

SULF:s kongress 2024

Migration is a labor issue

International staff, including PhD candidates, at Swedish higher education institutions have faced mounting obstacles in their work due to changes in migration policy, and the resulting insecurities regarding their residence status.

These obstacles include new requirements for extending current residence permits or obtaining permanent residency, such as proof of financial support for a certain period and time-bound residency in the country. In 2021, new requirements were introduced for PhD graduates to obtain permanent residency, including income requirements. Another significant challenge concerns the extension of current residence permits, which is often processed with considerable delay, preventing the applicant from travelling outside Sweden in the meantime, such as to attend a conference or do field work.

Uncertainties regarding residency status leave international staff, particularly PhD candidates and early career researchers, more vulnerable to victimisation and unequal treatment. These migration-related hurdles have profound implications for both academic freedom and equality in the work environment within Swedish universities.

These obstacles not only impact the general quality of life and long-term career prospects for international staff, but also have more immediate negative effects on well-being, workflow, research outputs, and access to educational or professional development opportunities.

There is a clear and pressing need for greater support to international staff in navigating immigration-related matters that directly affect their work capacity. SULF has previously determined that providing such support is beyond the capacity and expertise of our member service. Then, SULF should address this need in other ways: by pressuring the higher education institutions to provide adequate support, or through third-party options.

Taking a clear stance on migration-related support, or even offering this in some form as a membership benefit, holds considerable potential to recruit new SULF members.

The SULF Doctoral Candidate Association therefore submits that the Congress decide:

- that SULF shall highlight uncertainty of migration status as a significant work environment challenge and a source of vulnerability for international university teachers and researchers;
- that SULF shall, in its political efforts, advocate for clear pathways to permanent residency for all university teachers and researchers;
- that SULF shall continue to highlight in the public debate the discrepancies between migration law as written and the lived experiences of our members;
- that SULF, acting in its own capacity and/or through negotiation platforms such as Saco-s, shall advocate for universities to take responsibility for ensuring support on migration issues is available to international staff;
- that SULF shall explore the possibility of offering, as a member benefit, facilitated or discounted access to external legal support in migration-related issues;
- that SULF shall allocate funding to employ an additional full-time specialist in migration law in order to help meet the high demand for individual assistance from its members.

We wrote this motion in English, which is the main working language of the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association. Below is our proposal for decision in Swedish.

SULF:s doktorandförening hemställer därför:

- att SULF ska synliggöra att osäkerhet kring migrationsstatus är en betydande arbetsmiljöutmaning och en sårbarhetsfaktor för universitetslärare och forskare med utländsk bakgrund;
- att SULF, i sitt politiska arbete, ska verka för tydliga vägar till permanent uppehållstillstånd för alla universitetslärare och forskare;
- att SULF i den offentliga debatten ska fortsätta lyfta fram skillnaderna mellan migrationslagstiftningen som den är skriven och våra medlemmars upplevda erfarenheter;
- att SULF, inom den egna verksamheten och/eller genom förhandlingsorganisationer såsom Saco-s, ska verka för att lärosätena tar ansvar för att anställda med utländsk bakgrund har tillgång till sakkunnigt stöd i migrationsfrågor;
- att SULF ska undersöka möjligheten att som medlemsförmån erbjuda kontaktvägar till, eller rabatt på, extern juridisk hjälp i migrationsfrågor;
- att SULF ska avsätta medel för att anställa ytterligare en heltidsanställd specialist i migrationsrätt för att hjälpa till att möta den höga efterfrågan på individuell hjälp från sina medlemmar.

Motionen undertecknas för SULF:s doktorandförenings styrelse av:
Mohamed Al-Sabri, Chairperson