



**BASE**

Building Academics' Societal Impact



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# BUILDING ACADEMICS' SOCIETAL IMPACT SEMINAR

## Survey results

How do foreign academics in Finland  
see their societal engagement and  
collaboration with journalistic media?

Gökhan Depo, Mari K. Niemi,  
Ville Pitkänen

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**Building Academics' Societal Impact:**

**How do foreign academics in Finland see their societal engagement and collaboration with journalistic media?**

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Building Academics' Societal Impact

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# BASE: BUILDING ACADEMICS' SOCIETAL IMPACT PROJECT

Duration: 2022

Funder: Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation

The project is led by DsocSci, docent Mari K. Niemi and coordinated by MA Gökhan Depo. DsocSci Ville Pitkänen, DsocSci Matti Välimäki, and MA Roosa Veijola are members of the project team.



Collaborators:



# GOALS OF THE PROJECT

- 1. Understanding societal engagement better through the perspectives of foreign academics in Finland.**
- 2. Developing a more equal career path for scholars from all backgrounds.**
- 3. Improving understanding of what kind of support and training might be needed by foreign academics in their work to increase their societal engagement, impact, and media visibility in Finland.**

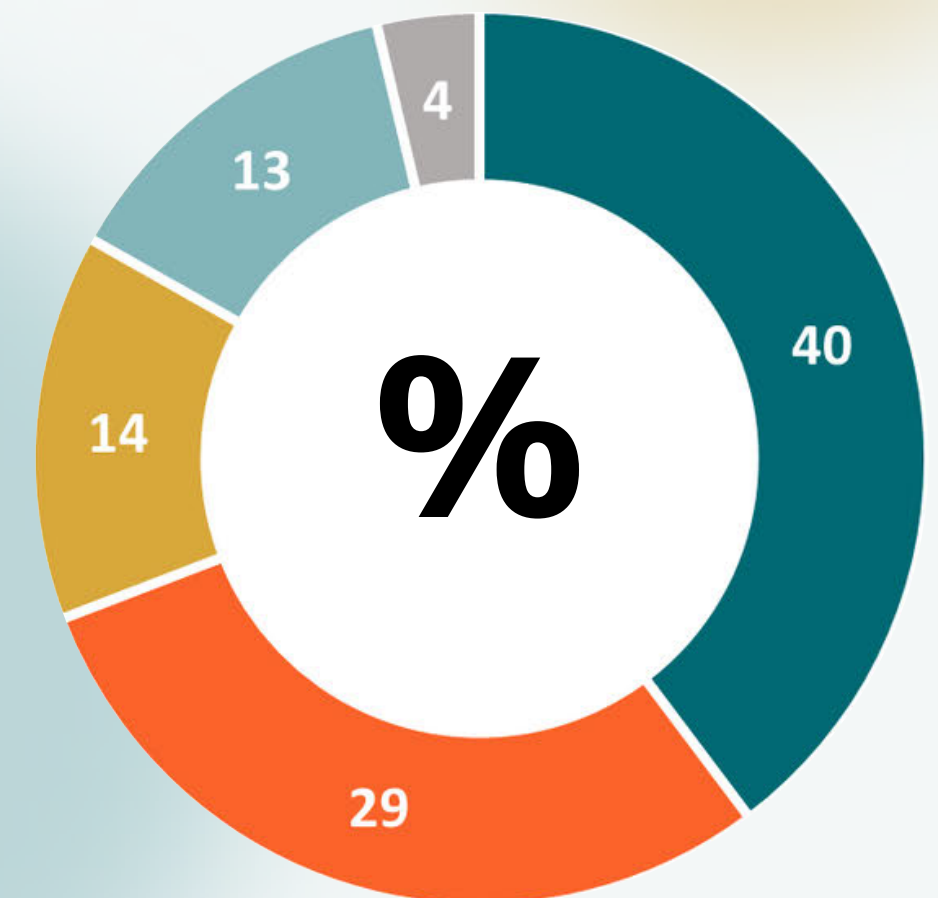
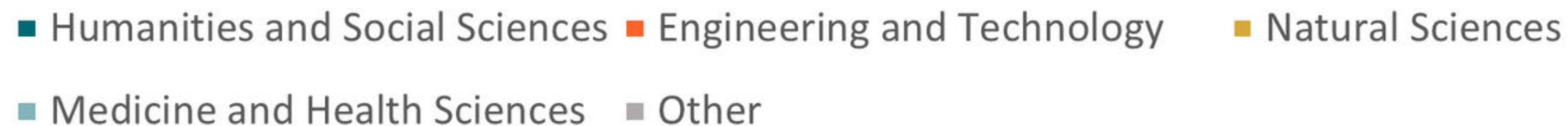


# SURVEY FOR FOREIGN ACADEMICS

# SURVEY FOR FOREIGN ACADEMICS

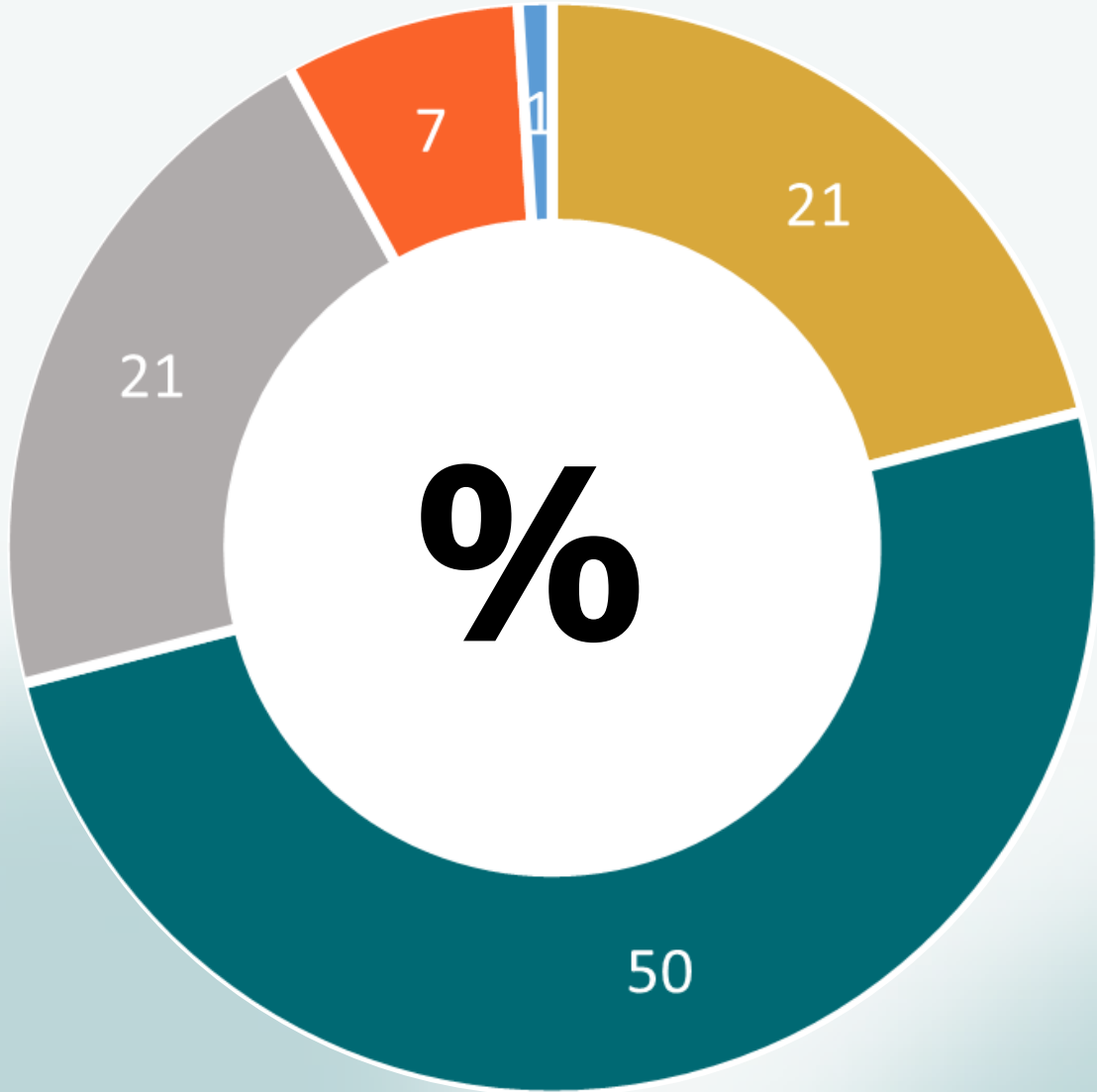
- Respondents (N=214) were foreign academics affiliated with Finnish universities (96 %) or with Finnish universities of applied sciences (4 %)
- Data collected: April 13, 2022 – June 3, 2022.
- 60 nationalities
- 23% do not speak Finnish and 44% are beginners.
- 43% of respondents earned their last degree in Finland.

## FIELD OF WORK



# SURVEY FOR FOREIGN ACADEMICS

## AGE GENDER



■ 20-29 ■ 30-39 ■ 40-49  
■ 50-59 ■ 60+

71% of the respondents were between 30 and 50 years old.



46%



48%

Respondents were equally distributed in terms of gender. 4 % chose the "other" option while 2 % didn't want to answer.



# KEY FINDINGS

## Foreign academics...



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### 1. Believe in the value of societal engagement.

- 81 % believe that societal engagement in any form is good and benefits society
- 72 % believe that societal engagement improves their career prospects

### 2. Want to do more societal engagement activities

- 59 % want to collaborate more with organizations or businesses
- 54 % want to write more pieces for a wider public audience
- 53 % want to give talks to the wider public

### 3. Identify some barriers regarding their societal engagement activities

- 80 % believe that language is a barrier
- 54 % believe that other work priorities (e.g., research, teaching, etc.) are barriers
- 48 % believe that not having networks outside academia is a barrier

### 4. Eager to appear in the media

- 90 % would be happy to give interviews to journalistic media in English
- Only 23 % be willing or able to give interviews in Finnish.
- Only 5 % have given more than one interview a year to Finnish media



# ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT

# ACADEMICS DEFINING SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT

“What we do is changing society and society is aware of our research (by means of public speaking, science communication, etc.).”

“Building the networks a person needs for living and working in Finland in a manner that supports mental and physical well-being and realizing their needs for friends, family, and good colleagues. It is also about getting recognition for your work.”

“Making our research better advertised and understood by people.”

“Sharing one's own expertise to impact on social change and improve society.”

“Societal engagement is about having chance to share the importance of the research field to public and the others. Gaining more visibility in the field and raising awareness about the research subject.”

# ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT

72%

believe that there is a positive correlation between their career prospects and societal engagement activities.

81%

believe that societal engagement in any form is good and benefits society.

68%

believe that societal engagement is very important in their current position.

50%

believe that they are not compensated enough for their societal engagement activities.

Only 8%

believe that societal engagement is not relevant to their field.



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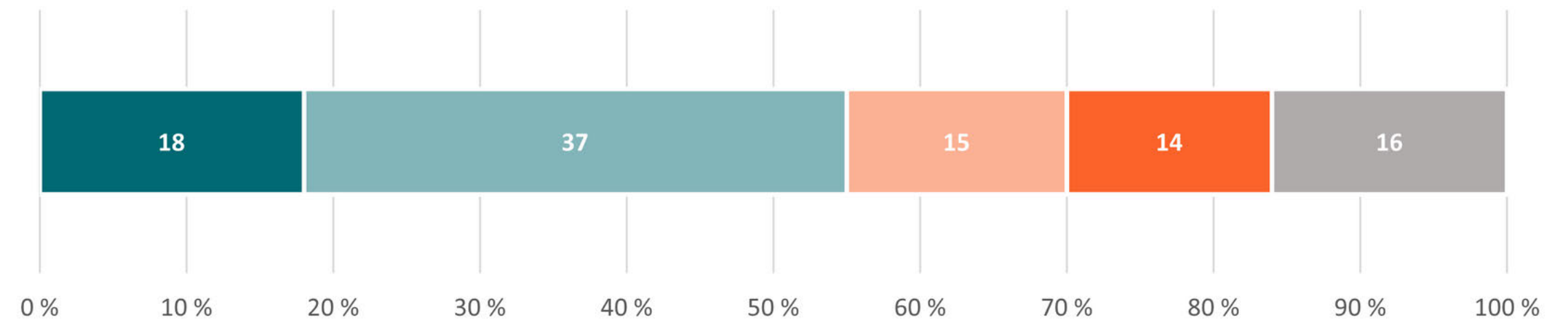
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# Academic institutions could encourage and reward societal engagement more

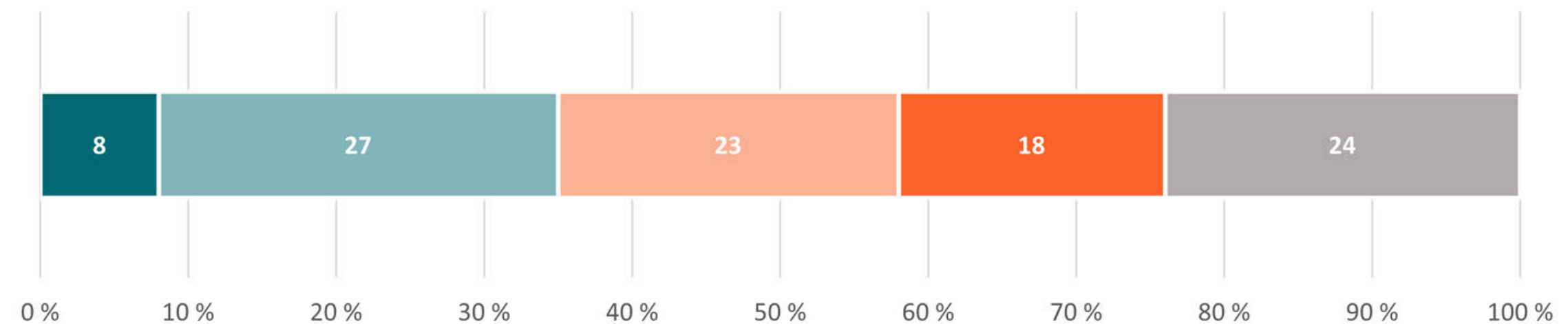


- 55% of respondents agree that their institutions encourages them in their societal engagement activities.
- 34% agree that societal engagement is recognized and rewarded by their institutions.
- There is room for institutions to increase their support for societal engagement activities.

"My institution consistently and clearly encourages academics in their societal engagement activities" (%)

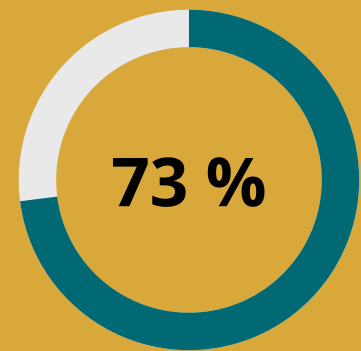


"My institution recognizes and rewards societal engagement" (%)

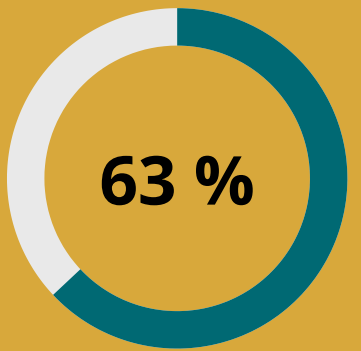


■ Completely agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Completely disagree ■ Cannot say

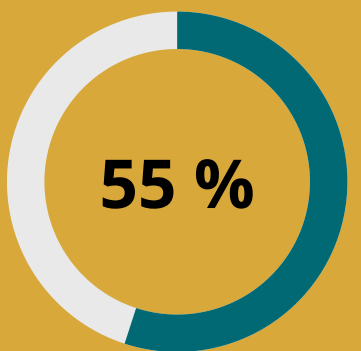
# What would most encourage you to get more involved with external stakeholders?



Access to networks outside academia



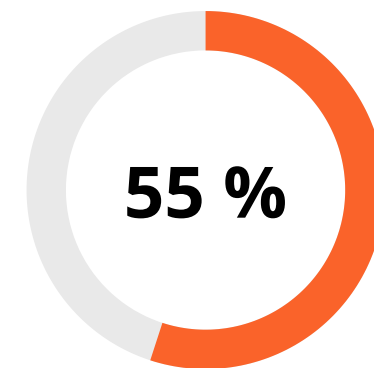
More support from organization



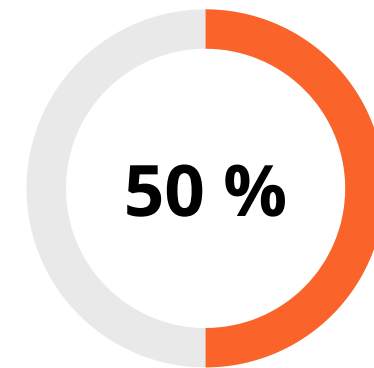
Help with getting funds



# What kind of support do you need to nurture your societal engagement?



Help in identifying relevant partners



Learning how to popularize research

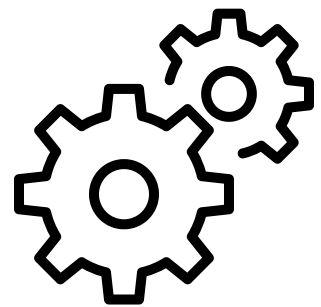


# NETWORKING AND OBSTACLES

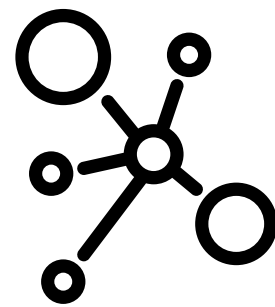


# In what ways participating in societal engagement in Finland is different for Finnish academics compared to foreign academics? (Open-ended question)

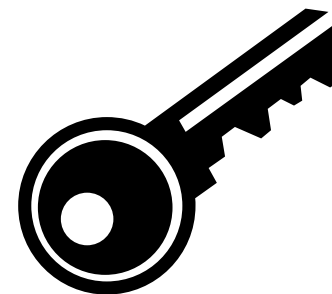
According to foreign academics in Finland their Finnish colleagues:



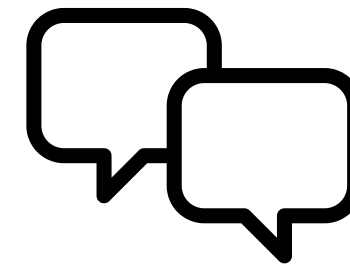
Understand the system better



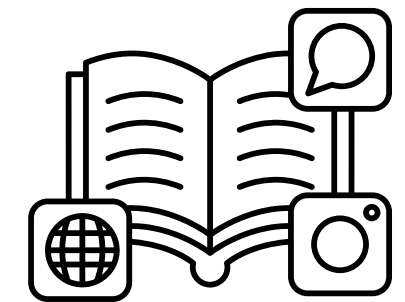
Have more established connections and networks



Know the key players in the society



Do not face language or cultural barriers



Are approached by and represented in the media much more frequently



## OBSTACLES OF SOCIETAL IMPACT

*"My team handles the Finnish side, which spreads the load and also gives them the exposure and the opportunity; in some cases it does mean we might not represent as well as they are less experienced etc. So I am excluded from many Finnish societal impact events."*

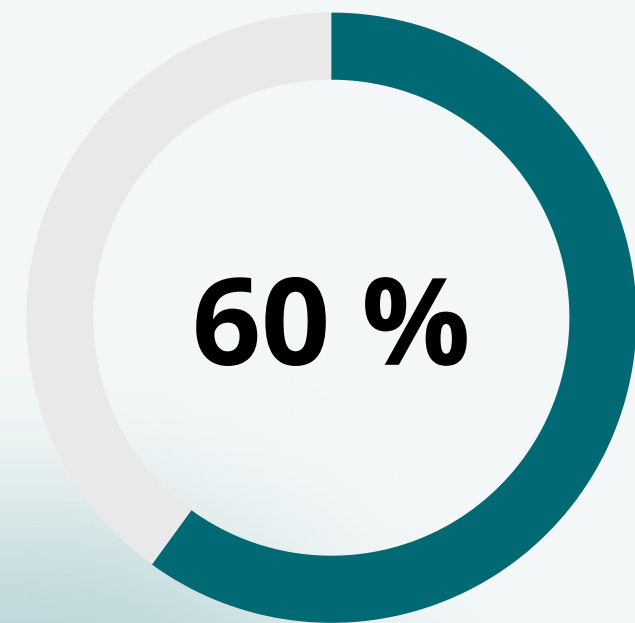
*"I believe that knowing the culture, language, existing communication networks and ways of doing are key to be able to develop our societal impact. In this sense, it can be harder for international academics to find a way to impact society in Finland."*

*"I cannot talk about general terms, but based on my own experience. I have a more limited network at the moment compared to an academic who has lived in Finland for a long time... I did not know anyone in my field beforehand."*

# THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKS

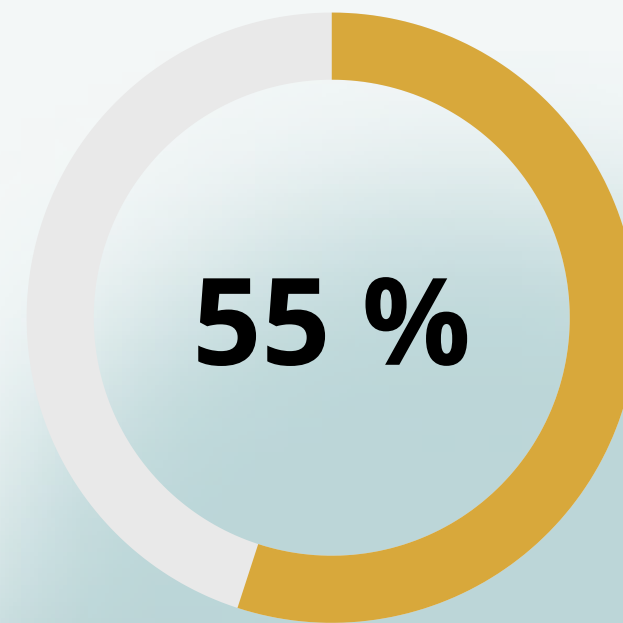
What kind of support is needed to nurture foreign academics' societal engagement?

## ACCESS TO NETWORKS



Have access to a wider selection of networks

## IDENTIFYING NETWORKS



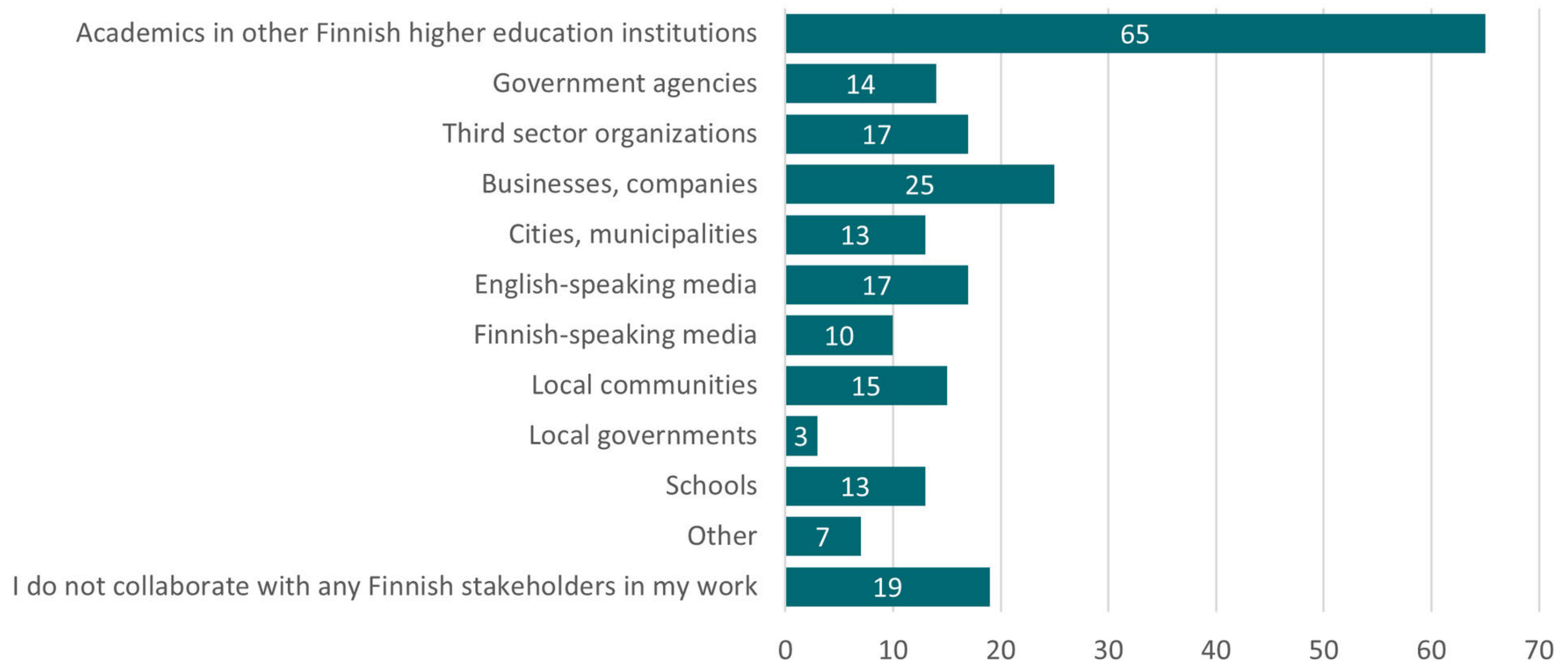
Get help in identifying relevant partners and networks

Respondents believe that having access to networks, within and outside academia, is crucial and benefits their societal engagement activities.

# More collaboration with public and private sectors needed

There is room for improvement regarding foreign academics' collaboration with stakeholders outside academia.

**With which Finnish stakeholders do you collaborate in your work? Please choose all the options that apply.**



# THINGS THAT HOLD FOREIGN ACADEMICS BACK



**“I am very afraid to be misinterpreted in the media and taken out of context.”**

**“I am not expert enough.”**

**“Time is limited and it can be hostile on Twitter etc... Discussions in Finnish are too hard.”**

**“My research does not generate much interest in Finnish society.”**

**“Hate speech... if you are in the public eye... this is what happens.”**

**“Last year, one of my collaboration partner and I were attacked in Twitter. The situation affected me badly, and I was afraid that my academic and work space would be impacted for that.”**

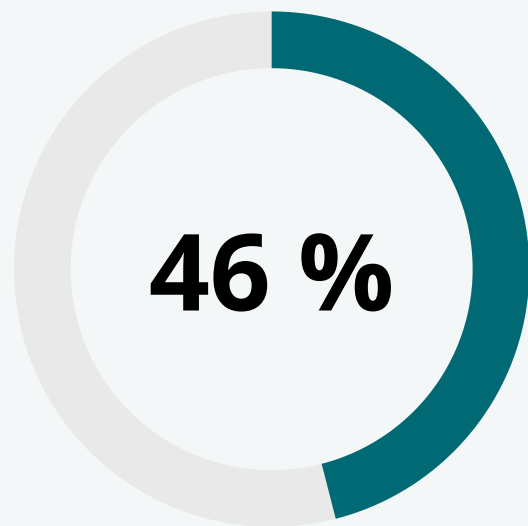
**“Why should I spend hours seeking out media and trying to be interviewed? It will not result in a higher salary.”**



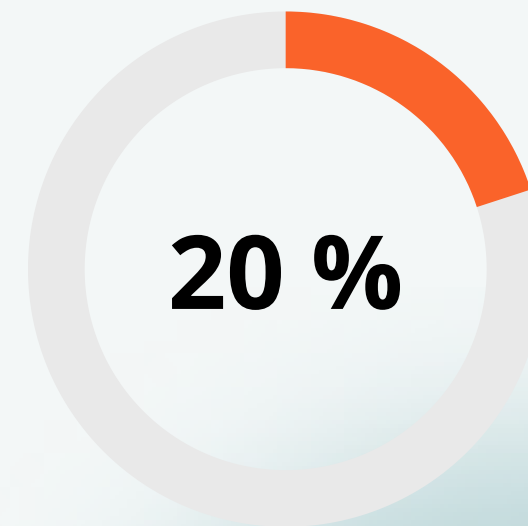
# UTILISING SOCIAL AND JOURNALISTIC MEDIA PROFESSIONALLY



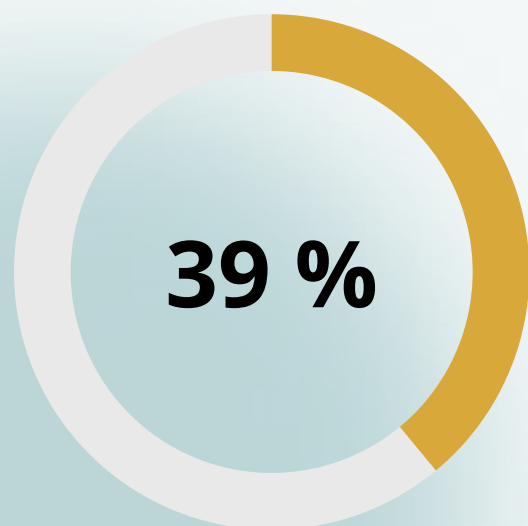
# USING SOCIAL MEDIA PROFESSIONALLY



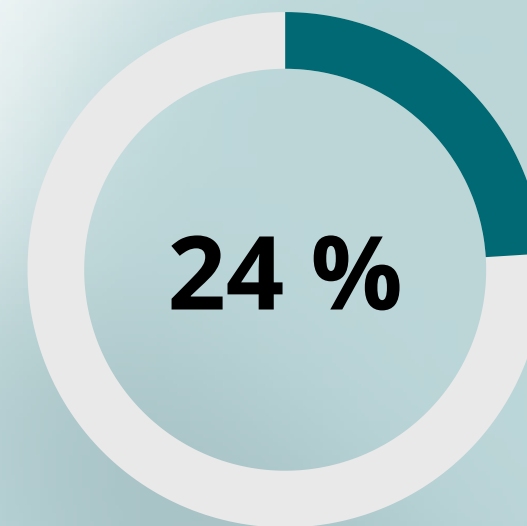
**46 %**  
**happy to participate in discussions**



**20 %**  
**do not believe they are using social media effectively**



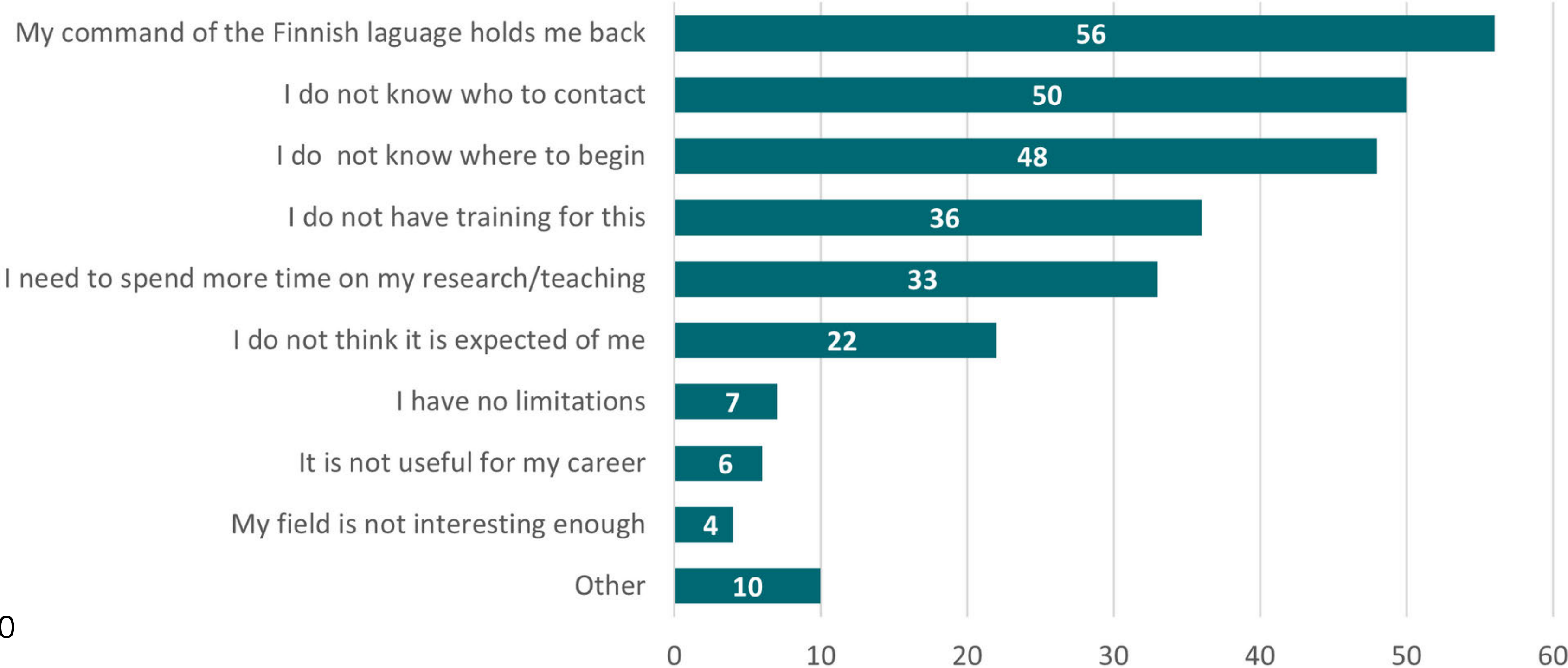
**39 %**  
**believe they would benefit from training**



**24 %**  
**believe there is hostility in social media**

# Language barrier remains the biggest obstacle

Factors that affect foreign academics' desire to collaborate more with journalistic media





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**GENDER, AGE, AND  
ACADEMIC FIELD PLAY A ROLE  
IN SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT**





# Men emphasize business cooperation, women popularizing science

Men (34 %) have collaborated with businesses more often than women (18 %)

Men (22 %) have been consulted by companies more often than women (10 %)

Women (28 %) have made press releases about their research more often than men (17 %)

Women (38 %) have published nonacademic papers in newspapers etc. more often than men (31 %)

# Men emphasize business cooperation, women popularizing science

## When asked, what would respondents like to do more:

- Men (44 %) would like to have business related consulting agreements with companies more often than women (29 %).
- Men (48 %) would like to generate revenue due to direct application of research more often than women (28 %)
- Men (47 %) would like to give expert interviews to the media more often than women (36 %)
- Women (55 %) would like to conduct joint projects with citizen groups more often than men (43 %)

**In terms of willingness to collaborate with journalistic media, women are more often afraid of negative publicity, and refer more often to their lack of training, shyness and not knowing what is expected from them.**

# Especially young academics need more confidence

Factors preventing societal engagement of young scholars (under 30 years):

- Do not consider themselves to be expert in their field (34 %) more often than others
- Are shy in public speaking (30 %) more often than others
- Are afraid of negative publicity (30 %) more often than others

Young scholars need training especially for pitching ideas and giving public talks (43 %).

Young scholars (20 %) also feel more often than others that "societal engagement is not relevant to their field".

# Clear differences between fields of study

## Field of studies affect how much societal engagement activities respondents have, and their motivation to do more:

- Those in the fields of social sciences and humanities have more experience in almost all forms of societal engagement (giving interviews, writing non academic papers, collaboration outside academia, expert roles outside academia) compared to their colleagues in natural sciences or engineering and technology.
- In social sciences and humanities, academics would be more eager than their colleagues in different fields to give talks to wider public (64 %), influence policy makers (62 %), conduct joint projects with citizen groups (61 %).
- Social scientists stress the role of networks more – and find social media more hostile.

# Clear differences between fields of study

Those in engineering or technology have been consulted more by the companies and they have owned intellectual property such as patents more often.

Those in engineering, technology or natural sciences would like to have business-related consulting agreements more often than their colleagues in social sciences and humanities.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATION NO 1

### **Universities could support foreign scholars better by applying a more strategic and tailored approach**

- Universities could do more in supporting foreign academics' societal engagement in terms of training, networking, and widening their contacts with media and other stakeholders.
- Important to recognize specific needs foreign scholars have, as well as differences between career phases and fields scholars work in.
- Tailored approach needed in motivating, supporting and training societal engagement.

# What Universities could do?

- Offer more tailored training and support (e.g., based on the field of research) in media connections, stakeholder collaboration and networking.
- Recommend foreign scholars actively and persistently to media and other organisations as interviewees and experts.
- Organise events in which foreign scholars gain visibility and meet various stakeholders.
- Share societal engagement activities more equally within research groups, e.g., pairing up Finnish and foreign scholars.



## RECOMMENDATION NO 2

### **Media and other organisations using experts should revise their practices to be more inclusive**

- While academia and other expert organisations can improve in offering their foreign staff as experts, media and other organisations using expert knowledge need to do their part as well.
- We recommend cities, municipalities, ministries, third sector organisations, businesses and industry to ask themselves: How accessible are we for foreign scholars in Finland? Could we improve our collaboration with foreign academics – and hence benefit a wider range of expert knowledge available?

# What media and other organisations using experts could do?

- Make a conscious decision to increase the number of foreign experts interviewed, invited as speakers etc.
- Event organisers could make events bi-lingual (parts of the event in English). This allows organisers to choose speakers and panelist from a wider range of experts – and makes events more accessible to those participants not yet speaking Finnish.
- Journalists could interview two scholars from the same project – the Finnish one could help in checking quotations, if needed.

## RECOMMENDATION NO 3

**Foreign (and very likely: all) academics would benefit from understanding societal engagement more as a two-way street**

- When asked how the survey respondents understand societal engagement, definitions provided underlined academics as sources of knowledge, sharing their expertise for the benefit of wider society.
- However, there is plenty of expertise within stakeholder organisations from global companies to government ministries, from research institutions to third sector organisations. Citizens can have valuable understanding on many issues as well.

# What scholars could do?

Understanding societal engagement as a process in which both (or: all) parties are allowed to learn from each other, share insights and developing together has benefits:

- Academics realise they do not need to know "all", which allows them to learn, and revise their own understanding when needed
- Less pressure and rising motivation: societal engagement is not just a duty, it's an activity which can make you a better informed and more clearly arguing scholar
- Stakeholders feel the ground is more even, making the collaboration more equal and respectful – not just academics "educating" others

# Further reading

Niemi, Mari K. & Pitkänen Ville (2016) Gendered use of Experts in the Media: Analysis of the Gender Gap in Finnish News Journalism. *Public Understanding of Science*; Published online before print January 6, 2016, 1–14.

Niemi, Mari K. & Perälä, Annu (2018) "Keiden ääni kuului, keiden "kriisistä" puhuttiin? Ylen journalistiset valinnat turvapaikanhakijoita käsittelevissä ohjelmissa". Pp. 146–172. In Mari K. Niemi & Topi Houni (Eds): *Media ja Populismi. Työkaluja kriittiseen journalismiin*. Tampere: Vastapaino.

Perälä, Annu. & Niemi, Mari K. (2018) "Asylum Seekers Arrived, Elites Occupied the Air: Topics and Interviewees in YLE's Magazine Programmes During the "Asylum- Seeker Crisis"". *Nordicom Review*.

Pitkänen, Ville, Niemi, Mari K. (2016) "Hallitsematon ja houkutteleva media. Yhteiskuntatieteilijöiden näkemyksiä julkisesta asiantuntijuudesta". *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka* 81 (1), 5–16.