

## Brief Overview of the State of Ukraine's Higher Education and Science in Times of War

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in Ukraine beyond a small number of internationally visible institutions is currently being recognised. This trend goes beyond the disciplines that deal directly with the war and its consequences. This process is also part of the necessary decolonization of East European studies and a more differentiated public perception of the region.

The focus on Russian history in teaching and public discourse and the central role of Russian language and literature in Slavic studies have mirrored Russia's colonial view of its neighbouring countries, underpinned a one-sided orientation of the public discourse and political misjudgements. Other countries, languages, and cultures in the wider region of Eastern Europe were by and large ignored. On the basis of a now more differentiated perspective of the region, tragically honed during the war, and the numerous personal and institutional connections, a more long-term research agenda and multi-local cooperation can and need to be conceived now.

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An important prerequisite for this are opportunities for researchers inside and outside Ukraine that go beyond short-term support measures. Basic practical issues that are unfortunately too often overlooked are part of this rethinking, such as access to expensive international conferences and academic journals.

With the war, the academic landscape in Ukraine is changing. The extent of the destruction, the military and civil engagement of academics and their students, displacement, and the precarious socio-economic situation make a reorganization of academic structures necessary. The many new and intensified networks and the tireless commitment of Ukrainian academics provide the basis for this. Science will play an important role in the reconstruction of Ukraine, which makes it all the more important to anchor support and reforms of academic structures in the plans for recovery.

## **Brief Overview of the State of Ukraine's Higher Education and Science in Times of War**

By Yuliia Yevstiunina, Philipp Christoph Schmäddeke, Tetiana Folhina (Science at Risk Emergency Office—Academic Network Eastern Europe, Berlin)

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**I**n 2014, Ukraine clearly chose the European direction of development, but faced many challenges to its territorial integrity and national security as a whole, as well as to specific spheres of society. The outbreak of hostilities in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea caused significant damage to higher education and science, including significant destruction of infrastructure, forced relocation of higher education institutions to safer territories, and the loss of scientific and pedagogical staff and students. All of this significantly hampered the implementation of European standards of higher education and the implementation of the new Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" adopted in 2014.

A new set of challenges was introduced by Russia's full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022. Under conditions of military aggression, the sphere of higher education and science was again forced to find new ways and forms to continue its activities. The main challenges were the constant bombing and destruction of higher educa-

tion and research institutions, the need to move them to safer areas, the temporary suspension of educational activities, the displacement of educational staff and students both within Ukraine and abroad, the occupation of some territories, and the moral and psychological stress and trauma resulting from direct threats to life.

The experience of organizing distance learning and further scientific and pedagogical online activities during the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be very useful in this extreme situation. In a fairly short time, it was possible to implement the primary tasks to ensure a safe environment and resume the educational process. This was supported not only by administrations and management departments, but also by academic and teaching staff. A large number of academic and teaching staff found themselves in extremely difficult living conditions in Ukraine, within occupied territories, or abroad. Unfortunately, there are no exact statistics on the loss of staff caused by the war and forced migration,

but partly due to the opportunity to work remotely (according to the Letter of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine) higher education in Ukraine managed to conclude the 2022/23 academic year, and to ensure the further functioning of the sphere of higher education and science in Ukraine.

In reaction to this situation, in 2023 the Science at Risk Emergency Office of the Academic Network Eastern Europe, in cooperation with a team of researchers in Ukraine, initiated a study to obtain more detailed information and a better understanding of the current needs of higher education and science in Ukraine under the conditions of full-scale war. The study, consisting of a survey of Ukrainian academics, is currently ongoing. Moreover, the start of the new academic year this September will provide additional information, including quantitative indicators, of the general state of the country's institutions of higher education and academic research, including current needs and activities. However, first data of our study already gives the opportunity to identify the main needs and risks for the sphere of higher education and science in Ukraine today.

According to the Unified State Database of Ukraine on Education, as of 01 January 2023 a total of 736 institutions of higher education are active, of which 439 are run by the national state, 49 by local public entities and 248 by private institutions. In respect to regional distribution, the largest number of higher education institutions is located in the city of Kyiv (133) and the regions of Kharkiv (61), Dnipropetrovsk (55), Lviv (48) and Odesa (46).

One of the most urgent problems is the support of higher education institutions that suffered directly from military aggression and/or had to move to safer regions of Ukraine. According to the information of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, as of 01 September 2023 (and including the first wave of relocation in 2014), 31 higher education institutions and 65 separate structural subdivisions of such institutions were relocated from the regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, Crimea and Sevastopol (a city with special status). Most of the relocated universities or subdivisions moved to higher education institutes with a similar profile in other regions: in total, 11 regions of Ukraine received relocated higher education institutions.

According to a report on higher education in Ukraine, most universities relocated in 2014 scored lower after their move (based on the unofficial rating "Top-200 Universities of Ukraine"). It can be assumed that such a negative trend will also show for institutions relocated in 2022. The forced change of location, the need to quickly re-establish the educational process, and communication with academic and teaching staff as well as students are just some of the many challenges for uni-

versities for which they need the support of the state, partners, and the public.

At the same time, the destruction and damage to the infrastructure of the education sector is constantly increasing. When the full-scale invasion started, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine created the online platform "Освіта під загрозою" (Education under Threat), which documents the scale of destruction and damage to all educational institutions in Ukraine caused by the war. According to the resource and information provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, as of 01 September 2023, four institutions of higher education have been destroyed in Ukraine (all of them located in the Donetsk region) and 84 institutions of higher education have been damaged. The most affected regions are Kharkiv (23), Donetsk (9), Odesa (9), Zhytomyr (5), Zaporizhzhia (5) and Mykolaiv (5), as well as the city of Kyiv (6). Unfortunately, the bombing and shelling continues, and new destruction is recorded on a weekly basis.

Despite this widespread damage and destruction, according to the Unified State Database of Ukraine on Education, as of 01 January 2023 there were 1,077,685 applicants for higher education degrees (covering all levels, from BA and MA to doctoral degrees). Of these, more than a third study at the expense of the state and local budgets, while the remaining 63% utilize personal or private funding for their studies. Of all applicants for higher education, 75% are enrolled for full-time study, while 0.4% opted for evening studies and 24% for distance learning. Soon, it will be possible to sum up the results of the admissions cycles for the academic year 2023/24, which will allow us to draw further conclusions about the current functioning of the Ukrainian higher education system.

Next to teaching, the other important function of higher education and science is academic research. Again based on data from the Unified State Database of Ukraine on Education, as of 01 January 2023 we have analysed the profiles of 119,533 members of the academic and teaching staff working in institutions of higher education in Ukraine. About 59.5% of them have academic degrees: Doctor of Science degrees (second doctoral degrees)—13.5%, Candidate of Sciences or PhD degrees (first doctoral degrees)—46%, while the remaining 40.5% are without academic degree. If we analyse the gender balance, about 60% of the academic and teaching staff are women, 40% are men. Among women the proportion of holders of a scientific degree is 62.3%: Doctor of Science degrees (second doctoral degrees)—9.2%, Candidate of Sciences or PhD degrees (first doctoral degrees)—53.1%, without academic degree—37.7%. Among men, the proportion of holders of a scientific degree is 77.2%: Doctor of Science deg-

rees (second doctoral degrees)—20%, Candidate of Sciences or PhD degrees (first doctoral degrees)—57.2%, without academic degree—22.8%.

These and other data can be extremely important when analyzing the state of the scientific sphere and the needs of Ukrainian scientists in the context of the war in Ukraine. For example, the gender of staff is an important aspect in the context of mobilization and restrictions on the exit of men of military age from the territory of Ukraine, which in turn directly affects the quality of research activities of male Ukrainian scientists, etc.

Further important aspects to be considered are:

- Reduction of state funding for higher education and academic research—more than 20% of higher education institutions have delayed payment of salaries and scholarships, and the National Research Foundation of Ukraine did not receive appropriate funds to continue grant funding for research and development projects because the state was forced to sequester previously allocated budget funds for the defence of the country against military aggression;
- Institutions of higher education and academic research have suffered significant financial losses as a result of destruction of and damage to infrastructure;
- The demand for higher education is expected to decline—demand by the state for the training of spe-

cialists and academic and teaching staff is reduced; higher education will become less accessible to a large number of Ukrainians due to factors like the fall in real incomes of the population, business's lack of interest in training specialists, the underdevelopment of the market for commercial loans to finance education, and life in conditions of uncertainty due to the war;

- Under these conditions, many of the nearly two thirds of students who rely on personal or private funding for their studies will find it increasingly hard to pay in full for their education;
- Within Ukraine, many students are moving to higher education institutions located in relatively safe parts of the country, while both Ukrainian and foreign students currently studying in Ukraine may also move to foreign universities;
- Declining attractiveness of work as academic or teaching staff in higher education due to the significant payment gap in comparison to both the business sector in Ukraine and academic institutions abroad, as well as a general decline in the prestige of academic and teaching professions.

*Translation: Heiko Pleines*

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