Special Student Relief for F-1 Students from Designated Countries

What is Special Student Relief (SSR)?
The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is granted the ability to offer a waiver of some of the regulatory rules guiding F-1 students, when they are from countries experiencing temporary emergency circumstances. DHS has therefore instituted Special Student Relief, which is the grant of benefits to students in F-1 status from those designated countries.

SSR offers additional employment authorization to those students, in addition to the relaxation of the full-time requirements under certain circumstances. After receiving their approved Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS, students are permitted to remain enrolled on a part-time basis in order to remain in legal F-1 status.

What locations are currently designated as eligible for SSR?
The locations currently approved for SSR, along with the pertinent dates, follows:

- Burma/Myanmar: May 25, 2021 – November 25, 2022
- Haiti: August 3, 2021 – February 3, 2023
- Hong Kong (must be a resident of Hong Kong): August 3, 2021 – February 2, 2023
- Somalia: September 18, 2021 – March 17, 2023
- South Sudan: March 3, 2022 – November 3, 2023
- Sudan: April 19, 2022 – October 19, 2023
- Syria: April 22, 2021 – September 30, 2022
- Ukraine: April 19, 2022 – October 19, 2023
- Venezuela: April 22, 2021 – September 9, 2022
- Yemen: September 4, 2021 – March 3, 2023

Who is eligible for SSR?
In order to be eligible for SSR benefits, the F-1 student must also:

- Be a citizen of the designated country, or a resident of Hong Kong
- Have been lawfully present in the U.S. on the date of designation for their location
- Be currently enrolled in a full course of study
- Be experiencing severe economic hardship “as a direct result” of the designated crises in their home country

What is the application process for SSR?
The F-1 student must contact their Immigration Specialist/Designated School Official (DSO) and make a request for SSR. After reviewing the request and accompanying documentation, the DSO will recommend SSR employment on the student’s I-20. The student will then apply for an Employment Authorization Document from USCIS.

What happens after receiving the Employment Authorization Document (EAD)?
After receiving the EAD, the F-1 student should contact their Immigration Specialist for more information about employment-related rules and the part-time enrollment option. The student should NOT reduce their course load prior to speaking with their Immigration Specialist, who will need to update the student’s SEVIS record with the appropriate information.

Additional Resources:
- Special Student Relief For F-1 Students: Essential Concepts. NAFSA, April 19, 2022.