# SKILLED AND MOBILE: SURVEY EVIDENCE OF AI RESEARCHERS' IMMIGRATION PREFERENCES Remco Zwetsloot<sup>1</sup>, Baobao Zhang<sup>2</sup>, Noemi Dreksler<sup>3</sup>, Lauren Kahn<sup>4</sup>, Markus Anderljung<sup>3</sup>, Allan Dafoe<sup>3</sup>, & Michael C. Horowitz<sup>4</sup> | AIES 2021

<sup>1</sup> Center for Security and Emerging Technology, Georgetown University, remco.zwetsloot@georgetown.edu | <sup>2</sup> Department of Government, Cornell University <sup>3</sup> Centre for the Governance of AI, Future of Humanity Institute, University of Oxford | <sup>4</sup> Perry World House, University of Pennsylvania

### BACKGROUND

Countries, companies, and universities are increasingly competing over top-tier artificial intelligence (AI) researchers. The immigration preferences of AI researchers have important political, ethical, commercial, and technical implications. Past research has found that the AI talent pool is both global and highly mobile. Such research has usually been based on ana lysing publicly available information (JF Gagne's 2019 Al Talent Report, Macro Polo's Global Talent Tracker) or been restricted to U.S.-trained AI PhDs (Aiken, Dunham, and Zwetsloot, 2020a; 2020b). We investigated where AI researchers are likely to immigrate and what affects their immigration decisions using a sample not restricted to U.S.-trained researchers.

## METHOD

We conducted an online survey of Al researchers that had papers accepted at the Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems (Neu**rIPS**) and/or the International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML). Of the 3030 contacted Al researchers, 17% completed the survey (**N** = **524**). Respondents worked or studied in 27 coun tries from around the world, though the majority were resident in the U.S. or Western Europe.

### FINDINGS

Which countries are Al researchers likely to move to? The U.S. is by far the most popular destination: the majority of non-U.S. residents (58%) report they would consider moving there in the next three years. Only 22% did not already live in the U.S. nor were considering moving there in the next three years. The U.K. (35%), Canada (28%), Switzerland (25%), France (16%), and China (10%) were the next most popular destinations.

What factors affect AI researcher's immigration decisions? We asked AI researchers what factors were important in their consideration of where to move. The resulting ranking of the factors based on percentage of respondents who chose them was:

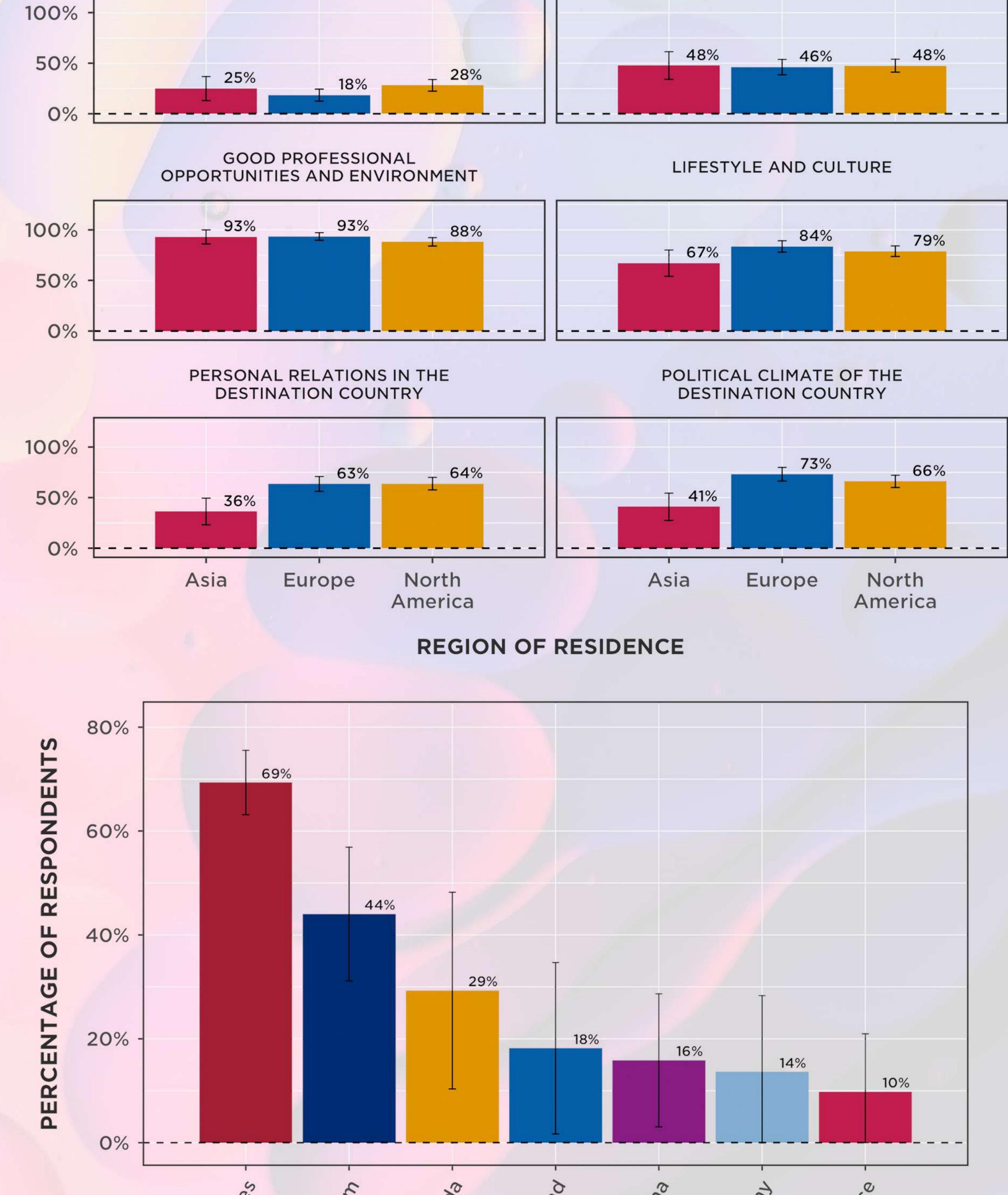
- 1. Good professional opportunities and environment (91%)
- 2. Lifestyle and culture (79%)
- 3. Political climate of the destination country (66%),
- 4. Personal relations in the destination country (60%)
- 5. Ease of immigration or incentives provided (47%)

Figure A shows how these immigration decision factors break down by region of residence.

### Where are visa and immigration issues considered to be a serious problem for conducting high-quality AI research?

As Figure B shows, a substantial percentage of researchers in the U.S. (69%), the U.K. (44%), and Canada (29%), perceived visa and immigration issues as an impediment to conducting high quality Al research in their country of residence.

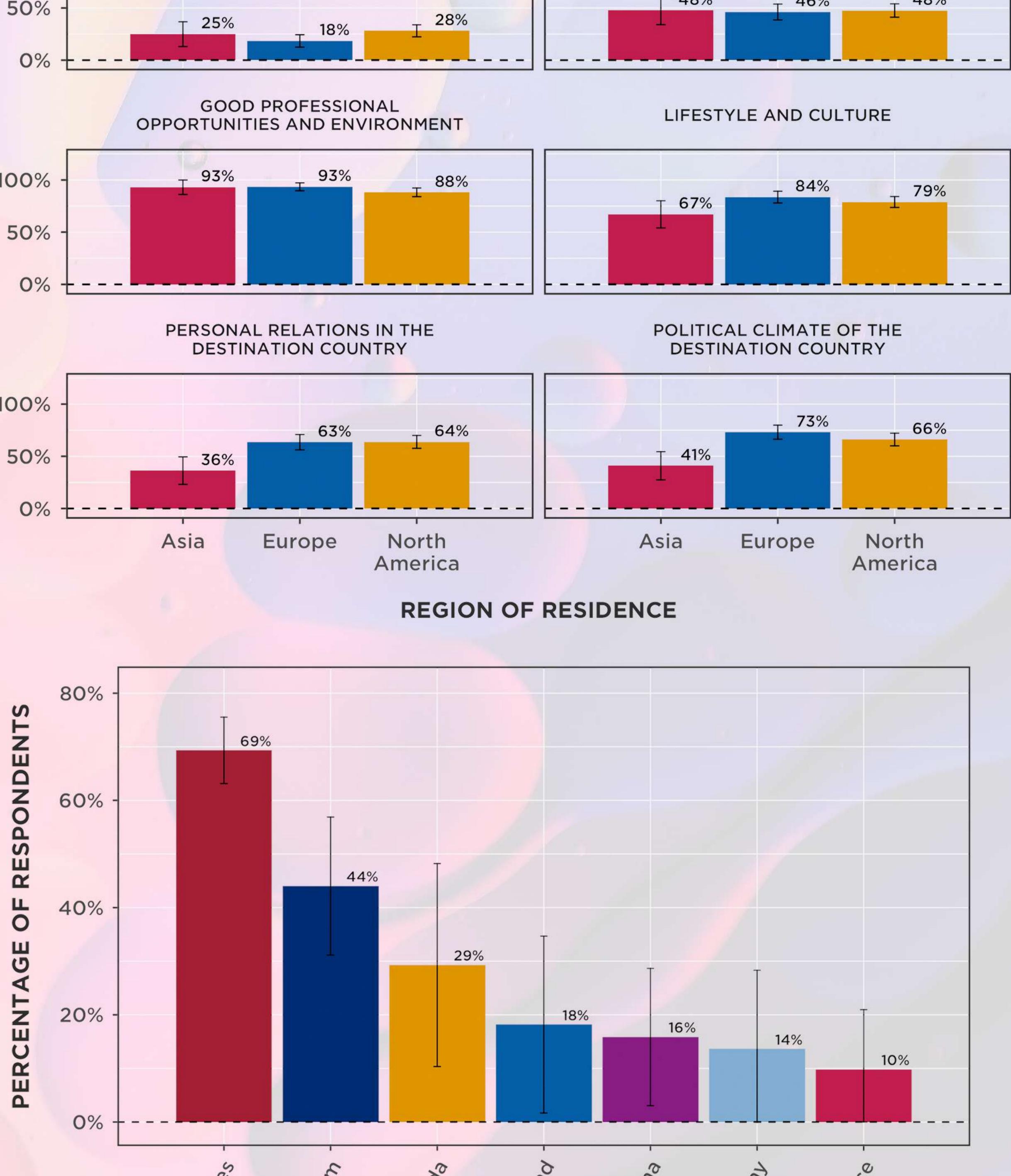
6. Current immigration difficulties in country of residence (24%)



CURRENT IMMIGRATION

**DIFFICULTIES IN COUNTRY OF** 

RESIDENCE



EASE OF IMMIGRATION AND/OR

INCENTIVES PROVIDED TO MOVE

TO DESTINATION COUNTRY

### **COUNTRY WHERE RESPONDENT WORKS OR STUDIES**