

A strong research and higher education sector is crucial for a sustainable recovery of Ukraine

Yesterday, Eurodoc's president Sebastian Dahle and vice president Pii Maria Saugmann met with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the National Research Foundation, the National Academy of Science, the Office of the President, and members of the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

The topic for all meetings was the same: the war has had devastating effects on the Ukrainian research and higher education sector and this threatens Ukraine's recovery as a knowledge economy. Researchers have sought refuge outside Ukraine, scientists and students are fighting as soldiers at the frontline, entire universities have been internally displaced, and national budgets have been drained due to the efforts of defending the country. Since the war started, the percentage of Ukraine's GDP used on higher education and research has dropped from 1.7% to 0.4%. Such a cut in funding affects the sector on all levels and means a loss of resources for high quality education and impactful research. Not surprisingly, the cut in funding has led to research projects being stopped and researchers having left academia. But Ukraine will need research to deal with the economical, environmental, and the social consequences of the war.

Funding, or the lack thereof, affects the quality of education and the quality of employment. With many students and academics being either internally displaced or having had to leave the country, the Ukrainian higher education system is pressed to its limit. In order to provide quality education for students and carry out impactful research, academic staff must have reasonable working conditions.

As our Ukrainian colleagues tell us, graduation ceremonies in Ukraine take place to the sound of sirens in bomb shelters or in university basements. Offers for temporary alternatives, for example through the Erasmus+ programmes, provide Ukrainian students, doctoral candidates and ECRs with a chance to study or conduct research in a peaceful environment. But the Erasmus+ and similar initiatives all have in common that they support only those Ukrainian students and academics who – for a shorter or longer period – leave the Ukraine. While this may be an important solution for some for a shorter period of time, it is not a long term solution as it entails a massive brain drain from Ukraine to the rest of Europe. It is therefore necessary to think beyond the kind of support that the Erasmus+ program and similar programs provide and to turn to forms of support that benefit the higher education and research sector directly in Ukraine, and the students and academics working in it.

“On one side, it was devastating to see and hear about the consequences of the war on the researchers. At the same time, it was impressive to see how much the Ukrainian academic community is managing and it holds a high promise for the European research community,” Pii Maria Saugmann reflects. “There is no doubt that

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more designated funding for research and higher education is needed in the European recovery programs.”

Despite the devastating impact of the war, there are crucial reforms under way in the legal framework, funding and further aspects of the higher education and research sector. **Sebastian Dahle thus takes stock of yesterday's meetings: "The Ministry, Research Foundation and President's office have made early-career researchers a major priority. Intense reforms are already being implemented and tailored support and funding measures are being put in place, all in an effort to align with the European Research Area and to shape a modern, efficient and sustainable academic environment. The impact of the war, however, makes external support in collaboration and funding imperative."**

From a European early career researcher's perspective, it is a joint responsibility of all of Europe to support a sustainable recovery of Ukraine. This is necessary for the future of Europe and its democracies. **As the education committee of the Council of Europe states: "Better education for better democracies."** We thus commend and highly welcome the mention of higher education institutions and research infrastructure and the intent to support researchers in the European Commission's proposed Ukraine Facility.

It is thus crucial that in the implementation of the Ukraine Facility, **sufficient funding is allocated to the Ukrainian research and higher education sector.** A strong research and higher education sector is necessary in today's knowledge economy and will be important for a sustainable recovery after the war: Ukrainian academia must receive the necessary support to in particular retain the current generation of Ukrainian early career researchers as they will be essential to shaping the higher education and research sector for the decades to come.

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Eurodoc, the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers, is a grassroots federation of 25 national associations of early-career researchers (ECRs) from 23 countries across Europe. Eurodoc was established in 2002 and is based in Brussels. As a representative of doctoral candidates and junior researchers at the European level, Eurodoc engages with all major stakeholders in research and innovation in Europe.