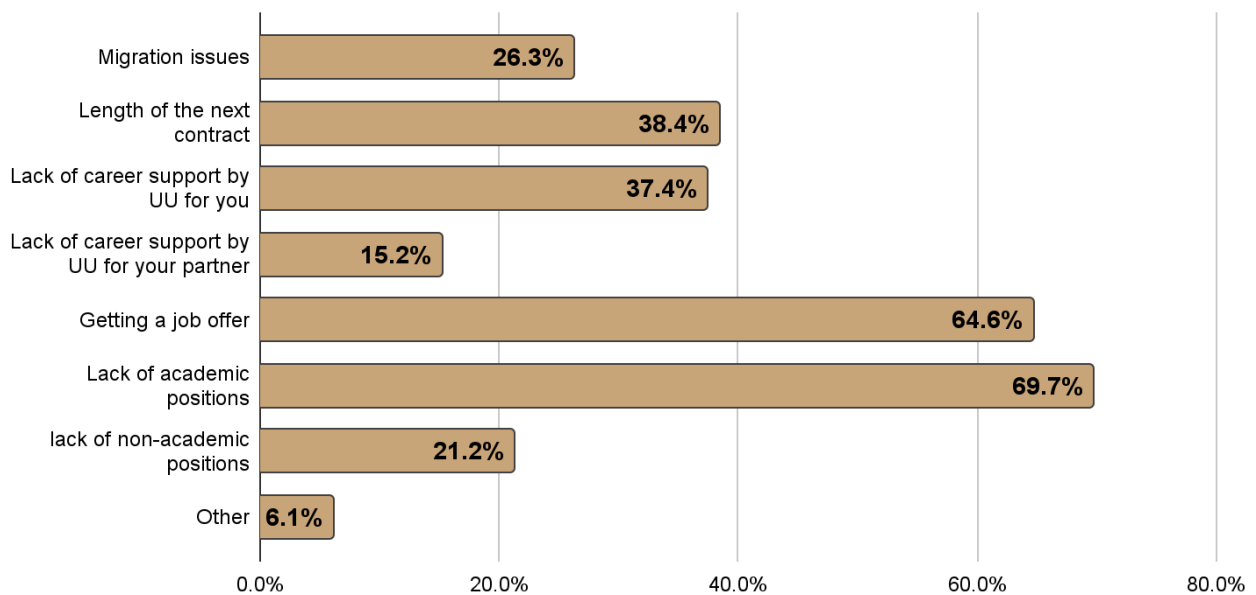


Fig. 28. Obstacles experienced by respondents for staying in Sweden after finishing postdoc programs (n=99).

Almost half of the respondents (**46.3%**) considered **going back to their home country** if not staying in Sweden after finishing their postdoc contract. The EU was also a top choice (36.6%)(Fig. 29).

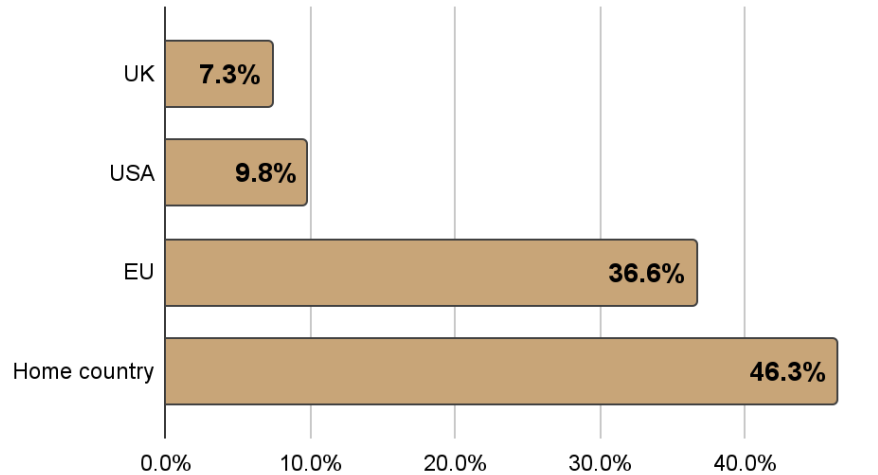


Fig. 29. Countries postdoc respondents consider as alternatives to move to after finishing their contract (n=62).

**Better career opportunities** (32.8%) was the top reason for the postdocs to leave Sweden, while **family** (18%) and **migration issues** (18%) were second equally important considerations (Fig. 30).

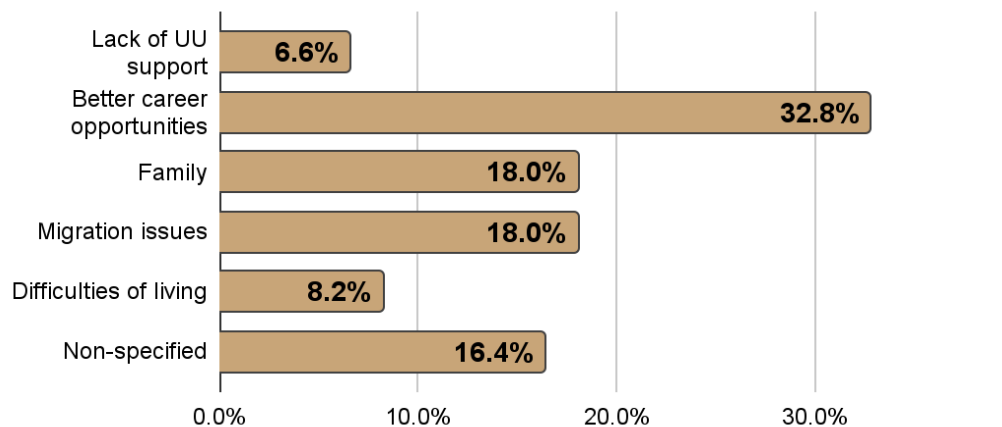


Fig. 30. Reasons reported by postdoc respondents for planning on leaving Sweden after finishing their contract (n=62).

### 6.3. Researchers

In this category, 98 people replied to the questions regarding the obstacles to staying in Sweden (65% of researcher respondents). Their answers clearly reflect that the main obstacles for those who would like to stay in Sweden are the **Lack of academic positions** (41%) and **Getting a job offer** (22%). Not surprisingly, the **migration issues** also have an impact when the researchers decide whether they would like to stay in Sweden or not (15%). Their answers also reflect that the **Length of the next contract** is also a factor when deciding to stay in Sweden (21%) (Fig. 31).

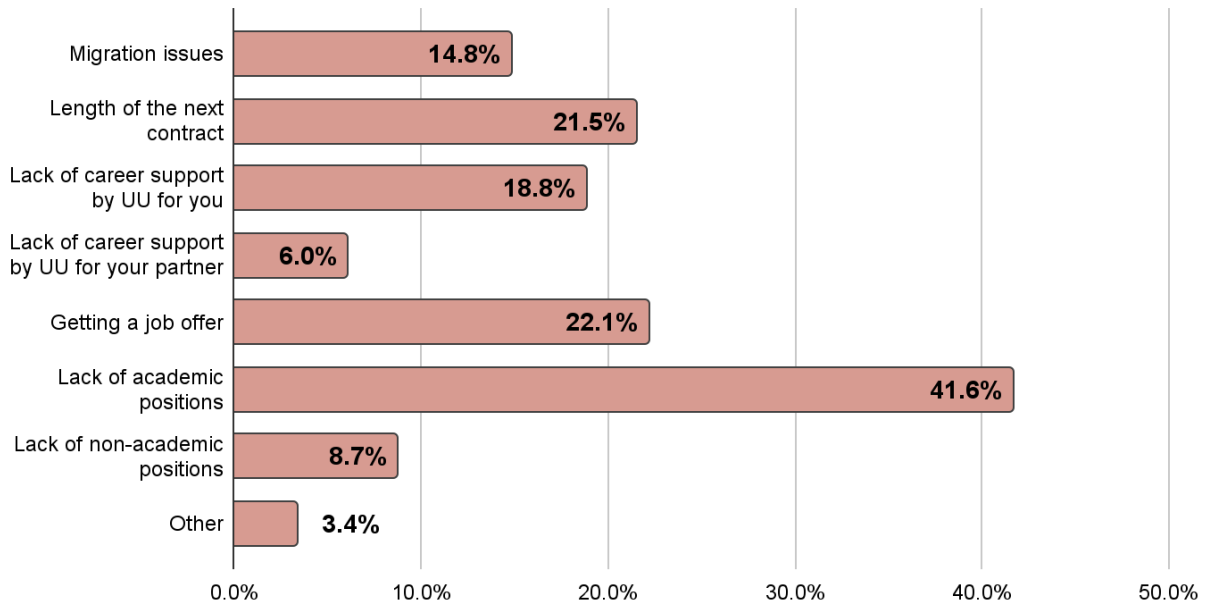


Fig. 31. Obstacles experienced by respondents for staying in Sweden after finishing their researcher programs (n=98).

In consonance with comments in previous answers, the **waiting time for receiving or renewing residence permits** plays a big role as stated by one of the respondents:

*“The current set of rules for permanent residence permits (application only when the current permit expires; a valid contract for at least 18 months at the time when Migrationsverket starts processing your case [...]) makes things extremely complicated and indefinitely extended into the future, let alone the insane waiting times.”*

*“It is very stressful not to get a permanent residency after working for 6 years in Sweden because of short term contracts. I always have the fear of being kicked out of the country.”*

This issue, linked to the experienced **lack of support by UU** to help them (19%) or their partners (6%), impacts the decision of the researchers whether to stay in Sweden or not.

*“[...] The local HR do not want to let you contact the immigration specialists at uni. I've been told many times to contact Immigration myself or that they can't advise me anything. I have never felt so lost in any immigration process.”*

*“[...] department had no experience in helping UU employees' partners with immigration issues. This seems unlikely, so the UU admin staff might need updated training in this area.”*

The main reason that the respondents mention they have to leave Sweden is that there are **better career opportunities** (46%) in other countries, for example, the US, UK, and Germany (Fig. 32). The reason can partially be the fact that some of these countries are English speaking, apart from

being countries with good career opportunities. The other two main reasons for the researchers to move from Sweden are **family reasons** (25%) and **migration issues** (25%).

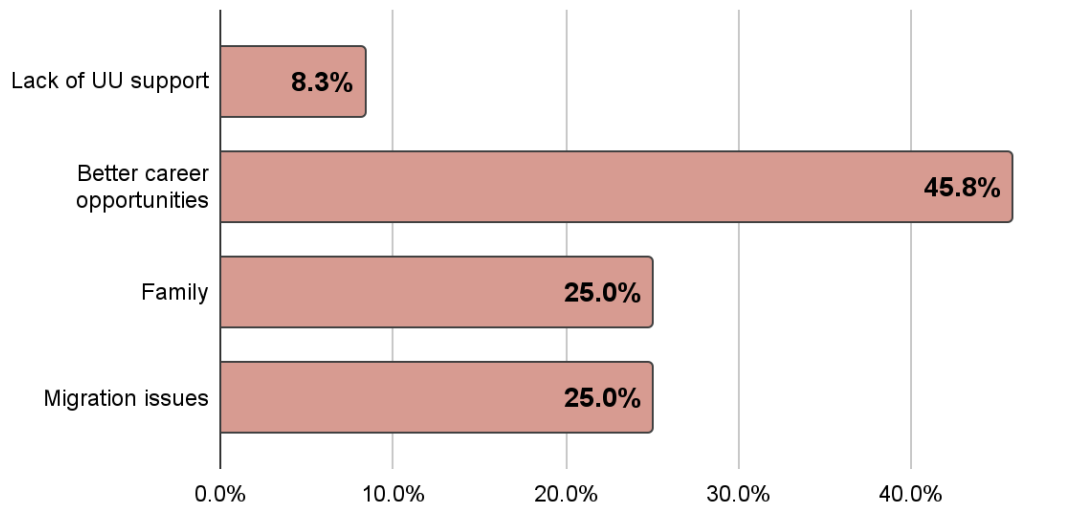


Fig. 32. Reasons reported by researcher respondents for planning on leaving Sweden after finishing their contract (n=49).

*“[...] although I have a permanent position at UU. Partly because unwritten migration laws in Sweden had made it impossible for my original family back in [...] to get visa to visit me and my family here.”*

As mentioned earlier, migration issues for the researchers as well as their families put extra stress on them that is not worth it if the possibilities in their careers are not high.

## 6.4. Conclusions

While the difficult immigration process was the main reason PhD students prefer to leave Sweden, better career opportunities in other countries motivate postdocs and researchers. Nevertheless, PhD students also find many hardships on the way to finding a job in Sweden after finishing their respective programs which makes it uncertain whether they will stay or leave. It is noteworthy that while writing this report, there have been changes in the migration regulations regarding the required length of the contract to acquire a permanent residency.

All the respondents groups mentioned a lack of career support by UU as a reason for leaving Sweden. This influences their chances of getting a job offer in Sweden after finishing their current contracts with UU. There are many helpful units at the university designated for career assistance, however, they are either not introduced to all groups of employees or do not have sufficient staff to be able to handle the requests they receive in good time. It seems the information flow at the right time to the right person at UU does not function as it could, which is the root problem of several mentioned reasons to leave Sweden.

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Considering that much of the funding to educate and train PhDs and postdocs originates from tax and government funds, it can be considered a waste of taxpayers' money that so many of the highly skilled experts trained in Sweden are forced to leave due to a lack of simple procedures to stay and realistic opportunities for a career.

## 7. Executive summary

Most of the respondents to this survey were non-EU/EEA citizens working in the Science and Technology domain at Uppsala University. Most of them have moved to Sweden within the past 10 years.

The majority of respondents, independent of their position, perceived three months as a reasonable maximum waiting time to get or renew a residence permit card as it, for instance, influences research project implementation.

Regarding the issues that respondents faced before coming to Sweden, difficulties in the interactions with the Migration Agency stand up as the most mentioned one. Additionally, the lack of support and knowledge in the subjects relevant to hiring international employees, particularly, in the case of non-EU/EEA employees from the local HR departments at UU were among the most experienced issues by the new PhD students, postdocs and researchers of UU. The latter could be addressed by introducing an online up-to-date checklist that is well-communicated to the newcomers at the very early stages of their recruitment process.

As mentioned by most of the respondents independent of their positions, finding accommodation, opening a bank account and obtaining a social security number comprise the main obstacles to overcome upon their arrival in Sweden, which were accompanied by the lack of provided information and support by the local HR departments. These obstacles add an extra unfair level of stress to the lives of international employees. Furthermore, the long waiting time for the residence permit extension has become a real barrier hindering the non-EU/EEA staff from participating in international research activities that are part of the nature of their academic careers. In addition, the non-EU/EEA employees can be deprived of visiting their families for long times as another consequence of the long waiting time for the extension of the residence permits.

The difficult immigration process and better career opportunities abroad were the leading reasons for the PhD students, postdocs and researchers to decide to leave Sweden at the end of their current roles. Another reason was the lack of career support by UU which influences their chances of getting a job offer, and therefore, staying in Sweden.