



# YOUNG ACADEMY FINLAND

## Supporting Ukrainian researchers: lessons learned from a year of full-scale war

*A report commissioned by Young Academy Finland and compiled by Maryna Smahina*

### Abstract

Since the full-scale military attack of Russia against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, millions of Ukrainians have been facing the consequences—losing homes, stability, and their loved ones. The international community expressed immediate support and provided various assistance. By the end of 2022, 7,896,825 people had fled the country, and almost 5 million received temporary protection status in the European Union member states, including Finland<sup>1</sup>.

Finland has accepted over 45 thousand refugees from Ukraine. Among them, there were students, scholars, academics, and researchers. Finland's government and institutions provided immediate assistance to them—the universities invited scholars to continue their research within new walls and provided them with work, foundations assigned grants, etc. Naturally, **most of the assistance was ad hoc**. Over time, it became apparent that the efficient support has to be long-term and cover Ukrainian researchers both in Ukraine and abroad.

In Ukraine, the issue of keeping science and research afloat during the war and in the post-war period is essential for many reasons. One of them is that rebuilding the country is impossible without investing in research and innovation. Helping the Ukrainian research community will not only ensure that, but will also be beneficial for the foreign partners as the assisting countries will gain more resilience by helping scholars at risk, enrich their scientific and research landscape, and create stronger networks within Europe. The main task, for now, is **to keep Ukrainian researchers within the scientific field**.

The particular uniqueness of the situation with Ukrainian researchers requires new solutions to be found and implemented to assist the Ukrainian research community. Most of the support

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

provided so far involves helping and funding Ukrainian researchers abroad, while **the absolute majority of the researchers have chosen to stay or return to Ukraine** (surveys and polls show a dynamic where most researchers remain in Ukraine, but around 40% find themselves internally displaced. Only approximately 12% fled abroad<sup>2</sup>). This is the first thing that needs to be considered.

As of the beginning of 2023 and for the following six months, the most beneficial forms of support **for those Ukrainian researchers who continue to reside in Ukraine** will be the following:

- **financial support for the researchers remaining in Ukraine** (the key here is the long-term nature, and the solution could be virtual mobility and distance grants or scholarships; even small monthly grants of 100–200 euros will have a positive impact);
- **support with energy independence** (both on a personal and institutional level in light of Russian strikes against Ukraine's energy infrastructure in the fall and winter of 2022 and possible future attacks)
- **offline events and opportunities for the researchers** (in order to keep Ukrainian researchers at the beginning of their career in the scientific field in Ukraine, it would be useful to organize and host offline events for them abroad (for example, summer schools, etc.).

**For those Ukrainian researchers who are already abroad or might be planning to leave Ukraine temporarily due to the war**, there should be a clear understanding of why they should choose Finland and how the system works here. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure, among other things:

- continuous **financial support** of Ukrainian researchers' projects and their lives here in Finland;
- **language courses** (because language is often a barrier for Ukrainian researchers who temporarily moved abroad, fleeing the war);
- **inclusion and integration in the local academic community**, as well as the creation of relevant opportunities in various scientific fields for Ukrainian researchers.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sciencebusiness.net/news/International-news/new-normal-ukraines-research-and-innovation-community-slowly-standing-its-feet>

While personal support is very beneficial and efficient, special attention should be paid to systemic and continuous institutional cooperation. **Institutional cooperation** would be beneficial for the development of science in Ukraine, while also being valuable for the Finnish side, creating stronger links and community between Ukraine and the rest of Europe, and providing certain resilience and relevant experience to the Finnish system, should another emergency happen to cause a wave of refugee researchers coming to Europe or staying home but still needing support from abroad. That is also something that will ensure the sustainability of all the support provided to Ukrainian researchers now and will make the results of this support more long-lasting and more mutually beneficial. Such cooperation would also minimize the problem of 'brain drain' in Ukraine while contributing to the scientific development of both sides involved.

But above all, Ukraine needs military support. The sooner Ukraine banishes Russia from its land and wins the war, the better our prospects for its academic landscape, development, and international cooperation.