# 2025 Scholar Survey

SCHOLARS AT RISK
NETWORK
protection advocacy learning

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# Introduction

**In an effort to evaluate and improve our work, the Scholars at Risk (SAR)[1] offices periodically survey the scholars and practitioners we jointly support with the wider network. In April 2024, we asked scholars and alumni to complete an anonymous survey on their satisfaction with SAR services, their current employment status, and successes and challenges they have faced during and after their SAR placements. The survey was last distributed in 2020.**

133 scholars and practitioners who were actively supported by SAR from September 2023–August 2024 (henceforth referred to as "scholars") and 200 alumni scholars and practitioners (henceforth referred to as "alumni") completed the survey. The response rate for scholars was 57%, and the response rate for alumni was 20%. Because many alumni have completed the survey in the past, in some cases multiple times, the lower response rate was expected for this group.

Survey respondents highlighted the invaluable impact of SAR's services and provided suggestions for how SAR can better support scholars in continuing their careers in safety. The following report highlights these suggestions as we consider the best forms of service provision for at-risk scholars.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Scholars and alumni reported **high levels of satisfaction with SAR**.
- 82% of employed alumni reported **working in higher education**, at least part-time (which is 51% of all respondents).
- Alumni cited **networking and developing strong local language skills** as key to finding career success after their SAR placements end.
- Scholars and alumni advocated for **extending the length of positions** beyond one year. They highlighted the difficulty of adapting to new cultural environments, integrating into their host institutions, and taking meaningful steps towards re-establishing their academic careers in the span of a 12-month placement. (For these reasons, many network members do offer 2-year placements when possible.)
- Survey respondents emphasized that their lack of proficiency in the **host country language** was one of the **primary challenges** they faced after relocating. Scholars and alumni noted that this negatively impacted them both in adjusting to their SAR placements and in finding positions after their SAR placements ended.

1 The survey and results reported here were limited to the scholar and practitioners served by Scholars at Risk, Inc., based at New York University (NYU), and do not include the activities of SAR Europe, based at Maynooth University, Ireland.

# Recommendations

## Based on the key findings, we recommend that SAR, members, partners, and the wider network consider the following recommendations:

- **Seek out new opportunities for scholar professional development**, including identifying new partnerships, providing guidance on the funding landscape for research production and conference participation, and mapping training opportunities in higher education and related professional industries.
- **Build new relationships with local and international language education organizations** to help scholars develop proficiency in host country languages.
- **Offer increased opportunities for scholars to network** with one another and with other professionals in their fields, both within and outside of academia.
- **Encourage network members to continue offering two-year placements** to give scholars more time to adjust and thrive academically.

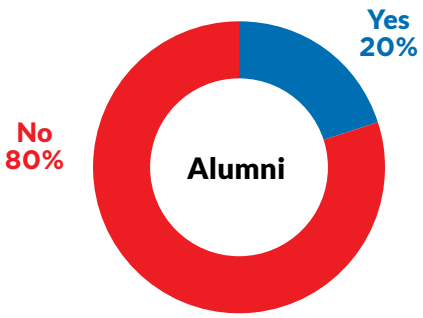
# Demographics

Respondents were asked to provide demographic information including location, gender, and immigration status to help SAR identify patterns or disparities that might inform future programming.

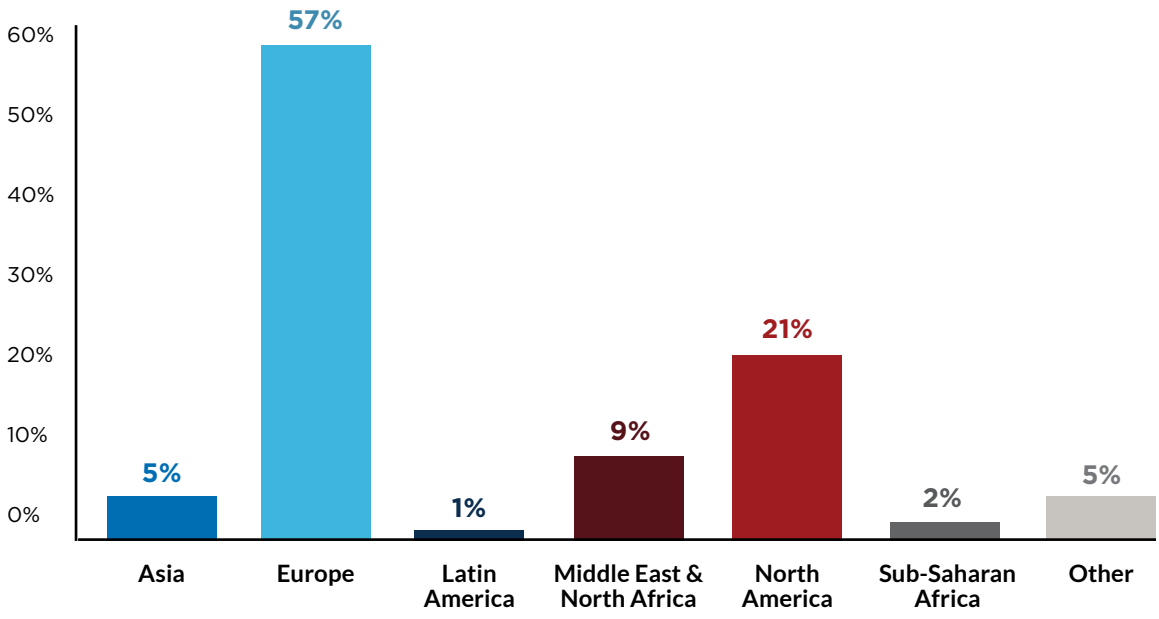
## LOCATION

Most alumni reported being outside of their country of origin. A majority of alumni reported insecurity about their return to their country of origin, noting their inability to continue their academic career in safety. A majority of alumni are located in Europe, which roughly corresponds with the percentage of SAR placements in Europe. In the 2024 fiscal year (September 2023–August 2024), 70% of placements were in Europe and 30% were in North America.

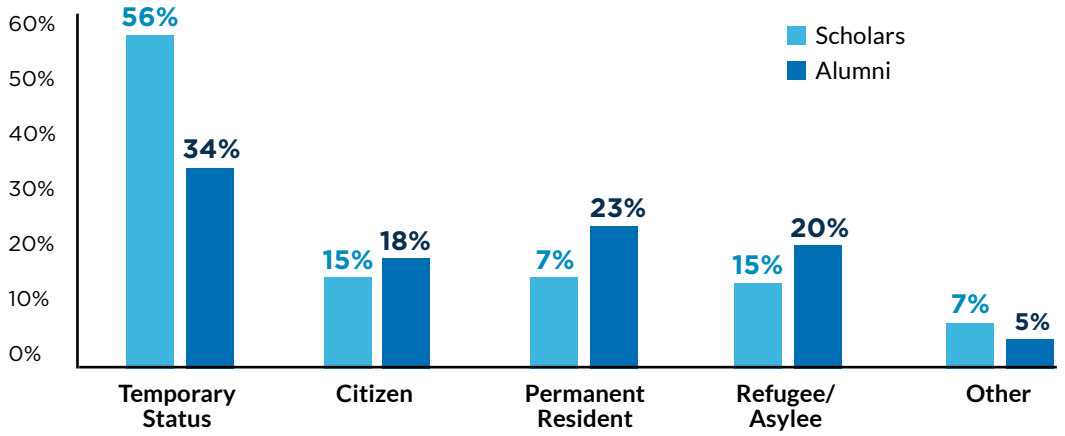
**Are you currently in your country of origin?**




**Alumni: Where are you located?**



**What is your legal status in your current location?**

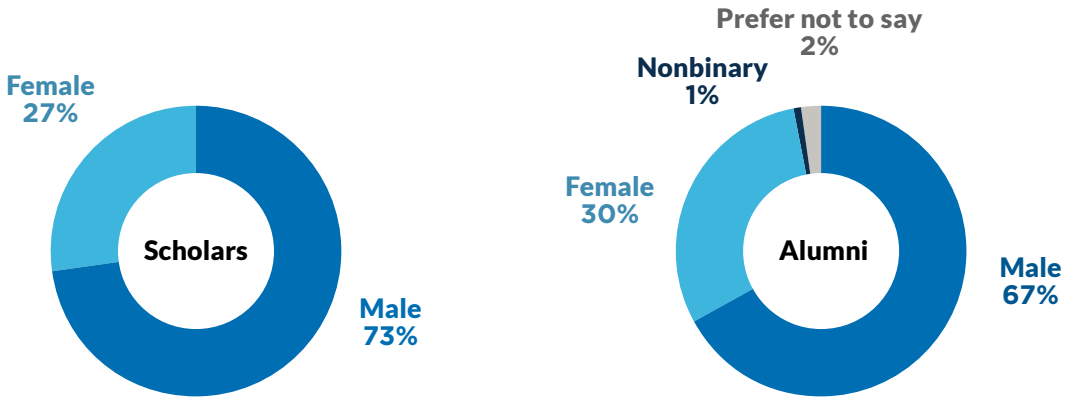



A majority of scholars have temporary legal status in their current location. Alumni reported a higher percentage of permanent status than scholars. This is likely linked to the longer time in their host country.

## GENDER

The majority of survey respondents were male, which mirrors the relative gender balance in SAR's applicant and open case load.

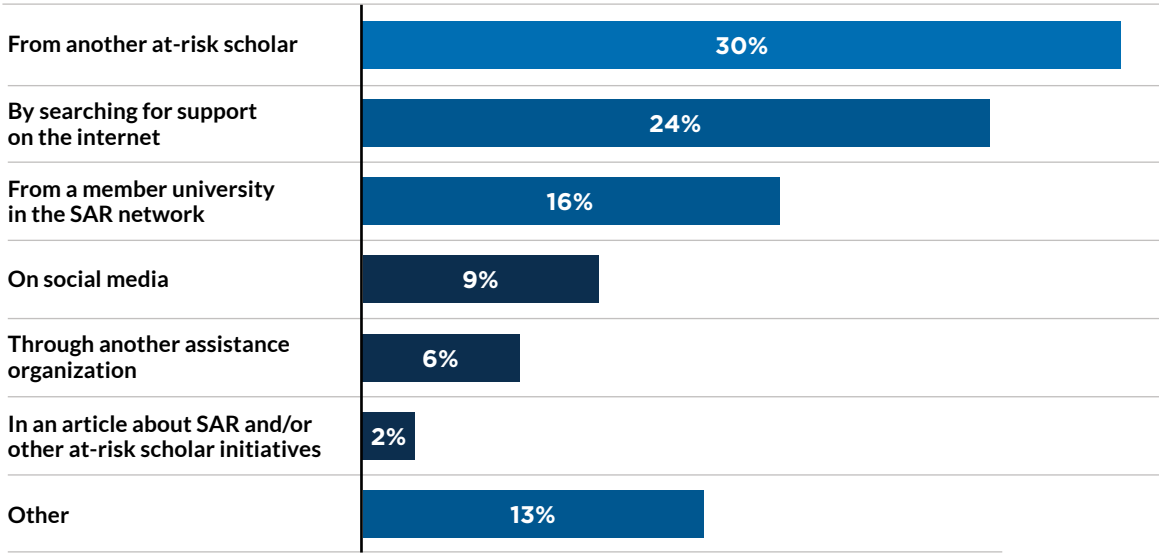
**What is your gender?**



# SAR Application Process

To better understand how scholars get connected with SAR, we added a question to this year's survey on how they learned about the organization. The most common way scholars learned about Scholars at Risk was from other at-risk scholars, followed by searching for support on the internet. Most respondents who selected "other" specified that they learned about SAR from a colleague.

**Scholars: How did you learn of Scholars at Risk?**

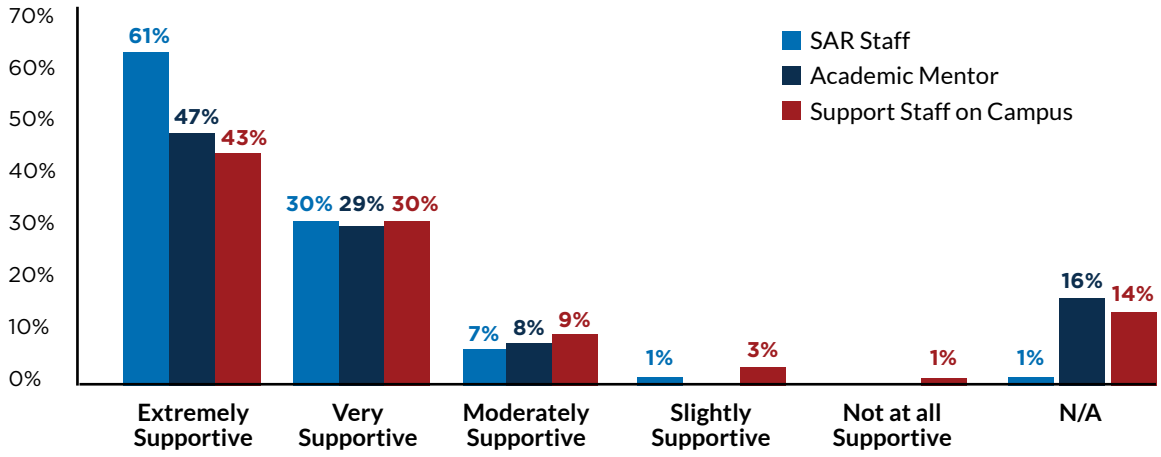


# Satisfaction with SAR

Scholars and alumni reported high levels of satisfaction with SAR. 89% of scholars and 82% of alumni reported being either extremely or somewhat satisfied with SAR's support. Satisfaction rates were consistent across gender. Satisfaction increased slightly from 2020, when 83% of scholars and 76% of alumni reported being either extremely or somewhat satisfied with SAR's support. In addition to reports of satisfaction in 2025, 86% of scholars and 80% of alumni either strongly or somewhat agreed that SAR's support has been essential in helping them continue their academic work.

In particular, scholars and alumni noted the professionalism, respect, empathy, and timely follow up by SAR staff as contributing factors to their satisfaction. Several respondents shared that it was meaningful simply to know that there was a community of people trying to help them.

**Scholars: How supportive have the following individuals been for your academic career in safety?**




Some alumni expressed dissatisfaction that SAR was unable to secure a placement for them. When SAR opens a scholar's case for placement assistance, we use our best efforts over the course of up to 12 months to arrange a temporary position at a higher education institution for the scholar. In a small number of cases, SAR is unfortunately unable to identify a placement after 12 months of outreach efforts.

> "This organization saved my life."

> "SAR network is the main reason I am where I am right now. The staff are so friendly, very supportive. The program is so helpful in surviving in an environment where you can not survive without any network and support."

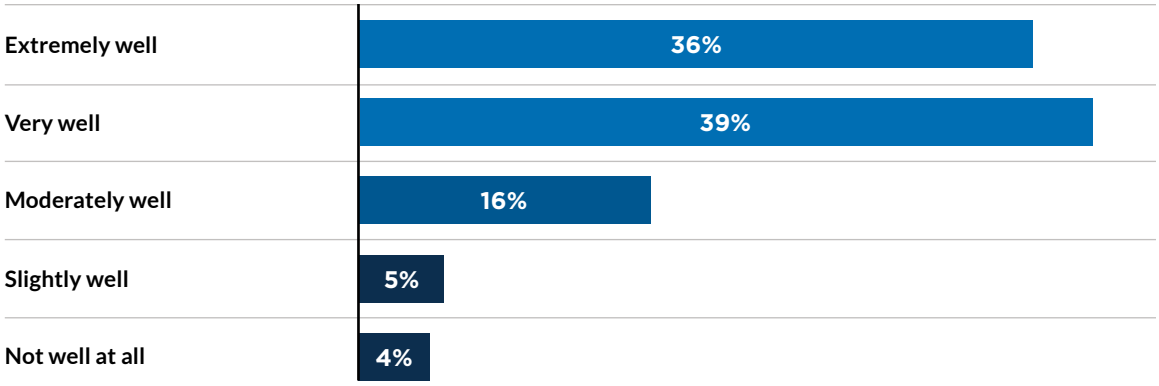
# SAR Services

To help us improve our support of at-risk scholars, we asked survey respondents about their awareness of existing SAR services and their suggestions for additional services.

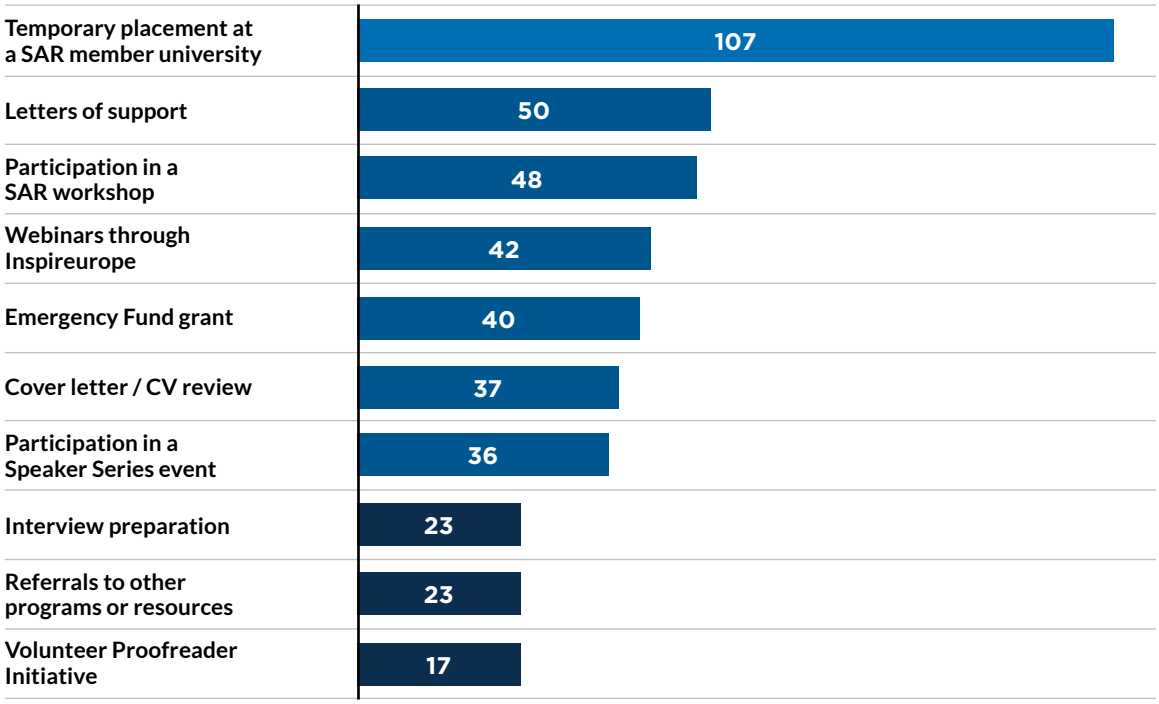
## AWARENESS OF EXISTING SERVICES

Most scholars reported that SAR advertises its services well. Despite that, many respondents were not aware of the full list of advisory services available to them, such as scholar workshops and cover letter and CV review via the Volunteer Proofreader Initiative. In 2024, SAR created a menu of services for member institutions and scholars that we hope will increase awareness of the breadth of services we offer.

**In your opinion, how well does SAR staff advertise the types of services available to you?**




**Which of the following SAR services were you previously aware of?**




*Based on 126 total respondents to this question*

## REQUESTS FOR ADDITIONAL SERVICES

To better understand how SAR can expand its services, we asked scholars and alumni what additional advisory support they would like SAR to offer in general and what SAR could do specifically to bolster their academic career goals. Notably, when answering both questions, scholars and alumni raised the importance of gaining access to networking opportunities, immigration support, and solutions for longer term stability in academia beyond temporary SAR placements across the SAR network. Many scholars also requested advice on transitioning to careers outside of academia.

**Top suggestions for additional advisory services from SAR:**

- Share relevant job postings
- Facilitate networking opportunities
- Advise on immigration matters

**Top suggestions for academic career support:**

- Financial support for attending conferences and workshops, enrolling in language classes, and conducting research
- Longer SAR placements
- Networking opportunities
- Immigration support
- Support in finding more long-term or permanent positions

To help address scholar requests for additional career support beyond individualized case management, SAR has worked closely with academic associations in the network. Select associations have offered scholars free association membership, connections to research institutes, conference stipends, and participation in mentorship programs.

> "One year placement is too little for any substantial academic advancement as half of the time goes into settlement in a new location. This needs to be at least two years."

> "I have the feeling that the connection to SAR fades after resettlement. Most of the grateful academics like me would be ready to support others, if arrangements were made."

> "SAR could think of a sort of mentoring program to encourage previous SAR [scholars] who have achieved some steady steps (success) in rebuilding their career and are willing to participate in the program to mentor some new scholars willing to do that. I found my last experience with this very useful for the colleague who agreed to talk to me."

# Placement Challenges & Supports

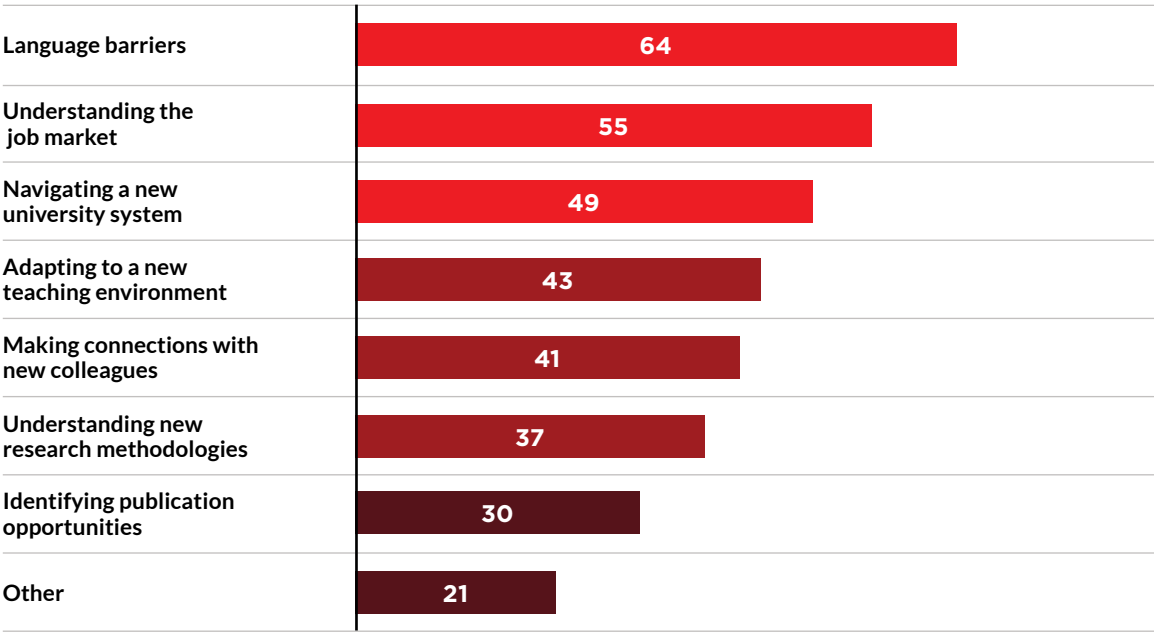
Scholars cited a number of challenges adjusting professionally and personally in their host countries. Language barriers, navigating a new academic system and job market, immigration matters, and housing were among the top challenges that scholars reported.

Scholars shared that supportive staff and faculty mentors at their host institutions helped them as they worked to overcome these challenges. Learning the local language, building social connections, and being patient with the adjustment process were also frequently cited as being helpful.

## ACADEMIC

Language barriers were the top academic challenge reported by scholars, followed by understanding the job market, navigating a new university system, and adapting to a new teaching environment. Most respondents who selected "Other" clarified that they have not yet begun a SAR placement.

**Scholars: What were the primary *academic* challenges you faced when relocating to a new setting?**

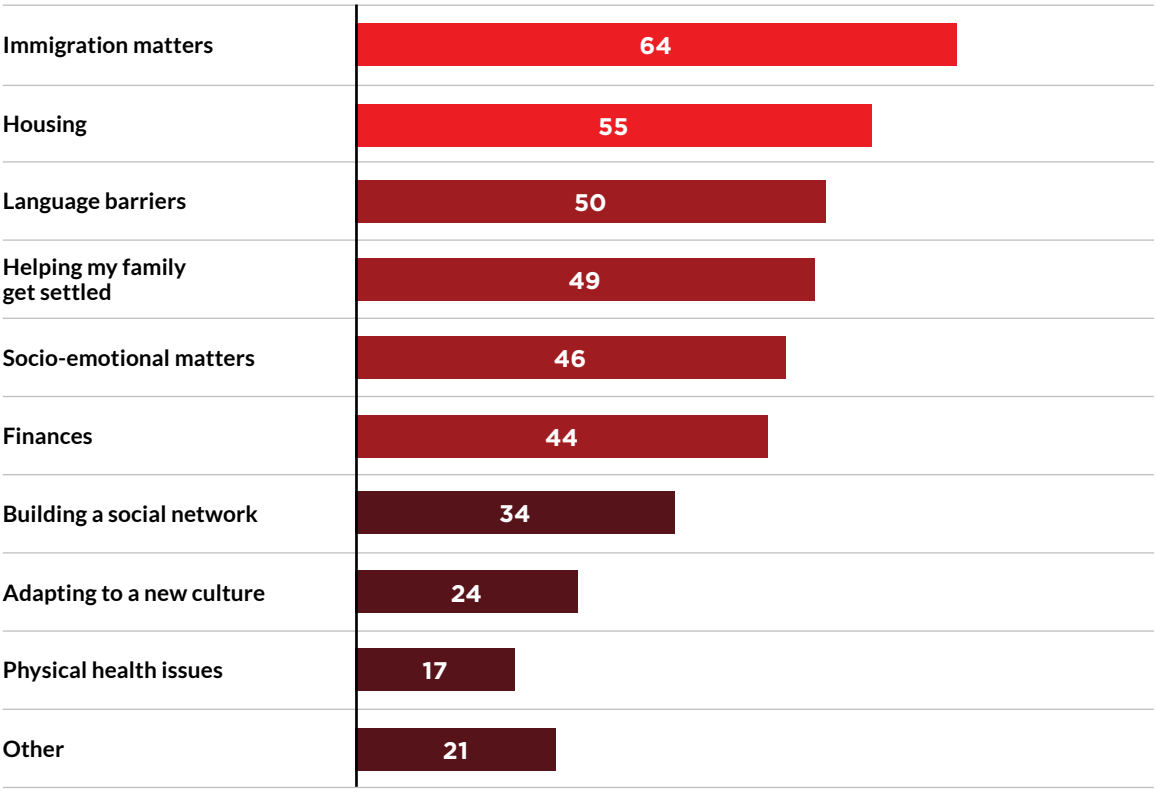



*Based on 124 total respondents to this question*

## PERSONAL

Immigration matters were the top personal challenge reported by scholars when relocating to a new setting. Housing, language barriers, getting family settled, socio-emotional matters, and finances were also frequently selected.

**Scholars: What were the primary *personal* challenges you faced when relocating to a new setting?**



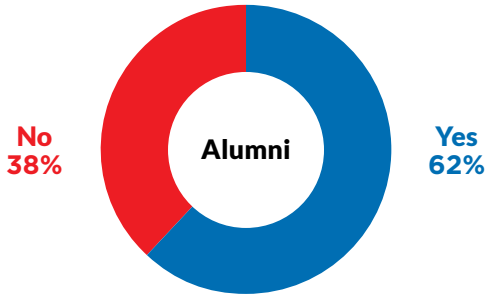

*Based on 124 total respondents to this question*

# Job Search after SAR

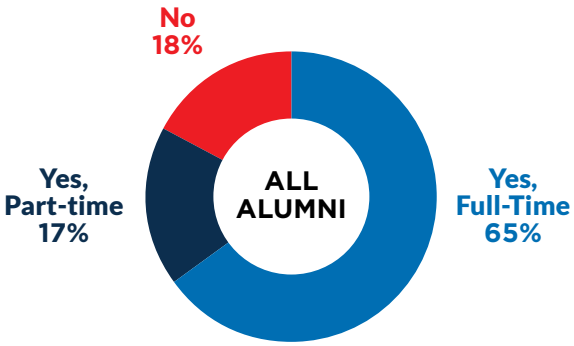
## EMPLOYMENT

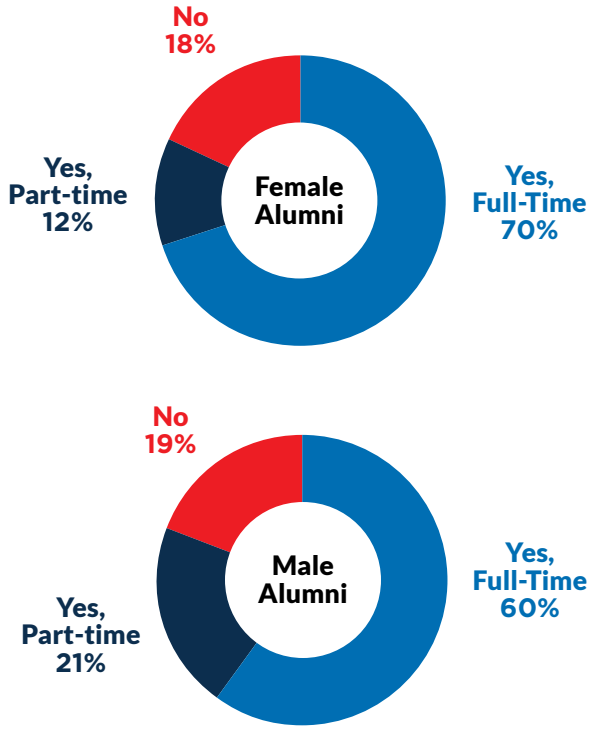
62% of alumni reported that they are currently employed. This was consistent across gender. Of those who are employed, **82% reported that they are employed within academia at least part-time**. While male and female alumni reported similar rates of employment within academia, female alumni reported higher rates of full-time academic employment. Alumni outside their country of origin reported slightly higher levels of employment than scholars in their country of origin, and alumni in Europe reported higher full-time academic employment than alumni in North America. It is worth noting, however, that the sample size of scholars in Europe was more than double that in North America.

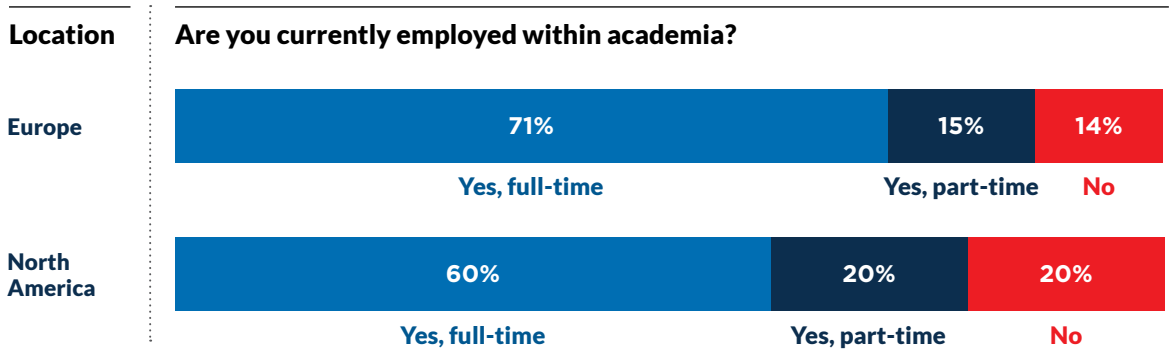
**Are you currently employed?**




**If currently employed, are you currently employed within academia?**

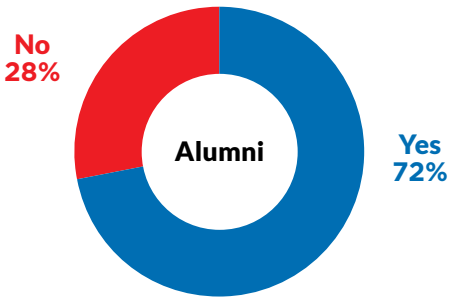





Over 70% of alumni reported facing barriers in continuing their academic work. Lack of proficiency in the host country language was by the far the most commonly cited barrier. A lack of relevant positions to apply to, holding a foreign degree, visa/immigration status, ageism, racism, and mental health challenges were also frequently mentioned.

**Have you faced barriers in continuing your academic work?**




> I have encountered numerous obstacles while searching for academic employment. Adjusting to a different academic environment, mastering a second foreign language, and starting a new life from scratch have all contributed to the difficulties I have faced in my quest for academic work in a new country. I have also struggled to apply my expertise outside of academia, which has limited my employment opportunities. Additionally, the highly competitive nature of academia while searching for research positions, moving from one project to another, has been a significant challenge for me. Finally, the stress and trauma from my past experiences in my home country, where I was imprisoned due to my academic studies, and the realization that I can no longer return, have also had a negative impact on my mental well-being."

## ADVICE TO OTHER SCHOLARS

When invited to share advice for other at-risk scholars embarking on new academic careers in safety, both scholars and alumni emphasized the importance of networking. Scholars also advised asking for help, learning the local language, and maintaining hope and optimism. Alumni strongly emphasized the importance of learning the local language – this was by far the most common response. Several alumni also advised looking for jobs outside of academia.

> Attending workshops and conferences is key for networking. I make sure to dive into discussions, pose questions, and share my insights to make an impression. During coffee breaks, I'm always equipped with my business cards to exchange with new acquaintances. Once the event wraps up, I make a point to connect with the people I've met, bringing up specific details from our conversations to remind them of our interaction. I also follow up by engaging with them on social media, liking or commenting on their posts. To keep the connection alive, I reach out during various events, keeping the professional relationship active and meaningful."

> There is more to life in safety than an academic profession, it is possible to transfer skills gained in academia into other spheres due to the complexities of getting full-time employment in academia in a foreign land. There are many sectors that are not classified as academia but where an academic or scholar could add value, especially in the civil society sector but also in industries that are having to negotiate their future in a digital world."

> Do not forget about the fact that although you are an at-risk scholar you are a scholar. It is very important to remind yourself of the second part 'you are a scholar' and you are equipped with many qualifications that might have been overlooked due to what you have been through, but they are real and should be seen and acknowledged. Supports provided by SAR and other supporting bodies are essential but these are temporary and meant to help you with getting started and gradually becoming independent. Therefore, try to build a good network, build the required capacity for your field and actively strive to find your own way and bring things under control."

# Conclusion

The 2025 Scholar and Alumni Survey illuminates the value of SAR's work creating academic opportunities of refuge for at-risk scholars, while also underlining areas where SAR, member universities, and partner organizations could offer more targeted advice and resources. **Scholars and alumni expressed gratitude for the support SAR staff and member universities provide, in some cases describing placements as "lifesaving."** In addition, they shared advice on how to make such support even more sustainable. In particular, scholars and alumni requested **longer placements**, more **opportunities to network** amongst each other and with the wider academic community, and additional **resources to learn local languages**. SAR will continue to advertise existing programming that address these issues, including our work with associations, and our workshops for scholars. We will also continue to advocate for longer placements. In addition, we hope to work with the wider network to identify and expand the array of professional development opportunities available for scholars. Moreover, we will share these results with the wider network to ensure that scholars' suggestions and needs are more widely understood as we create stronger opportunities for scholars to continue their academic work in safety. We are grateful to SAR scholars and alumni for sharing their vital perspectives with us through this survey.

> I would like to express my gratitude to SAR for their invaluable support in advancing my career and protecting academic freedom. The opportunities provided by SAR have not only enabled me to continue my scholarly pursuits but have also empowered me to advocate for human rights and academic liberty. I am committed to contributing meaningfully to the academic community and leveraging my experiences to promote the values of SAR worldwide."

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