




“Displaced but not disconnected: the potential of scientific diaspora in the rebuilding of Ukraine”

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DISPLACED BUT NOT DISCONNECTED: THE POTENTIAL OF SCIENTIFIC DIASPORA IN THE REBUILDING OF UKRAINE

When war comes, it silences classrooms, shatters labs, and uproots entire lives. But what it cannot destroy is the knowledge people carry within them – resilient, determined, and driven by purpose. This is the story of Ukrainian science after February 2022. Not a story of loss, but of transformation. Not disappearance, but displacement, and determined reconnection.

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion, according to the rough estimation of the Ministry of Education of Science in Ukraine, over 5,000 Ukrainian scientists were forced to flee. Many were women with children. Most of them landed in Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, the UK, the US, carrying not only their expertise but also the enormous weight of uncertainty.

In that moment of war, something extraordinary happened. Ukrainian scientists abroad tried to find one another. The first discussion about the science diaspora initiative was conducted in October 2022 with Mykhailo Hrebenuik (First Secretary of the Delegation of Ukraine to the EU) in a small cafe in Brussels, and it seemed so difficult to organize it. We already conducted the survey [“Beyond Resilience: Professional Challenges, Preferences, and Plans of Ukrainian Researchers Abroad,”](#) where half of Ukrainian scientists claimed that they are not ready to return to Ukraine; at the same time, they wanted to stay in touch with their colleagues and universities (Maryl et al., 2022).

With a soulmate, Dr. Igor Lyman, we started thinking about the details. Then, in March 2023, the first meeting of the Ukrainian scholars abroad was held with the support of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Poland), where more than 70 Ukrainian scholars gathered, and that instinct gave birth to the Ukrainian Science Diaspora initiative. The initiative has become coordinated by the common efforts of the Young Scientists Council at the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the Scholar Support Office, the NGO Innovative University, and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. The aim was not only to track displaced scholars but to keep connections across borders.

With vital support from the MIT-Ukraine program, the initiative gained digital form. It was Julie Kukharenko, Michael Leskiw, and

Rainer Frost, employees affiliated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), who first reached out in the early months of the war. Meanwhile, Dr. Lyman and I, along with colleagues from the Ministry (Zoya Petrenko, Sergii Zharinov, and Olena Zaika), envisioned a platform that could connect Ukraine's scattered scientific community. By February 2023, with the coordination of Dr. Elizabeth Wood and Svitlana Krasynska at MIT, and the dedicated work of six MIT students – Nisha Nkya, Michelle Luo, Vivian Chinoda, Sabrina Hu, Esther Kinyanjui, and Suzanne Jiang – that vision became reality. Later, the technical development of the site was taken over from MIT by young scientists from the National Technical University “Dnipro Polytechnic” – Leonid Ksenchuk, Dmytro Buslov, and Viktor Umansky.

Support and inspiration also came from groups like Czexpats, who shared their experience mapping Czech scientists abroad. Their guidance helped the Ukrainian team anticipate challenges in outreach, privacy, and engagement. The concept of the platform was further refined through discussions at various events, including “Ukrainian Scientific Diaspora: connecting scholars for the future,” which concluded the conference “One year of war in Ukraine, exploring the impact on the science sector and supporting initiatives,” organized by the International Science Council (ISC) and All European Academies (ALLEA).

The result is ukrdiaspora.nauka.gov.ua, a living map of Ukrainian researchers around the globe, open to those who want to collaborate with colleagues in Ukraine. The site has grown into a digital meeting place, a collaboration platform, and a symbol of scientific resistance.

It is important to say that the Ukrainian Science Diaspora initiative has become global. As already mentioned, we initially looked for scholars, and then we began to identify diaspora scholar organizations. At the same time, other scholars approached us for advice on establishing such organizations in their host countries. There are currently 19 academic diaspora organizations in our network from 16 countries around the world. They are completely independent and operate within the norms and rules of the host countries. Their activities are mainly focused on the following areas: the integration of newly arrived Ukrainians into the research space of the host countries, as well as the promotion of Ukraine. Today, every Ukrainian researcher abroad is a science diplomat – they raise the Ukrainian question, fight against Russian propaganda, and convince people and governments to continue standing with Ukraine.

The website is more than infrastructure, it is also a vessel for gratitude.

Many Ukrainian scientists now use the site to share heartfelt thanks. They speak not only of academic support, but of human kindness:

- *“My host in Germany gave me access to her lab, but more than that, she treated me like family.”*
- *“When I was lost in Prague, my Czech colleague helped me find housing, school for my child, and the will to keep going.”*
- *“A Belgian postdoc became my research partner and my friend.”*

These moments matter. They show that science is not only about discovery, but also about solidarity.

Beyond the platform, the initiative has supported a growing diaspora mentorship program led by Dr. Uliana Zbezhkhovska. In 2025, it launched a pilot phase, connecting Ukrainian scientists abroad with those still working in Ukraine. The results have been powerful: co-authored publications, successful grant proposals, and new partnerships between Ukrainian and foreign universities.

Our initiative also has an unofficial channel of communication. The Telegram group “Ukrainian Science Diaspora” has become a digital hub with over 1,200 members. It was created in October 2023, mostly because of simple communication ways and security reasons – not all scientists can put their data on the map on our webpage. Via this group, the Ukrainian scientists around the world now share opportunities, insights, and support within national chapters.

Originally focused on temporary displacement, the Ukrainian Science Diaspora now builds permanent, two-way bridges: from Ukraine to the world, and back again. Its priorities today include:

- supporting national networks of Ukrainian researchers abroad;
- developing science diplomacy and advocacy channels;
- mentoring scientists inside and outside Ukraine;
- designing policies that turn brain drain into brain circulation.

But the community also faces challenges. Many displaced scientists are unlikely to return, not out of disloyalty, but because their labs are destroyed, their institutions damaged, their lives permanently changed. At the same time, tensions can arise between those who remained and those who left. Healing that divide is part of the Diaspora’s vision: connection instead of comparison, support instead of suspicion.

This is why we appeal now to the global academic community: support these efforts not only as a gesture of solidarity, but as an investment in the future of science itself.

Because Ukrainian scientists in diaspora are not guests. They are global colleagues, contributors, and leaders. They are not lost – they are leading.

We thank every institution that has opened a door. Every researcher who has shared a bench, a grant, or a conversation. But we must go further: long-term fellowships, co-authored projects, inclusive policies, and formal recognition of Ukrainian scholars in exile must become structural.

The war may have scattered Ukrainian science. But it has also shown us something profound: when knowledge is shared, when researchers are welcomed, science not only survives – it thrives.

Let us honor that truth. Let us amplify the Ukrainian scientific diaspora. Let us make sure that when peace returns, science will be ready to rebuild Ukraine.