

# Empowering researchers with new opportunities and skills

**Council for At-Risk Academics**

*Tim Riches | [riches@cara.ngo](mailto:riches@cara.ngo)*

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# Agenda

1. What is Cara?
2. Challenges
3. Placement Support
4. Examples
5. Conclusions

# Background

A world map with countries highlighted in red and orange. The highlighted countries include Russia, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and several countries in Southeast Asia and Africa.

**135** Partner Universities  
**150** Active Fellows  
**12,000** Academics assisted

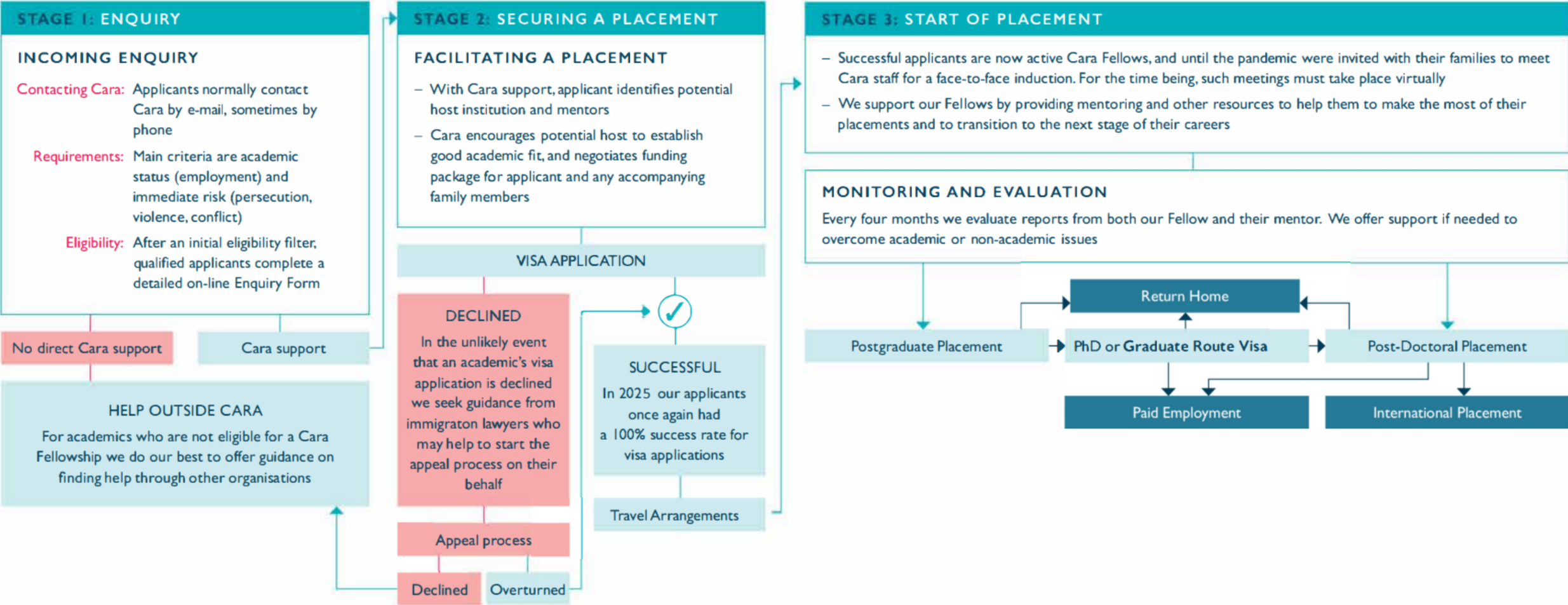
In 2021, Cara received a **400%** increase in applications. Demand continues to remain high today

- Most of our fellows are from Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Palestine
- Our fellows come from diverse fields, including science, medicine, economics, human rights, history, and literature
- Our Syria Programme (2016-2024), has assisted over 200 academics from Syria and created a volunteer network to connect the local academic community

**“I wouldn’t have been able to get back to the academic track without Cara; I will never forget that.”**  
- Cara Syria Programme

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THE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME: HOW IT WORKS



# Challenges

- Cara empowers Fellows unable to return home to secure meaningful **employment and stability** post-placement
- 20 Fellows secured the prestigious **Global Talent visa** in 2025
- However, there are key challenges:
  - Lack of jobs in academia
  - Skills and knowledge gaps
  - Language difficulties
  - Mental health
  - Immigration
  - Host Institution status
  - “Professional reinvention”

“The academic and research job market is highly competitive, and many recruitment processes take several months from application to appointment. This makes the timeline particularly challenging.”

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# Placement Support

- **Tailored support:** Fellows have a designated Cara case officer, and academic and non-academic mentors at their Host Institutions
- **Mentoring Scheme:** Fellows are paired with UK academics for advice on professional development
- **Workshops and Webinars:** topics include employability, wellbeing, networking, and immigration pathways
- **Small Grants:** for research-related costs such as training or conferences
- **Family & Wellbeing Grants:** for Fellows' and their dependants' wellbeing
- **Language Support:** joint tutor scheme with the University of Leeds, or through the British Council, with plans to expand further
- **Professional Memberships:** discounted or free access to learned societies and professional bodies

# Case Study: Identifying Skill Gaps

- Turkish Postdoctoral Fellow in Economics
  - Completed courses at Host Institution on Machine Learning, Data Science, and Cloud Data Analysis
  - Received a £500 Small Grant from Cara for a new laptop
  - 20 English language sessions through the British Council
  - Attended webinars on transitioning to industry, grant applications, and immigration pathways
- Placement Outcome: Postdoctoral Researcher in AI at a UK University

“By attending new courses in Artificial Intelligence (AI), I increased my job opportunities in the private sector, civil services, and universities.”

# Case Study: Making Professional Connections

- Syrian PhD Fellow in Pharmacy
  - Took up volunteering opportunity at future employer
  - Underwent university training for transferable skills
  - Attended a Cara workshop on professional development at Oxford
  - Placement extended beyond three years
- Placement Outcome: Project Coordinator at the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP)

“During my PhD, I developed skills in project management, leadership, and problem-solving, and I came to understand that these were just as valuable outside universities as they were inside.”

“Volunteering and engaging with FIP alongside my PhD gave me the chance to show my commitment, gain practical experience, and build strong connections that directly led to my first role after graduation.”

# Key Lessons and Conclusions

- Host Institutions should offer **training opportunities**, including on transferable skills and new areas of work
- Think **outside academia** and encourage professional connections in industry
- **Mentoring** academics is highly beneficial
- Start long-term planning early
- Cara is exploring **lengthening postdoctoral placements** to three years, to allow more time for academics to settle and upskill
- **Alumni** are valuable in sharing their experiences and mentoring academics



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# Thank you

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