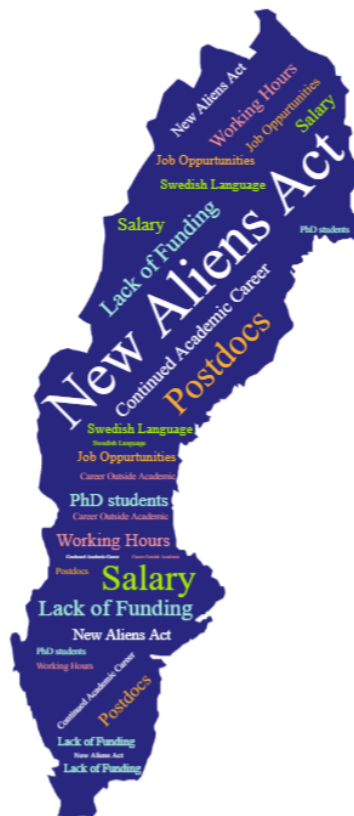


The Aliens in Academia

Or the residence process for doctoral students and how the Aliens Act affects them



About

If you have questions

Please contact SFS-DK at doktorand@sfs.se

About SFS-DK

The doctoral students committee (SFS-DK) in the Swedish National Union of Students (SFS), represents the around 17.000 doctoral students in Sweden at national level. SFS-DK is working on all issues that concerns doctoral students, their conditions, and the Swedish doctoral education in general. Through SFS, SFS-DK is responsible for advocating the doctoral student perspective on the governmental processes, laws and regulations that concern doctoral students.

About SULF-DCA

The SULF Doctoral Candidate Association (SULF-DCA) is the PhD candidate association of SULF, a politically and religiously independent labor union. SULF-DCA is working for approximately 3,450 PhD members by monitoring labor issues, employment terms, admissions, equality, the post-doctorate labor market and the quality of the PhD education.

About the data

These stories have been gathered through use of an open ended form titled "*The residence permit process*", created by SFS-DK and SULF-DCA in January 2022. The form focused on gathering qualitative data and individual stories of people directly affected by the Aliens Act. The form was distributed among doctoral students via email and social media. We received over 50 answers within a week, which were then analyzed and used to write up the information presented in this report.

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Introduction

This report is named *The Aliens in Academia* as it centers around how the new migration legislation *the Aliens Act* [1], affects doctoral students [12]. Alien in this sense means a foreigner, as those affected by the act are. However, we chose this title as it points to a deeper underlying issue. The employment conditions in academia, especially for doctoral students and early career researchers, are very vulnerable and indeed seem alien in comparison to most other professions. If you are unfamiliar with the academic career path, we refer to appendix A.

Since the summer of 2021, the new maintenance requirements introduced by the Aliens Act have been discussed as problematic for Sweden's attractiveness as a research and innovation nation. As representatives of doctoral students and other public actors have raised awareness on this issue, both industry and research funding agencies have expressed their shared worry [3, 4, 5]. In creating this report, we SFS-DK and SULF-DCA aimed to bring new voices to the debate, as so far no collection of examples or stories showing how the maintenance requirements become particularly problematic for doctoral students has been created. This is what you will find on the following pages. Here 9 doctoral students shares what the Aliens Act has done to them. We are however only scraping the top of the iceberg, and there are many more stories like these. For a more statistical approach to these questions we refer to the report *A sustainable migration policy for academia and Sweden* [6].

The maintenance requirements and the doctoral students career paths have turned out to be an ill matched combination. For those who continue in academia, they likely continue on short term contracts. For those who leave academia, the lack of permanent residency presents a number of other problems. Employment as a researcher, even within the industry sector, can be time limited, some companies only employ those with a permanent residency, and yet other companies might use the lack of a permanent residence permit against a candidate when negotiating the terms of the contract. The lack of a permanent residence permit makes the individuals affected more vulnerable, it limits their career options and it limits the Sweden's abilities to attract the qualified workers it need.



Pil Maria Saugmann

Chair of SFS-DK 2021-2022



Paulina Rajkowska

Chair of SULF-DCA 2021-2022

Summary

The collection of stories we present here, shows how doctoral students are affected by the new migration legislation, also known as the Aliens Act. We present 9 examples, but we could have easily included many more. Each example in this report is unique, in the sense that it someone's personal story. However, at the same time they are not unique at all, as the experiences described here are shared by many others.

The stories we share, come from individuals who have moved their lives and homes from all over the world to Sweden. They show, that while you conduct your doctoral studies, life happens. You might fall in love, buy a flat, and have children, but it is also likely that you or your close ones get sick, or that someone you care about might die. While all examples are kept anonymous, the identities behind them are known by the authors of this report. If you wish to know more about why the examples are anonymous, please read out appendix B.

In the examples we see how the maintenance requirement is an intrinsic hindrance for doctoral students to obtain permanent residency. We see how this affects the individuals while they are doctoral students, but also in their future career planning. Many express that they have to choose between an academic career or a permanent residency. The examples we share come from universities all over Sweden, and from all kinds of fields.

- When the outcome of your residence permit application depends on chance such as the processing time at Migrationsverket, is perceived as a legally uncertain process.
- Time used on waiting on decisions affects the individuals both personally and professionally.
- The combination of the maintenance requirement and an employment as a doctoral student and researcher, just doesn't match, as for this type of employment, permanent employment is not an option.

Recommendation

If one wishes to ensure that Sweden remains attractive for international research talents, within and outside of academia, it is necessary that these individuals are given the same opportunity as others on the Swedish labour market to establish themselves in Sweden and plan their life long term. Therefore we recommend that, an exception from the maintenance requirement is introduced for doctoral students and researchers.

Andrea, Chalmers University of Technology, Engineering

Andrea was a doctoral student at Chalmers University of Technology and graduated in January 2022. She is the only one of our examples who has a permanent residency. She obtained it only after she signed a new work contract, even though she applied for it when she became eligible, more than half a year before the new legislation was enforced.

As you will read below, Andrea's story shows the vulnerability that comes with not having a permanent residence permit when you graduate. She experienced that some employers used her lack of permanent residency as leverage in salary negotiations.


When Andrea graduated she had been employed for 5 years by Chalmers University of Technology. She had spend around 16 months at various points waiting for the Migrationsverket to make a decision about her cases, during which she was not able to leave Sweden for professional or personal reasons.

Residence process

1. Feb 2017 - Feb 2018: Temporary residence permit (12 months) (1.5 months processing)
2. Feb 2018 - Feb 2020: Temporary residence permit (24 months) (1 month days processing)
3. Feb 2020 - Feb 2021: Temporary residence permit (12 months) (2 months processing)
4. Jan 2021: Applied for permanent residency (12 months processing)

Andrea's story

Andrea started a PhD in February 2017 in engineering. As her work continued and she fulfilled the criteria for a permanent residence, she sent in an application before the new regulations were known. Unfortunately, due to long processing time, she did not receive a permanent residency in time. The year-long waiting time created a lot of stress that affected her research, including planned publications needed for her PhD. She had to search for jobs during the last month of her doctoral studies, and had to accept the first offer just to feel safe about the possibility of staying in Sweden. She is one of the few cases that managed to secure a contract, and get a permanent residency in the past half a year. Nonetheless, she experienced that lack of a permit at the time of job application had negative consequences in the negotiation process. Getting a permanent contract with a



company was difficult and she had a very weak position during the interviews. Some companies offered lower salaries although Andrea is more than qualified and has a relevant and interesting resume.

Andrea says that all of this was massively disappointing. Sweden thus far has given her a positive experience up to the introduction of these new rules. She had many plans to settle in Sweden and pursue a career based on her education. She has never before felt like a stranger here but now that is gone. She feels unwelcome and not as valuable as before. She spent a large amount of time in research positions with low salaries and was looking forward to a stable residency that would help her feel safe and help her develop in her field. Andrea never thought of finding a job in another country but when the new rules came into power she started to think that maybe she made the wrong decision coming to Sweden.

Mat, Kungliga Tekniska Högskolen, Engineering

Mat is a doctoral student at Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan (KTH), who has lived and worked in Sweden for more than eight years, first as master student and then, since November 2016, as a doctoral student.

Mat has been eligible for permanent residency since the fall of 2020, but could not apply for permanent residency before the fall of 2021, by which time the legislation had changed and Mat was no longer eligible due to the new maintenance requirement. By the time he graduates, the length of Mat's employment as a doctoral student will have been 6 years and 3 months, where 1 year is due to departmental duties, and 1.3 years is due to a combination of sick leaves and representational tasks.

Prior to his doctoral studies, Mat did a master in Sweden, financed by Svenska Institutet. He has so far held 9 different temporary residence permits (four as a master student, one as a job seeker, and four as a doctoral student) and spend around 30 months waiting for the Migrationsverket to make a decision about his cases, during which he was not able to leave Sweden for professional or personal reasons.

Residence permits as a doctoral student

1. Nov 2016 - Oct 2017: Temporary residence permit (3 months processing)
2. Nov 2017 - Oct 2019: Temporary residence permit (2 months processing)
3. Nov 2019 - Oct 2021: Temporary residence permit (2 months processing)
4. Oct 2021: Applied for permanent residency. **No decision yet**

Mat's story

Before coming to Sweden, Mat viewed Sweden as a country that strongly promotes knowledge and innovation as well as a leading county in his field of interest, sustainable energy. This was a deciding factor in his decision to pursue his masters degree at KTH. Giving his prior educational excellence, leadership and work experience, Mat was awarded a very competitive scholarship by Svenska Institutet. Though initially hesitant about pursuing a career in research, given the unstable conditions, when Sweden in 2014 made it possible for doctoral students to obtain permanent residency after 4 years of studies (like any other relevant career paths), he felt that these conditions had improved. One of the reasons Mat is conducting a PhD in Sweden is because of this stability.

Mat did his master thesis with a Swedish company, who offered him a job, but he decided to accept a doctoral student position instead. He maintained a strong

collaboration with industry (which partially funds his research) throughout his doctoral studies. Mat also works closely with leading researchers in his field abroad, which requires him to travel to conduct his research. That was not always possible due to the long waiting times for his residence permit. The wait also forced him to turn down an invitation from a leading research group in his field and hindered further developing that collaboration.

After three years of doctoral studies, Mat applied for a one year extension of his residence permit, knowing that by then he would be able to apply for permanent residency. Migrationsverket gave a two year extension, and, when contacted, they recommended him not to object to it. As one can only apply for a new residence permit 14 days before the current one expires, this meant that Mat would first be able to apply for permanent residence in Oct 2021. At the time, though he found it frustrating, Mat accepted it, and was hopeful that it would be an inconvenience that would only delay a permanent residency permit by a year.

During the spring of 2021, Mat started planning to buy a flat and plan for his post PhD life. This also included discussions with leading researcher abroad to formulate joint funding applications and attract research funding, which would allow him to continue his academic career. Then the new maintenance requirement was introduced and suddenly, Mat could no longer fulfil the requirements to apply for permanent residency. This had a significant negative impact on Mat both professionally and personally.

Professionally, Mat is near the end of his PhD and the required focus and attention to write his thesis was significantly affected by the high level of stress and anxiety caused by changes to the Aliens Act. This has significantly impacted his work outputs which also impacted his collaborators. Furthermore, Mat has had to pause his plans to apply for funding for a joint funding application with a group of Swedish industry partners and international research collaborators.

At the moment, despite his desire to stay in Sweden, Mat feels a great sense of instability. He feels forced to choose one of two undesired options: either pursue his ambition in a career in research and innovation and risk an instability in his living conditions that will significantly hinder his long term planning, or quit his life-long dream and ambition he studied for and go for other jobs that give him the possibility to obtain permanent residency and thus enough stability to start a family in Sweden.

A third option he has is to pursue his dream career outside of Sweden where living conditions are more stable and secure. Despite his excellency, the scholarships he has been granted by the Swedish state and his prolific work in a topic of such high importance, he is not even given the same opportunities other people get when choosing industry and immediate work. In his case, education and idealism for innovation and future possibilities in Sweden has caused professional and personal suffering.

Sheela, Gothenburg University, Medicine

Sheela's story

Sheela has been a doctoral student since 2016 and is planning to graduate in June 2023. Before moving to Sweden in 2016, Sheela lived in Italy 2008-2016. In total, she has lived in the European Union for 14 years.

Sheela became eligible for permanent residency in 2020, two months after she got her newest temporary residence permit. However the Swedish regulation is such that one cannot apply for a new residence permit earlier than 14 days prior to the current one expiring. In the meantime, the new maintenance requirement has been enforced, and Sheela no longer fulfills the requirements.

When Sheela graduates she will have lived in Sweden for more than six years. Sheela has spent around a year waiting for Migrationsverket to make decisions at different points in time. During this periods she was unable to leave the country for personal or professional reasons.


Residence permits

1. Jun 2016-Jun 2020: Four different temporary residence permits. (3 months processing)
2. Jun 2020-Dec 2021: Temporary residence permit (7 months processing)
3. Dec 2021: Applied for long term residence permit **No decision yet**

Sheela's story

Sheela began her PhD in 2016 in medicine. She immediately encountered problems due to her initial supervisor. They wrote a letter to Migrationsverket containing an arbitrary graduation day that was not agreed upon. After the incident, she changed universities and supervisors. The relationship between a doctoral student and their supervisor is very uneven; international students in particular depend on them for many forms of documentation. Supervisors can use this to exert power over their students. This also means doctoral students might struggle with bringing up any other problems with their employment as a supervisor can hold the needed documentation hostage. While this is clearly illegal it happens nonetheless.

Sheela faced terrible mental health consequences. She feels unsafe about her future as her life choices seem to be dictated by a residence permit not by what she would like to do. Despite her troubles, Sheela also volunteers her time as a doctoral student representative in different committees. Even in these organiza-



tions, support has been very limited as students are afraid to speak up publicly and demand action from more senior people at the university.

Beside the mental health problems, she is facing similar personal limitations as other students. She cannot travel while waiting for any permit: her family is Albanian so she cannot travel to see them because she is afraid she won't be able to come back. Furthermore, her partner lives in yet another country and she can't travel to visit him either. She is 30 years old and cannot make any future plans to create a family. She doesn't want to risk being forced to leave Sweden with her kids to get their residence permit as it could be traumatizing. She decided to wait with having children, but this is also making her upset. For women wanting children, age is an obvious limitation. Additionally Sheela feels like she is contributing to society in Sweden but that the same society is leaving her behind.

Magda, Umeå University, Natural Science

Magda is an industrial doctoral student at Umeå University and is planning to graduate in June 2023. Her education is done in collaboration with an industrial partner with strong connections to the Swedish labor market. When Magda graduates she has worked in Swedish industry for 5 years.

Already now Magda would have been eligible for permanent residency, as she lived and worked in Swedish industry for four years, however due to the new maintenance requirement, Magda is not eligible for permanent residency.

Residence permits

1. Jan 2018 - Jan 2020: Temporary residence permit (6 months processing);
2. Jan 2020 - Jan 2022: Temporary residence permit (1 month processing);
3. Jan 2022 for permanent residency. **No decision yet**

Magda's story

Magda started her PhD in 2018. Right away, even her first residence permit suffered from long processing time. The application process took 6 months and her supervisors had to start the lab work without her. They also had to call Migrationsverket nearly every day to understand what else they needed to do to facilitate the process. When Magda finally arrived she had to work on a very tight schedule to catch up. Now, when she graduates, unless something changes, she will be stuck in the loop of bureaucratic processes and it might affect her possibility to stay in the country to look for a job. Ironically, her PhD is an industrial one and the intention was for her to continue at one of the Swedish State Agencies (replace employees who will retire). As these positions do not pop up in the job market so often, she will need some time to wait, which will be difficult, if an already existing working contract is a prerequisite for any kind of permit. Although she spent 5 years preparing to support the Swedish state, she might be denied that very chance. Knowing her future is bound to Sweden she also began making plans for the future. Magda and her partner, who is a Swedish citizen, plan to marry, but it is still not clear what they should do after her permit expires. Migrationsverket only allows an option to "apply from outside Sweden"; the same will apply to their children. Magda will have to travel with the newborns to apply for their residence permit. Currently, she is waiting for the decision from Migrationsverket on her application for the permanent residence permit, and she has no travel documents, hence she cannot leave the country. This created a catch-22 scenario which also inhibits the possibility of any long term planning.

Sid, Linnéuniversitet, Natural Science

Sid is a doctoral student at Linnéuniversitet, who has been working in Sweden for more than four and a half years and graduated in September 2021. He was employed first as a doctoral student, then, after his defence in September 2021, as a research assistant for six months. If Sid chose to stay in academia, such short term contracts as research assistant are not uncommon, and he will not be able to fulfill the new maintenance requirements while holding such positions.

Sid has already spent a year waiting for the Migrationsverket to make decisions at different points in time. During this time he has been unable to leave the country for personal or professional reasons.


Residence permits

1. Aug 2017 - Aug 2019: Temporary residence permit (3 months processing)
2. Aug 2019 - Aug 2021: Temporary residence permit (2 months processing)
3. Aug 2021: Applied for permanent residency - **No decision yet**
4. December 2021: The Migrationsverket asked him to apply for a work permit - **No decision yet**

Sid's story

Sid came to Sweden to pursue a PhD. The process of applying for residence permits put him in a situation where leaving the country for any professional reason could leave him unable to return. He hoped to pursue a job after his defense but most job openings, especially within the industry sector, have short term contracts which will not let him acquire a permanent residence permit due to the new requirements of 18 month long contracts. Similarly, recruitment processes in academia take much longer time and again contracts can many times be scholarships based (tax-free) or short term (1 year with possible extension). The change in rules for permanent residency, with no transitory exemptions, destroyed all his plans. Finishing a PhD is always a big turning point, where it is time to explore career options and have a mentally sound environment. Now with the Aliens Act, graduates are forced to find any available job to stay in Sweden.

For Sid this has grave consequences not just for him and his career but for his family as well. His 4 years entitling him to permanent residence were complete in August 2021, just 15-20 days after the Act was introduced. Knowing the prior regulations, Sid and his wife decided to settle in Sweden and planned to have a baby which got conceived in May 2021. They also bought a house in June 2021 to have a well structured place to live in, keeping in mind the upcoming baby.



Also, at the end of June 2021 Sid committed to work as a research assistant right after his PhD contract was ending. Considering all circumstances, everything was personally falling in place until mid 2021.

After these new rules, everything went upside down with no guarantee of peaceful stay since secure permanent residence permits are suddenly gone. Work as a research assistant is regulated on a very short term. Without a permanent residence, if Sid decides to take a break from work to focus on his newborn's and wife's health, he might not be allowed to stay in the country. Sid describes this change as falling off a cliff and the reason is not carelessness but rather policy change that betrays the promise of offering permanent residence in the first place. This becomes so critical mentally, emotionally and physically when there are so many things planned and invested in this country which are suddenly completely void. He and his wife have personally felt deep distress and daily anxiety of insecurity and betrayal from the policymakers for whom they worked, led a law-abiding life, contributed in terms of taxes and time, and promoted quality work output for the enrichment of Sweden's community.

Four years is a long time to invest and if migration rules were meant to change, there should have been a proper warning communicated to those who could be affected. Doctoral students are people in the middle of their lives; they look to settle instead of living in a van like nomads able to just pack their stuff and go somewhere else. Suddenly newly graduated PhD's have to fulfill requirements which are not viable in every career, particularly not in the academic one they have been trained for. Pursuing research work is more project based and short term meaning one can't both find a suitable job and be allowed permanent residence. This is forcing Sid to change careers to find a job with longer contract periods to secure the safety of his family and their right to stay in Sweden. Research is his passion but due to migration policies he now has to look for a job where he might never be able to work happily and where his extensive knowledge will be wasted. If he could get one message across to policy makers it would be "I'd like to urge you to at least have some humanity and sense of understanding towards cases like mine, in dealing with permanent residence or permits. In my whole life this is the most extreme mental stress I have ever got, which is ongoing from July 2021."

Sam, Stockholm University, Natural Science

Sam is a doctoral student at Stockholm University who has lived and worked in Sweden for more than four and a half years, and has been eligible for permanent residency since September.

Sam is planing to graduate in December 2022, by which she will have lived and worked in Sweden for five years, however due to the new maintenance requirement, Sam is not eligible for permanent residency.

She has so far spend around 13 months a various points waiting for the Migrationsverket to make a decision about her cases. During this time she has been unable to leave the country for personal or professional reasons.

Residence permits

1. Sep 2017 - Sep 2019: Temporary residence permit (2 months process)
2. Sep 2019 - Sep 2021: Temporary residence permit (6 months process)
3. Sep 2021: Applied for permanent residency. **No decision yet** (6 months processing so far)


Sam's story

Sam started her PhD in 2017. Her research focuses on issues of global warming. Due to the residence permit process she is not able to travel outside of Sweden to conferences, nor is she able to carry out her field work. Additionally, the amount of time and energy she has spent dealing with migration related issues is immense as she reports:

"Just to give an example: when trying to contact MV I had to call 30 times (literally) before I was even put on the line. Once on line I had to wait for more than half an hour to talk to someone. Sending emails and talking to newspapers, filling surveys, watching seminars, having meetings to discuss our issue with our head of department, and the list goes on!"

While dealing with all that, she also has to conduct her research and other duties and receives the same amount of time as her EU colleagues who do not need the same amount of additional work. This situation really places non-EU students at a great disadvantage. They are getting delayed in their own work in order to figure out a way through the migration process.

The situation has also highlighted the inequalities that exist within the University where the contracts of the doctoral student are only given for very limited periods of time. Sam's current contract is only 6 months long, but at the end of that contract she will still have a year left to finish her PhD. The university



works hard to offer equal opportunities to all students and employees. However, under the current situation and thanks to the new legislation, non-EU doctoral students and other early career scientists are far from being offered the same opportunities in terms of the work environment.

This will have an impact on future career choices. To stay in Sweden, Sam needs to assume she will be subjected to a similar process as the one she is living now, including huge uncertainty on whether she will be given the chance to stay and for how long. Sam's family life has also been affected. She has not been able to travel back home for almost 3 years due to the pandemic and now migration issues. At the end of the day, this situation is just highlighting many of the inequalities that already existed in the Swedish system, from the social welfare, to the universities and academia, and of course the legislation. Sam states that she has already earned a place in Swedish academia; she did it when she competed with other candidates (including Swedish and EU) for the PhD position. She was chosen because through the selection process she demonstrated she was good at what she does and has something to offer to the academic and scientific world using the resources offered here in Sweden. After using those resources, Sweden is letting her go.

Irina , Uppsala University, Natural Science

Irina is a doctoral student at Uppsala University, who has lived and worked in Sweden for more than five years. Irina first moved to Sweden from Ukraine in 2017, together with her husband. After working outside of academia in Sweden for two years, she began her doctoral studies in 2019.

Irina is expected to graduate in August 2024, by which time she will have spent around 7 years in Sweden.

Residence permits

1. Oct 2017: Oct 2019 Temporary residence permit (6 months processing)
2. Jan 2020: Jan 2022 Temporary residence permit (2 weeks processing)
3. Jan 2022: Temporary residence permit (**No decision yet**)

Irina's story

Irina first came to Sweden with her husband in 2017. She was accepted to a PhD program in biochemistry in 2019. Upon acceptance she had to return to her home country to reapply for a permit due to the change in her working conditions. After receiving the new permit she was allowed to travel back and begin her studies. When she was choosing a PhD she had considered not only the project, but also conditions for doctoral students and possible career options in the future. By the time she started , she had lived in Sweden for quite some time, and considered being able to settle in Sweden after her PhD was very appealing. A PhD is very demanding and projects are quite challenging. Being unsure about residence permit decisions demotivates, distracts and is a source of constant additional stress. Residence permit issues restrict a lot in job application and mobility after PhD. It is quite hard to find a job after PhD itself, but now the pool of possible employers has narrowed even more. Not every company can afford to deal with migration situations.

Irina is not sure if she can continue to live in Sweden, and this affects her mental health. She describes it as very hard to focus on work and get stuff done, plan the future career and life. She wants to pursue a career in industrial research.

Today Irina can not be sure about tomorrow as her home country is Ukraine. She can not rely on even having a place to go back to. She has lived and worked in Sweden for 5 years but, since the law chnged, she is not sure if she can stay here. She emphasizes how exhausting it is to live in a condition when you can not choose your future freely. Her physical health also declined due to depression which began when the law came out and as a result her work performance and motivation decreased.

Beata, Uppsala University, Humanities

Beata is a doctoral student at Uppsala University, who despite a variety of competitive work offers decided to choose Sweden to settle in. She has put in a lot of energy to integrate into the local society including learning the language, acquiring extra legal documents, such as a local driver license, and nurturing local work collaborations. Despite all of that, she does not know if she will be allowed to stay in the country and what legislation will be in power when it is her turn to apply for permanent residency. She suffers because the uncertainty of her situation is making her second guess her life choices regarding Sweden.

Beata is expected to graduate in June 2024, by which time she will have spent around 7 years in Sweden.

Residence permits

1. Sep 2018-Aug 2020: Temporary residence permit
2. Sep 2020-Aug 2022: Temporary residence permit
3. Aug 2022: Plan to apply for permanent residency

Beata's story

At the time Beata was accepted into a PhD in Sweden, she already had several equivalent job offers in other countries (including elsewhere in the EU). One of the important considerations that influenced her decision to accept the PhD position here was that the policies in place at the time made her eligible to apply for permanent residence after four years, which would give her the opportunity to establish a long-term career here. Even in an increasingly international and interconnected world, many academic collaborations are still based on local connections; in this context relocating to Sweden was a professional investment. During her PhD time, Beata worked hard to meet the requirements that would strengthen her application for permanent residence after four years - she fought for the opportunity to take Swedish classes (although they weren't offered consistently on the campus), and completed the training to obtain a Swedish driver's license. Working in academia demands a substantial time commitment beyond regular work hours, and all of these extra efforts took time away during afternoons, evenings, and weekends that could have been devoted to research activities. When Beata had to renew her temporary residence permit after two years in Sweden, she waited for 10 months before receiving an answer, and during that time she was not allowed to leave the country for any reason (including work) unless she was willing to risk being banned from re-entry. The pandemic complicated issues even further. Beata's research is dependent on international

fieldwork, and has been delayed nearly two years as a result of global travel restrictions. Despite her best efforts to circumvent these obstacles, completion of her dissertation has been substantially affected. For international PhDs who are already in a precarious position due to the pandemic, the enactment of the Aliens Act dealt a devastating blow. Due to the conditions of short-term permits, non-EU doctoral students did not have the option to 'freeze' their studies and take temporary alternative employment to wait out the pandemic, an option that was available to most of their Swedish and EU colleagues. Nor do they have the right to rely on short-term scholarships to extend the period of employment beyond the contracted date, as far as Migrationsverket is concerned.

Beata still intends to apply for permanent residence when she becomes eligible, but with the knowledge that the long wait time will likely prevent her from traveling overseas again for at least 6 months, and that it may amount to nothing. That means she will have to try to plan crucial research trips around her residence permit application and will certainly miss out on professional and research opportunities because of this. She had also intended to apply for a postdoc position in Sweden upon completion of the PhD, but now that possibility seems increasingly out of reach. Beata wishes she had known the degree to which the residence permit process and her status as an international doctoral student would have affected her ability to conduct research and function as an ordinary human being before moving here. According to Beata, uncertain conditions surrounding residence permits place a significant handicap on international researchers, and the new Aliens Act further marks them as 'undesirables' in Sweden. It also exemplifies policy based on prejudice, not pragmatism or reason, and amounts to a de facto deportation order for international doctoral students at the end of their contracts.

Beyond professional consequences, Beata also suffered some irreversible personal trauma. When she had to renew her temporary residence permit a close personal friend in her home country fell ill and eventually died during the waiting period of 10 months that was connected to processing the residence permit application. She was unable to return to visit him, nor could she attend funeral services. Beata contacted Migrationsverket 3 times while waiting to hear about her permit renewal application, with no apparent effect. This is a regret that she will carry for the rest of her life.

Robert, Karolinska Institutet, Medicine

Robert is a doctoral student at Karolinska Institutet, who expects to graduate in December 2022. When Robert graduates he will have been in Sweden for more than six years, and so far he has already spent 15 months, at various points, waiting for Migrationsverket to process his case.

This has meant that he was not been able to leave the country during these periods of waiting. Had there been international conferences in this period of time, he would not have been able to attend them.

- Sep 2016 - Mar 2020: Temporary residence permit (3 months processing)
- Aug 2020 - Sep 2021: Temporary residence permit (7 months processing)
- Sep 2021: Applied for permanent residency **No decision**

Robert's story

Robert came to Sweden to pursue a PhD in biology, specializing in breast cancer research. His career began with receiving a full scholarship through a competitive application process. His funding was granted from 2017 to 2021. He acquired his first residence permit and began his research as soon as possible. His permit was up for renewal in 2020. During the wait an applicant is not allowed to leave the country until a decision is reached and if they do, they might be denied the right to return. For Robert this meant no travel abroad to pursue his research and attend academic conferences. To receive a doctoral degree every student is required to both publish and present their work internationally; this means that an inability to travel seriously hampers one's chances of graduating on time. Furthermore, this coincided with the Covid pandemic so Robert could not visit his family as the illness started spreading. His research was also delayed as some high level biology labs introduced heightened security standards during the COVID pandemic - staff without a documented ongoing permit were not allowed to use the lab space. He finally received a permit for one year and had to reapply once more in September 2021, an application which has still not been processed by the migration office. He hoped to be able to travel to his home country to be able to marry his long term fiancée but again, he can't leave the country. At the same time, she can't come here as his work and permit status are uncertain. Robert has had to put his life on hold while struggling to finish a PhD in a field that's extremely needed. His future employment in industry can be further affected as certain companies require already having a residence permit in order to become employed.

Conclusion and outlook

From our perspective, the lack of an exception from the maintenance requirement for doctoral students and researchers, is a result of either a lack of understanding of the academic career or expression of an academic career being viewed as less valuable than other careers. We, young researchers, are expected to settle for lesser conditions than if we pursued another career in the public or private sector.

If the motivation behind the new maintenance requirements, is to ensure that those who are granted permanent residency are established within the Swedish labour market it should in theory, not be problematic for doctoral students. Those who have conducted their degree in Sweden are less like to become unemployed than others [7]

One has to ask one self, why international talent should pursue their doctoral education in Sweden, rather than Norway, Germany or Canada? [8]. If Sweden will not offer similar conditions for those who chose an academic career path as they do for those outside of academia, why should they come here? If this is not remedied it will have long lasting consequences for Sweden. We risk both a brain drain in the form that the competent and educated workforce, that doctoral graduates make up, leaves Sweden upon graduation and it becomes harder to attract such talent in the future, even though both the academic sector and the industry express their need of being able to attract such talent.

The examples we discussed here come from fields such as cancer research, sustainable energy, global warming solutions and many other areas in which Sweden heavily invests and wants to be seen as innovative and ahead of the curve. None of that can be done without research at the universities, and this research is often done by doctoral students.

An exception from the maintenance requirement is needed in the new Aliens Act, not because doctoral students or researchers deserve an easier route to a permanent residency than others. It is because their academic career should not be a hindrance for obtaining permanent residency.

About doctoral education and employment

There are currently 17,100 doctoral students in Sweden [9] with a nearly equal gender distribution. Around 20% of the doctoral students are from outside the EU/EEA. The Swedish doctoral education takes four years but it is most commonly carried out over a five year period as the doctoral student may have up to 20% departmental duties (teaching etc.). Today around 90% of doctoral students are employed, most of which in the designated employment type *doctoral studentship*, which is defined in the Higher Education Ordinance [10].

In academia, short term contracts are the norm. Both the employment conditions of doctoral students, regulated in the Higher Education Ordinance, and the employment conditions of postdocs, regulated in the postdoc agreement from the fall of 2021, deviate from the general principle of the LAS agreement which states that after 360 days in the same position, one has to be offered a permanent employment [11].

Most doctoral students are given an employment contract for one year at a time, and while it is possible to offer a contract of two years, the length of the contract can not exceed the length of the doctoral education. Even for those who are given a contract of two years, chances are that Migrationsverket will not get around to processing their applications before they no longer fulfill the maintenance requirement. Right now, the processing time at Migrationverket is eight months in 75% of the cases [2, 12].

The argument that academia must solve this by providing longer contracts neglects to remember that research and research education is financed by a multitude of sources, of which many are external sources. The universities only have control over the funding that comes directly from the financial bill, and even this can be restricted due to requirements of co-financing in case of external financing. When different Swedish governments have supported the increase in the allocation of research funding via competitive national grants, they have eroded the control universities can exercise over the exact length of these contracts.

When we argue that an exception is needed in the new Aliens Act, such that the maintenance requirement is waived for doctoral students and researchers, it is not because we think that doctoral students or researchers deserves an easier route to a permanent residency than others. It is because we think that they deserve the same possibility as others in the Swedish labour market, and that a choice of a career within research should not be a hindrance for obtaining permanent residency.

About this report

The examples in this report were found through an extensive online form, which we made open to doctoral students and recent graduates. For current doctoral students, we requested that they had been enrolled in the doctoral education for at least three years, and for the recent graduates that they have graduated in 2021 or 2022. Within a week, we received more than 50 examples from all over Sweden.

The aim of this report is not to reach statistical conclusions - for this we refer elsewhere [6]. Hence, we have limited the number of examples in this report to 9. We have chosen these 9 examples as they broadly span different fields and universities, and highlight as many different aspects of the residence process as possible.

The examples have been made anonymous. From our perspective, it has been absolutely crucial that those who were willing to share their stories should not fear any sort of repercussions for doing so. Everyone who volunteered will have interactions with the migration agency in the future. As the examples show, this can be a sensitive process throughout which the applicant needs the support of a supervisor or employer. A supervisor can provide incorrect documentation or impose extra pressure on the student. An employer can use a need for a permit as leverage in offering lower salaries. All of these risks are documented in this report. It is for these reasons that the anonymity of our sources is a high priority. While we can guarantee that each story is true and represents a real person, we obscured their identity through pseudonymization.

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