POLICY BRIEF

Science Diplomacy for Ukraine's European Integration

The Role of the Science Diaspora

> Outcome of the 1st Ukrainian–European Science Diplomacy Forum (Vienna, Austria, 12 March 2026) and empirical research on the Ukrainian Science Diaspora partner organisations[1]

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[1] *Based on "Impact Assessment of the Ukrainian Science Diaspora on the Rebuilding of the Research and Higher Education System of Ukraine" (2025), drawing on a survey of 300 diaspora members*

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Executive Summary

Russia's full-scale invasion has transformed Ukraine's European integration into a central strategic priority for the European Union. Beyond military support and physical reconstruction, Ukraine's accession requires a deep transformation of its research, innovation, and higher education systems — sectors that underpin economic recovery, technological sovereignty, and long-term stability.

The war has severely weakened Ukraine's research capacity through the destruction of infrastructure, displacement of researchers, funding constraints, and institutional overload. Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine has displaced a substantial share of Ukrainian researchers. An initial estimate by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine indicates that more than **5,000 scholars** left Ukraine after the invasion. However, their potential remains largely underutilised due to fragmented policies, limited coordination, and insufficient institutional mechanisms at both Ukrainian and EU levels.

Mobilising the Ukrainian science diaspora through a comprehensive science diplomacy strategy could significantly accelerate Ukraine's integration into the European Research Area (ERA), enhance the effectiveness of reconstruction efforts, and strengthen Europe's broader security architecture.

This policy brief demonstrates how the Ukrainian science diaspora can serve as a strategic asset for both Ukraine and the European Union in advancing European integration.

Problem statement

Ukraine's integration into the EU is fundamentally a **knowledge-intensive transformation** that requires **institutional convergence** across research governance, innovation systems, and human capital.

Despite the growing recognition of **science diplomacy** as a key instrument of EU external action, no dedicated and operationally mature framework currently exists that systematically mobilises the **Ukrainian science diaspora** across accession, research and innovation reform, as well as recovery processes.

To fully leverage this potential, a **coherent, sustained, and well-coordinated strategy** is required at both national and European levels.

Key Findings

01 The Ukrainian science diaspora as a community is already an active transnational actor in support of Ukraine's recovery and European integration. At the same time, its organisational architecture remains uneven and only partially institutionalised, limiting its full potential for the EU and Ukraine to leverage it as a strategic partner.

02 The Ukrainian science diaspora already performs as a network of science diplomats across all four pillars of science diplomacy, but with significant unevenness. The most developed functions — *Diplomacy for Science* (e.g. facilitating international research consortia, Horizon Europe participation, engagement access, and mobility where the diaspora directly acts as liaison channels into global science), while the least developed is *Science in Diplomacy* (e.g. generating expert knowledge for security, reconstruction, and governance policy). Here, Diaspora expertise exists but lacks systematic pathways into decision-making, thereby constraining the EU's ability to fully leverage it for evidence-based policies on Ukraine's recovery, security, and integration.

03 The existing Ukrainian science diaspora platform is not yet institutionalised as a central coordination and communication mechanism, hindering structured and scalable engagement and reducing the EU's ability to efficiently access and mobilise diaspora expertise.

04 Despite a legal framework that formally obliges EU Member States to recognise Ukrainian academic qualifications — implementation remains uneven in practice. Compliance gaps, processing backlogs, and structural incompatibilities between Ukrainian and European degree frameworks compound one another. The bottleneck is not the absence of a legal framework, but the absence of compliance capacity and documentation alignment.

05 The Ukrainian science diaspora already acts as a network of science diplomats facilitating the transfer of research equipment from EU institutions to Ukrainian universities; however, these efforts remain dependent on individual initiative and informal networks, as existing platforms lack the legal, customs, and logistical frameworks needed to scale and systematically support Ukraine's EU integration.

Recommendations

01 Establish a dedicated EU–Ukraine science diaspora *Engagement Window* within the existing Ukraine Facility framework — not a new stand-alone institution, but a targeted operational mechanism with its own governance, criteria, and accountability structures. This would support newly established scientific diaspora centres and strengthen their role in science diplomacy, further shaping the science diplomats' network.

02 The EU should prioritise scaling *Diplomacy for Science* by strengthening diaspora organisations' mobility, funding access, and access to research infrastructures to accelerate Ukraine's integration into the ERA. In parallel, it should strengthen *Science in Diplomacy* by creating structured pathways for diaspora expertise to inform policy on reconstruction, security, governance reform, and EU accession. This would enable faster integration into the ERA and more effective, evidence-based policymaking in key areas of EU–Ukraine cooperation.

03 The EU should scale and institutionalise existing diaspora engagement mechanisms by strengthening the ukrdiaspora.nauka.gov.ua platform as a central coordination hub, ensuring its long-term funding, integration with EU programmes, and development of core services (such as registries, matchmaking, and information tools). This would allow the EU to access and mobilise diaspora expertise, reduce reliance on informal networks, and strengthen evidence-based support for Ukraine's recovery and integration.

04 The European Union, in partnership with the Government of Ukraine, should support Ukraine in repositioning its Doctor of Sciences qualification as a Habilitation-equivalent senior research qualification *where relevant*, preserving Ukraine's academic tradition while aligning it with established European practice. In parallel, capacity support should be directed to ENIC-NARIC centres facing the highest application volumes, and a joint EU-Ukraine working group should produce standardised guidance for credential evaluators on the reformed Ukrainian system. Diaspora organisations could be formally involved as documentation and advisory partners, drawing on their direct familiarity with both Ukrainian and host-country academic practice.

05 Establish a standardised EU–Ukraine framework for research equipment transfers, including legal templates, customs procedures, and dedicated logistics funding. This would enable the scaling of existing diaspora-led initiatives, reduce reliance on informal networks, and accelerate the restoration of Ukraine's research infrastructure.

Expected Impact

Implementation of these measures would enable the systematic **mobilisation of the Ukrainian science diaspora** as a strategic partner in Ukraine's recovery and European integration

This includes:

- ☑ **increased diaspora participation** in Horizon Europe and Erasmus+
- ☑ stronger and more **structured university–diaspora partnerships**
- ☑ greater expert input into **recovery and reform processes**
- ☑ improved access to **research infrastructures**
- ☑ reduced dependence on **informal contacts**
- ☑ stronger **retention and circulation of talent**
- ☑ enhanced institutional convergence with **ERA norms**

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Policy Context

Why This Matters for the European Union

Ukraine's reconstruction is not only a national recovery effort but a strategic European priority with direct implications for the EU's security, stability, and competitiveness. The war has severely weakened Ukraine's research and innovation system, undermining the knowledge base necessary for sustainable recovery and future EU membership. At the same time, many Ukrainian scholars are now working within European institutions, forming a highly skilled transnational community whose potential remains insufficiently mobilised. The issue is particularly urgent in light of Ukraine's candidate status and ongoing accession process. Early integration into the ERA can accelerate institutional convergence and reduce long-term accession costs. Moreover, the displacement of researchers since 2022 creates a narrow window to transform potential brain drain into brain circulation that benefits both Ukraine and the EU. If Ukraine's knowledge economy is not effectively rebuilt, the EU risks facing prolonged instability on its eastern border, higher reconstruction costs, and weaker technological competitiveness. Conversely, mobilising the Ukrainian science diaspora offers a cost-effective pathway to strengthen innovation capacity, support reconstruction, and reinforce European resilience.

Current Policy Landscape

- **Existing legislation, regulations, or government initiatives related to this issue**

The European Union has established a broad policy framework to support Ukraine's scientific cooperation and gradual integration into European structures. Ukraine is fully associated with Horizon Europe and the Euratom Research and Training Programme, enabling participation in EU-funded research on equal terms with Member States. It is also engaged in implementing the ERA Policy Agenda 2022–2024, which promotes research integration, mobility, open science, and institutional reform. Wider strategic initiatives, including the New European Innovation Agenda (2021), the Global Gateway strategy (2021), and the proposed ERA Act (2022), highlight the importance of strengthening Europe's innovation capacity, international partnerships, and technological sovereignty.

- **Recent policy developments or identified gaps**

Scientific cooperation is further embedded in the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement (2014), the annual Enlargement Package (2023), and the Ukraine Facility (2024–2027) (2023), which supports recovery, reforms, and alignment with EU standards. Despite this extensive architecture, current approaches remain fragmented and insufficiently coordinated. Existing instruments primarily focus on mobility, project participation, or short-term support rather than systemic transformation of Ukraine's research ecosystem.

- **Current approaches and their limitations**

Notably, there is no dedicated, fully operational mechanism focused specifically on diaspora mobilisation across R&I recovery, accession support, and institutional transformation to mobilise the Ukrainian science diaspora community as a strategic actor for knowledge transfer, institutional alignment, and reconstruction. Without such coordination, EU investments risk limited long-term impact, while structural challenges — including capacity gaps and potential brain drain — persist, slowing Ukraine's integration into the ERA and future EU membership.

A formal EU policy framework for recognising Ukrainian academic qualifications already exists: Ukraine is party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention (Council of Europe/UNESCO, 1997), and the European Commission issued a formal Recommendation (EU 2022/554, April 2022) on the recognition of qualifications for people fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine. However, the Commission's own assessment found that implementation "varies significantly across Member States" and that "not all Member States have followed it" (European Commission, 2023, p. 3). Recognition volumes increased substantially across multiple Member States following 2022, placing pressure on processing capacity (European Commission, 2023; OECD, 2023). A structural complexity compounds the problem: Ukraine operates a two-tier research degree system – Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Sciences (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2026) – which does not map directly onto the one-tier doctoral model prevalent in Western Europe, while closely corresponding to the Habilitation tradition retained in Germany, France, Austria, and several other Member States. This creates recognition challenges that the ENIC-NARIC network has actively worked to address since 2022 (ENIC-NARIC, 2023).

Key Stakeholders & Connection to Broader Priorities

Primary government actors

EU Commission side: Directorate-General Research & Innovation, Directorate-General Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations; Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture; Directorate-General International Partnerships; European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Parliament (notably the ITRE and AFET Committees), the Council of the European Union and Member State governments, and the EU Delegation to Ukraine.

Ukraine's side: Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry for Strategic Industries, Ministry of Digital Transformation, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, alongside regional and local authorities involved in rebuilding research infrastructure.

Affected populations or communities

Diaspora organisations, researchers, and academic staff in Ukraine, displaced scholars and students, the Ukrainian science diaspora in the EU and globally, universities and research institutions, early-career researchers and PhD candidates, and students as the future human capital of the country.

Other relevant stakeholders
(industry, civil society, international organisations)

Universities and research organisations across Europe, European research infrastructures, Horizon Europe consortia, technology companies and R&D centres, start-up ecosystems, defence industry actors, investors in deep-tech sectors, associations of the Ukrainian Science Diaspora, educational and research NGOs, professional scientific networks, foundations supporting science and education, and international organisations such as the OECD, the World Bank, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, NATO, the European Investment Bank, and other international financial institutions.

This policy brief aligns with key international frameworks, national strategies, and EU integration objectives relevant to Ukraine's research, innovation, and higher education systems.

International frameworks

The recommendations are consistent with *A European Framework for Science Diplomacy: Recommendations of the EU Science Diplomacy Working Groups* (2025). They also contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular:

- ☑ SDG 4 (Quality Education)
- ☑ SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure)
- ☑ SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)

Ukrainian national strategies and development plans

This brief supports Ukraine's strategic priority of establishing systemic cooperation with the Ukrainian Science Diaspora, as outlined in the *Strategic Plan of Activities of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine until 2027*.

EU integration commitments and acquis requirements

The proposed measures are aligned with Ukraine's commitments under:

- the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union
- the Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation between Ukraine and the European Community

While these frameworks do not explicitly address diaspora engagement, they provide a foundation for the Ukrainian science diaspora as a community to play a strategic role in advancing European integration in science, higher education, and innovation.

Evidence Summary

This section synthesises empirical findings and existing research to assess the role of the Ukrainian science diaspora in Ukraine's European integration through science diplomacy.

Empirical basis

The analysis draws on original empirical data collected through a survey of 300 members of the Ukrainian Science Diaspora (Ukrainian Science Diaspora, 2025). The respondents represent a highly qualified and internationally active research community, predominantly engaged in academic and research institutions across Europe and beyond. This provides a robust evidence base for assessing both the current functions and unrealised potential of the diaspora in supporting Ukraine's reconstruction and integration processes.

Insights from existing research

Previous studies demonstrate that science diasporas play a significant role in facilitating international research cooperation, including participation in joint laboratories, academic mobility, training, and knowledge transfer (Flink & Schreiterer, 2010). More recent research highlights the role of organised diaspora communities as actors of science diplomacy in host countries (Echeverria-King et al., 2022), as well as their potential to mitigate the negative effects of brain drain through transnational knowledge circulation (Writer, 2013).

Digital infrastructures and emerging practices

Digitalisation has significantly expanded the capacity of diaspora engagement by enabling more structured and scalable forms of cooperation. International examples, including diaspora databases and coordination platforms in the Czech Republic (https://czexpats.org/en/), Latvia (www.researchlatvia.gov.lv), Romania (https://ad-astra.ro/), and Austria (https://uscida.at/), demonstrate the role of digital tools in facilitating collaboration and increasing visibility of diaspora expertise. In this context, the Digital Platform "Ukrainian Science Diaspora" represents an emerging coordination mechanism, currently mapping over 400 researchers across countries and disciplines. It enables identification of expertise, supports networking, and provides a basis for developing more structured forms of cooperation between diaspora scholars, Ukrainian institutions, and international partners.

Key evidence-based insights

The findings indicate that the Ukrainian science diaspora already performs multiple functions of science diplomacy, particularly in facilitating international research cooperation, supporting institutional partnerships, and contributing to knowledge exchange. In addition, Diaspora actors are already involved in the transfer of research equipment from EU institutions to Ukrainian universities, demonstrating an emerging operational role in supporting Ukraine's research infrastructure recovery. At the same time, these activities remain unevenly distributed and largely dependent on individual initiative and informal networks rather than institutionalised mechanisms. This is particularly critical in the context of large-scale infrastructure damage: UNESCO documents 643 pieces of research equipment damaged beyond repair – out of more than 750 total damaged or destroyed – with total restoration costs estimated at USD 1.26 billion (UNESCO and Junior Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2024). This underscores both the scale of the need and the importance of establishing structured, scalable mechanisms for equipment transfer.

Knowledge gaps

Despite growing visibility and engagement, there is still limited systematic evidence on how science diasporas contribute to the long-term development of their home countries, particularly in the context of large-scale reconstruction and EU integration. In the Ukrainian case, the key gap lies in the absence of structured mechanisms that translate diaspora expertise into sustained institutional and policy impact.

Data Presentation*

*Data were collected in October and November 2025 through a survey of 300 self-identified members of the Ukrainian Science Diaspora, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Profile of the science diaspora respondents

Gender

74% 25%

Left Ukraine

34% Before February 2022

66% After February 2022

Level of education

Bachelor's degree	1,3 %
Master's degree	11 %
PhD	63 %
D Science	23 %
Other	1,7 %

Country of residence

Germany	22%
Poland	13.7 %
United Kingdom	8,7%
USA	4,7%
Switzerland	4,3%
Austria	4%
Finland	3,7%
Sweden	3%
Brazil	3%
Spain	3%
France	3%
Italy	2%
Other	26,1%

Age

18-29	11 %
30-39	25 %
40-49	43 %
50-59	16 %
60-69	4 %
70+	1 %

Field of science

Social sciences	36,7%	Medical and health sciences	4,7%
Natural sciences	19,7%	Engineering and technology	11,3%
Humanities	23,3%	Other	1,7%
Agricultural sciences	2,7%		

Current professional status abroad

work for a foreign academic nstitution (temporarily)	38,3 %	I work for an NGO	8,3 %
work remotely for a Jkrainian institution	30 %	I work for a private company	6,7 %
work for a foreign academic nstitution (permanently)	25,7 %	I am currently unemployed	5,7 %
receive a scholarship/grant	18,3 %	I work for a think tank	1,3 %
		I am retired	1,3 %

The findings reveal a highly qualified diaspora, with over **85%** holding **a PhD or doctorate**, and the majority being mid-career researchers. Women dominate the sample, especially among those who left after February 2022, reflecting wartime mobility patterns. The diaspora is geographically concentrated in Europe, with a significant presence in North America. Two-thirds of the respondents migrated after the full-scale invasion, indicating a war-driven outflow of expertise. Professionally, most respondents **remain active in academia abroad**, either in temporary or permanent positions, or through continued collaboration with Ukrainian institutions, demonstrating a strong potential for partnership and knowledge exchange.

The data confirm that the Ukrainian science diaspora is already highly active in supporting Ukraine **(over 90% participation)**, primarily through *Diplomacy for Science* activities such as joint publications, conference participation, research collaboration, and grant applications. These forms of engagement are **well-established, network-driven, and closely aligned with integration into the ERA**.

Data Presentation*

*Data were collected in October and November 2025 through a survey of 300 self-identified members of the Ukrainian Science Diaspora, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Participation of the diaspora in activities supporting Ukraine

Activities to support Ukraine

91,3% Yes (regularly and occasionally)

Stakeholders' interest in cooperation with the scientific diaspora

Very interested	12,7 %
Somewhat interested	30,7 %
Not very interested	34,7 %
Not interested	11 %
Difficult to answer	11 %

Reasons for interest

Forms of cooperation with Ukrainian institutions

Joint scientific publications	49,3 %
Participation in conferences, workshops, or seminars organized in Ukraine	49 %
Promotion of Ukrainian science and culture abroad (speeches, public events)	40,3 %
Teaching/giving lectures online	35,7 %
Joint preparation of grant applications	32 %
Scientific consulting for Ukrainian students/graduate students/young scientists	31,3 %
Joint research projects	30,7 %
Expert evaluation/review of scientific works or projects	28,7 %
Charitable or volunteer support for scientific, educational, and other initiatives	28,7 %
Countering disinformation and propaganda from the Russian Federation	27 %

Cooperation remains concentrated in academic and networking activities, with comparatively less structured involvement in policy-oriented functions. Notably, around two-thirds of respondents are willing to act as experts for government bodies in Ukraine's recovery, even beyond the education and science sectors, highlighting significant untapped potential for Science in Diplomacy. This reinforces the identified imbalance: while *Diplomacy for Science* is strong and scalable, *Science in Diplomacy* remains underdeveloped due to the lack of formal mechanisms to channel diaspora expertise into decision-making processes.

The data highlight a **strong willingness** of the Ukrainian science diaspora to contribute to **Ukraine's recovery** (**93%**), alongside substantial engagement in international projects. However, this potential is constrained by **systemic barriers**, particularly poor communication between institutions and scientists abroad, unstable funding, lack of clear state mechanisms, and the absence of a single coordination platform. At the same time, respondents clearly indicate **demand for structured engagement tools**, including invitations to joint research, participation in advisory bodies, and access to funding and recognition mechanisms. This confirms that while motivation and capacity are high, the lack of an institutionalised central platform limits efficient coordination, visibility of opportunities, and scalable cooperation.

Data Presentation*

*Data were collected in October and November 2025 through a survey of 300 self-identified members of the Ukrainian Science Diaspora, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

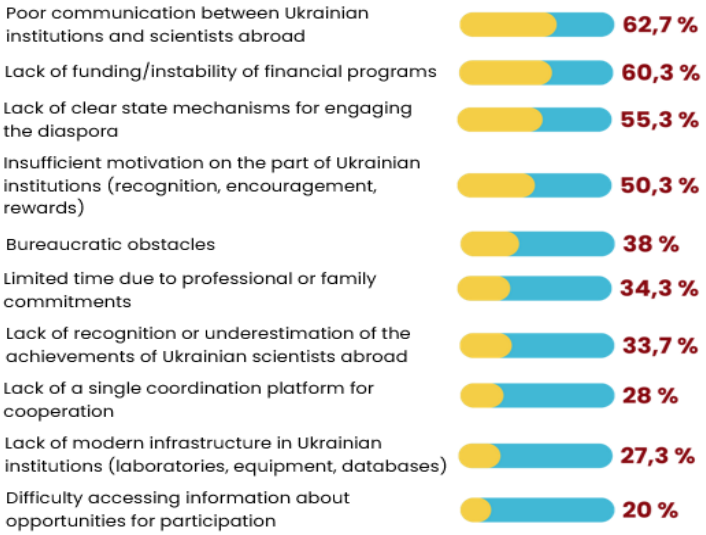
Engagement and barriers to participation of diaspora scientists

Involvement in projects outside Ukraine **45.5%** Yes

Willingness to participate in projects for the rebuilding of Ukraine **93%** Yes / Most likely yes

Mechanisms for encouraging and determining contributions to Ukraine's rebuilding

Obstacles to active contribution to Ukraine's rebuilding engagement



Other mechanisms for encouraging and determining contributions to Ukraine's recovery

These findings directly support the need to **strengthen and institutionalise** the existing diaspora platform as a **central hub**, enabling more **effective matchmaking**, **communication**, and **integration** of diaspora expertise into Ukraine's **recovery** and **EU-supported programs**.

No EU-level framework exists specifically for the transfer of scientific equipment from European research institutions to Ukrainian universities. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism covers emergency humanitarian items but does not address research infrastructure. Individual transfers currently require navigating customs duties, VAT regimes, and dual-use export control regulations simultaneously - a combination that functions as a **de facto prohibition** for most diaspora organisations and small institutions, regardless of willingness to donate. Evidence from the 1st Ukrainian-European Science Diplomacy Forum (Vienna, March 2026) confirms that Diaspora Partner Organisations in Austria and the Czech Republic have completed successful transfers, but describe each case as a **bespoke legal exercise** with no replicable template.

Policy Options & Recommendations

01

Establish a dedicated EU–Ukraine Science Diaspora *Engagement Window* within the existing Ukraine Facility framework — not as a stand-alone institution, but as a targeted operational mechanism with its own governance, criteria, and accountability structure.

Description

The EU-Ukraine Science Diaspora Engagement Window will be devoted to mobilising the Ukrainian scientific diaspora as a strategic partner in Ukraine's EU integration, providing targeted funding, capacity-building, coordination support, and partnership mechanisms linking diaspora networks with institutions in Ukraine and the EU. The Window should provide small and medium grants (€10,000–€150,000) for diaspora chapter projects linking EU and Ukrainian institutions; seed funding for Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, and COST preparatory partnerships; a twinning support window for university-laboratory partnerships; and co-financing for diaspora coordination roles within Ukrainian institutions. Governance should be jointly co-managed by DG RTD and Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science, with diaspora organisations formally recognised as implementing partners rather than merely beneficiaries. The case for a dedicated window rather than absorption into existing instruments is clear: existing instruments are designed for established institutions with administrative capacity, not for diaspora organisations operating across multiple jurisdictions without permanent secretariats.

Advantages

- Enables rapid scaling of existing diaspora engagement without building new structures from scratch;
- Strengthens Ukraine's institutional convergence with EU research and governance standards through trusted intermediaries;
- Enhances the effectiveness of EU programs (Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, COST, MSCA) by improving Ukraine's participation capacity.

Risks

- Potential duplication with existing EU funding instruments if not well coordinated;
- Uneven access across disciplines or regions if stronger diaspora networks dominate funding.

Resource Requirements

Moderate financial investment for grants and coordination support, plus administrative capacity within the European Commission or an implementing agency to manage calls, evaluation, and monitoring; requires engagement of diaspora organisations as implementing partners.

Implementation Timeline

Short- to medium-term (1–3 years) for launch and initial impact; medium-term (3–5 years) for full operational maturity and measurable contribution to EU integration.

Policy Options & Recommendations

02 Scale “Diplomacy for Science” while Building a Science Diplomats Network

Description

Given that the Ukrainian science diaspora already performs all four functions of science diplomacy (see Annex 1), albeit unevenly, priority should be given to scaling the most developed dimension – Diplomacy for Science – through support for diaspora partner organisations, mobility programmes, twinning partnerships, and access to European research infrastructure, thereby accelerating Ukraine’s integration into the European Research Area. Targeted support is also required for the least developed dimension – Science in Diplomacy. Build Science in Diplomacy capacity by creating structured pathways for diaspora expertise to reach policy processes – specifically for reconstruction, security, governance reform, and EU accession. Concrete mechanisms: an expert roster integrated into the Ukraine Facility governance structure; standing advisory panels for the Ministry of Education and Science and the Deputy Prime Minister's office for EU integration; and policy laboratory formats convening diaspora experts with Ukrainian and EU policymakers on defined reform agendas.

Advantages

- Structured Science in Diplomacy mechanisms bring high-level diaspora expertise into policymaking, strengthening evidence-based decisions in critical areas like reconstruction and EU accession;
- Transforms diaspora from individual or project-based collaboration into a strategic resource for recovery and accession;
- Rather than creating new institutions, the model uses targeted mechanisms within existing frameworks (e.g., Ukraine Facility), making it more feasible and sustainable.

Risks

- Overconcentration on well-connected diaspora hubs, potentially leaving smaller or newer networks underrepresented;
- Limited absorption capacity within Ukrainian institutions may slow the translation of expertise into policy outcomes.

Resource Requirements

Moderate financial resources for mobility, twinning, expert pools, and coordination activities; administrative capacity within EU programs to manage targeted calls; engagement of diaspora organisations and policy stakeholders as implementing partners.

Implementation Timeline

Short- to medium-term (1–3 years) for launch and initial impact; medium-term (3–5 years) to achieve systemic effects, with early results possible in the short term through mobility and partnership initiatives.

Policy Options & Recommendations

03 Institutionalise Coordination through a Central Diaspora Engagement Platform

Description
Strengthen and institutionalise existing mechanisms of cooperation with the Ukrainian scientific diaspora by supporting the long-term development of the ukrdiaspora.nauka.gov.ua platform as a central coordination hub, integrating it with EU programs and equipping it with services for expertise mapping, diaspora digital hub tools for its partner science diaspora organisations, partner matching, funding information, analytics and policy briefs for needs and problems assessment.

Advantages
- Reduces fragmentation and dependence on informal personal networks by providing a structured coordination mechanism;
- Improves efficiency and transparency of collaboration between diaspora scientists, Ukrainian institutions, and EU partners;
- Enables systematic mobilisation of diaspora expertise for reconstruction and EU integration policies.

Risks
- Effectiveness depends on sustained political commitment and active participation from stakeholders;
- Underutilisation if institutions lack capacity or incentives to engage with the platform.

Resource Requirements
Moderate financial support for platform development, maintenance, and service delivery; administrative capacity for integration with EU programs; funding for liaison roles and partner diaspora organizations to ensure active use.

Implementation Timeline
Short- to medium-term (1–3 years) for operational strengthening, with long-term sustainability contingent on continued institutional support.

Policy Options & Recommendations

04 Support Ukraine in Aligning Its Two-Tier Research Degree System with European Habilitation Practice

Description

The European Union, in partnership with the Government of Ukraine, could support Ukraine in aligning its two-tier research degree system with established European Habilitation practice as part of its EU accession process. A formal legal framework for recognition already exists: Ukraine is party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention (Council of Europe/UNESCO, 1997), and the European Commission issued Recommendation (EU) 2022/554 in April 2022 on the recognition of qualifications for persons fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Commission's 2023 assessment found, however, that implementation "varies significantly across Member States" and that "not all Member States have followed it". Processing backlogs persists, and a structural complexity compounds the problem: Ukraine operates a two-tier research degree system – Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Sciences – which is often misread against the Anglo-American one-tier doctoral model, despite the fact that the second tier closely corresponds to the Habilitation tradition retained in Germany, Austria, and to France's Habilitation to supervise research (HDR). The real bottleneck is therefore not the existence of the two tiers, but the absence of a shared, European-legible definition of the Doctor of Sciences. Repositioning the Doctor of Sciences as a Habilitation-/HDR-equivalent senior research qualification – where relevant – would preserve Ukraine's academic tradition while substantially reducing recognition friction, especially in the Member States that host the largest Ukrainian academic populations.

Advantages

- Aligns Ukraine's qualification system with the EU acquis as part of the accession process; Preserves Ukraine's two-tier academic tradition rather than abolishing the senior research qualification;
- Solves the recognition bottleneck at source rather than through Member State enforcement, avoiding national-competence sensitivities;
- Benefits European labour markets for the Ukrainian academic diaspora;
- Strengthens the role of the Diaspora as an operational partner in accession-related reform.

Risks

- Reform of the qualification system is politically sensitive within Ukraine and requires broad academic consultation;
- System reform is a longer-horizon intervention; short-term recognition pressures persist in parallel;
- Not all Member States retain Habilitation practice, so the cross-walk will not resolve recognition in every jurisdiction.

Resource Requirements

Moderate financial resources for legal drafting, stakeholder consultation, and ENIC-NARIC alignment, deliverable through existing accession instruments (Ukraine Facility, TAIEX, Horizon Europe Widening). Administrative coordination required at EU level (DG NEAR, DG EAC) and national level, with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science as lead implementing partner.

Implementation Timeline

Short-term (1-2 years): establish joint EU-Ukraine working group and publish initial cross-walk documentation; begin stakeholder consultation within Ukraine. Medium-term (3-5 years): legislative reform enacted in Ukraine, with ENIC-NARIC alignment completed across priority Member States.

Policy Options & Recommendations

05 Establish a Standardised Framework for Research Equipment Transfers

Description

The European Union, in partnership with the Government of Ukraine, should establish a coordinated and standardised framework for the transfer of research equipment from EU institutions to Ukrainian universities. While Diaspora organisations already facilitate such transfers, these efforts remain fragmented and dependent on individual initiative, as each transfer requires navigating complex legal, customs, and logistical procedures on a case-by-case basis. The framework should include: Standardised legal template covering export controls, customs procedures, liability, and insurance; Dedicated equipment matching mechanism, integrated with the existing Diaspora platform (https://ukrdiaspora.nauka.gov.ua – linking available EU institutional equipment with documented Ukrainian university needs); Targeted logistics funding to cover transport, installation, and operational costs; Formal involvement of Diaspora organisations as implementation partners, leveraging their operational experience.

Advantages

- Enables rapid scaling of already functioning diaspora-led practices;
- Directly contributes to rebuilding Ukraine's research infrastructure (critical given documented damage levels);
- Reduces transaction costs and legal uncertainty for EU institutions willing to donate equipment;
- Strengthens the role of the Diaspora as an operational actor in science diplomacy; Creates a tangible and high-impact instrument linking EU support to Ukraine's recovery.

Risks

- Regulatory complexity related to dual-use goods and export controls; Coordination challenges across multiple jurisdictions (EU–Member States–Ukraine);
- Mismatches between available equipment and actual institutional needs if not properly coordinated.

Resource Requirements

Moderate financial resources for logistics funding (transport, installation, maintenance); platform integration and coordination; legal and administrative framework development. Administrative coordination required at EU (DG RTD / DG NEAR) and national levels, with involvement of Ukrainian authorities.

Implementation Timeline

Short-term (1–2 years): pilot framework and initial transfers; Medium-term (3–5 years): full operationalisation and integration into EU–Ukraine cooperation instruments.

Institutional Arrangements

Lead bodies

- European Commission (DG RTD, DG EAC, DG NEAR) in partnership with the Government of Ukraine
- Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine as national coordinator in cooperation with the Ukrainian Science Diaspora Initiative and other diaspora science organisations.
- Relevant Ukrainian ministries involved in reconstruction and innovation policy

Coordination mechanisms

- A joint EU–Ukraine steering group on diaspora science engagement
- Integration with existing EU programs (Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, Ukraine Facility)
- Collaboration with diaspora organisations and university networks

Required legal or regulatory changes

- Simplified procedures for international cooperation and grant management in Ukrainian institutions
- Greater institutional autonomy for universities in international partnerships
- Alignment of research governance frameworks with EU standards

Potential Barriers

Political

- Competing priorities during wartime recovery and reform processes
- Variability in political commitment across institutions

Financial

- Budget constraints in Ukraine and competing demands on EU funding
- Need for sustained rather than short-term financing

Technical

- Limited administrative capacity in some universities to manage complex international projects
- Insufficient research management infrastructure

Social

- Institutional inertia and resistance to organisational change
- Uneven awareness of diaspora engagement opportunities across academic communities

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POLICY BRIEF

About this Policy Brief

This policy brief was developed as an outcome of the 1st Ukrainian–European Science Diplomacy Forum (Vienna, 2026) and is based on empirical research on Ukrainian science diaspora partner organisations. It brings together insights from academic research, stakeholder consultations, and cross-sector dialogue to inform evidence-based policy development and strengthen Ukraine's integration into the European Research Area.

About the Ukrainian Science Diaspora

The Ukrainian Science Diaspora represents a distributed network of researchers and professionals across Europe and beyond. It plays a strategic role in facilitating knowledge exchange, institutional cooperation, and science diplomacy initiatives, contributing to Ukraine's resilience and long-term integration into European scientific and innovation ecosystems.

Authors' Contributions

This policy brief was developed collaboratively by the four co-authors, with contributions described using the CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) framework. Yevheniia Polishchuk and Igor Lyman led the Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, and Formal analysis of the survey component. Oksana Ilnar-Vusyk and Oleksandra Romaniuk co-chaired the 1st Ukrainian–European Science Diplomacy Forum (Conceptualization, Investigation, Project administration), with Oleksandra Romaniuk leading the Visualization (design). All four authors contributed equally to Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing, and Validation, and read and approved the final version of this policy brief.

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