

Cooperation with Ukraine

Terms of Reference

Table of contents

I. Objectives	2
II. Background	2
III. Work plan and working modalities	3
IV. Inputs to WP3 Policy Dialogue & WP4 Communication and Dissemination	5
V. Members.....	5

I. Objectives

The topical group “Cooperation with Ukraine” shall serve the purpose of knowledge development from the ground and networking between alliances, and empowering the long-term (cross) alliances capacities in solidarity with Ukraine to increase impact.

With the full-scale war caused by Russian invasion, Ukrainian Higher education institutions (HEIs) have been in direct need for support at all levels. Many initiatives took shape at the faculty, institutional or national level. EUA Trends 2024 reports that up to 80% of HEIs in Europe have provided assistance. 33 HEIs in Ukraine have joined an alliance before the full-scale war or since then. There is a need to collectively and regularly update our knowledge about what are those needs and the policy initiatives in Ukraine and in the EU and its Member states, what have been the main contributions from European and Ukrainian partners in alliances, and how partnerships have been aligned with the strategic goals of alliances. It shall help connect further, in solidarity with Ukraine, and formulate ways to upgrade the cooperation in the perspective of the recovery & modernisation of the Ukrainian HE sector and its readiness in the EU accession process.

These connections, bottom-up information and knowledge development shall be useful both for Ukrainian HEIs & alliances and their student and academic communities, the wider HE sector and decision-makers in charge of planning the recovery and modernisation of Ukraine in the field of higher education and research. It shall allow alliances’ peer-to-peer learning process; some joint action within and across alliances where and when needed; and contribute to the expertise and visibility of alliances in their strategic development towards internationalisation with Ukraine by regularly informing decision-makers at EU, national and local or regional level.

The timeline to achieve those objectives (for the short, mid and long-term) is as follows:

- Short-term (1st year): monthly meetings to build trust, keep the motivation among alliances to assist Ukrainian partners, exchange best practices & expertise, and contribute to current policy discussions about the assistance to Ukraine (e.g., report on best practices to be submitted as a follow up of the Wroclaw forum)
- Mid-term: mutual support to alliances in developing long-term strategic partnerships and visibility, and contribute to the plan towards reconstruction and modernisation after ceasefire in Ukraine
- Long-term: mutual support to alliances in stabilising long-term strategic partnerships and prepare for alignment in the EEA/EHEA area and for Ukrainian accession to the EU.

II. Background

When alliances started being launched in 2019, their contribution as a role model to the EU/EHEA integration process was stressed. Facing the full-scale war in Ukraine, some alliances considered they could play a role in assisting single or groups of Ukrainian HEIs. In addition, a strategic positioning was gradually discussed with the aim to place alliances, based on the regular collection of best practices and preparation of joint statements, as bridges in the long-term cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. Not only alliances have been able to provide assistance and help Ukrainian HEIs (re)build capacities, but there has been an ambition to reflect about it as a strategic element of the universities and alliances. For Ukrainian universities HEIs, alliances helped quickly identify European partners within and cross-alliances and connect efficiently.

In practical terms, it was not easy to implement new activities because of the lack of funding and legal obstacles (a significant one being the “associated status” of Ukrainian HEIs). By “muddling through” (via e.g., ad hoc calls for funding at national and European level) several alliances initiated extra activities to assist in the emergency of the war, develop joint educational and research activities between Europe and Ukraine, help in the recovery of the Ukrainian HE, e.g., by sharing their initial steps towards a model for European joint cooperation in all universities’ missions.

In addition, 25 alliances in average signed the 2 joint statements in 2022 and 2024 calling for a twinning initiative and advocating for support, which has received EU political support. As of today, 35 Ukrainian universities have joined alliances, as reported by PPMI in early 2025. National initiatives such as NAWA in Poland have funded a large series of educational, research and governance initiatives made by alliances and Ukrainian universities, and alliances’ events such as in Strasbourg in March 2024 and the follow up report submitted to DG EAC in April 2024 have given visibility to it. Last but not least, 35 alliances have so far supported the Open letter “United in solidarity with Higher education and research in Ukraine” that was addressed to Executive Vice-President Mînzatu on 7 May 2025.

III. Work plan and working modalities

Work Plan and Provisional Timeline

Proposed work plan and associated provisional timeline:

General (short, medium and long-term):

- Monthly online meetings (except July & August) to learn more about each other with regular presentations of best practices of cooperation with Ukraine from universities within alliances, alliances, cross-alliances, etc; representatives from external organisations (e.g., university networks & the wider HE sector, EC, international organisations) can be invited to present a topic relevant to the reflections of the topical group
- Respond to regular requests by DG EAC, EC in general and other decision-makers about outcomes of our exchanges
- Respond to invitations made by the HE & research sector, EU institutions and Member states, Ukrainian authorities, international organisations, etc
- Contribute to the FOREU4ALL WP2 workshops in Venice (end 2025) and Granada (Spring 2026)

In addition, short-term:

- Taskforce “report on best practices”: submission of the report Mid-July 2025
- Ongoing communication about the Open letter

Medium-term:

- Develop knowledge about the best practices of alliances in solidarity with Ukraine, in the after-war context, keep on preparing best practice reports
- Build a positioning about the cooperation with Ukraine as a strategic element of universities’ and/or alliances => set up taskforce aiming at preparing a position paper to be submitted to decision-makers

Long-term:

- Develop knowledge about the support of alliances in stabilising long-term strategic partnerships, to be included in the annual reports on best practices
- Develop initiatives supported by EU and / or national funding to help prepare Ukrainian HEIs for alignment in the EEA/EHEA area and for Ukrainian accession to the EU

Meeting Plan and Working Modalities

- Regular online meetings: calendar of meetings set for the year, meeting agenda sent in advance (at least 1 week before, with a reminder a couple of days before), presentations of alliances followed by discussions, potentially invite experts;
- Recordings made available to all + documents shared during the meetings via FOR-EU4ALL channels;
- When and where needed some joint actions can be proposed, all voluntary based (e.g., joint statement, joint events, joint calls);
- Contribution to FOREU4ALL workshops by proposing speakers & topic(s).

Attributions of group members

- Each alliance can nominate representatives and decide who will participate to the meetings and / or joint initiatives, based on a clear expression of interest, expertise, skills in cooperating with Ukraine of the nominees
- Largest scope of academia profiles (from rectors to project managers, administrative staff, lecturers and researchers) providing an expertise, skills and / or contacts to decision-makers in relation to the topic (e.g., for the purpose of invitation to speak at the meetings, FOREU4ALL events, target groups)

Considerations on Equality & Diversity in organisational modalities

- Ensure balanced representation across alliances, regions, and institutions in the presentations;
- Guarantee accessibility by accommodating diverse needs, including those of individuals with disabilities;
- Use inclusive language and culturally sensitive practices to foster mutual respect and collaboration;
- Align all actions with EU values on academic freedom, equality, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement;
- English will be used as the working language, documents in any languages are welcome using automatic translation tools, in order to ensure a good coverage of the diversity of views across the continent and worldwide.

Communication and dissemination plan of both the topical group activities and outputs

- Between online meetings communication will go via emails using the mailing-list of the topical group and the shared Point created by the WP2 project team in FOREU4ALL. The list of participants will be updated and shared once every two months. The communication with the WP2 board, and with WP3 and WP4, is carried out by the Chairing Team of the topical group.
- Dissemination plan will be based on the annual reports and / or position papers, information about expertise shared in events, organisation of workshops with the WP3 and using the channels created by WP4.

IV. Inputs to WP3 Policy Dialogue & WP4 Communication and Dissemination

As described in the section “Objectives”, the topical group “Cooperation with Ukraine” aims at regularly informing decision-makers about the state of alliances’ cooperation with Ukraine and about the exchanges’ outcomes. Any initiatives in this field shall be nurtured by the information and expertise from the ground, covering the diversity of experiences across the European continent. As previous successful examples show, joint statements and reports on best practices are warmly welcomed by decision-makers and HE sector, and request for communicating about it are regularly made. Based on their expertise and contribution to the topical group discussions, members play a key role in deciding about the selected coordinated cross alliances advocacy and communication initiatives, according to which target groups and so on.

In order to increase the impact of the dissemination of these activities, the Chairing team will work in close connection with WP4 “Communication & dissemination”. Any advocacy activity will be coordinated with WP3 “Policy dialogue” and the FOREU4ALL General Forum or Board for validation, bearing in mind it needs some agility in a fast-evolving, very dense European (universities’) policy agenda in relation to Ukraine and EU accession process.

V. Members

Each alliance can nominate representatives and decide who will participate in the meetings and / or joint initiatives, based on a clear expression of interest, expertise and/or operational involvement in the cooperation with Ukraine of the nominees. There is no limit in the number of representatives from alliances.

The structure of the topical group shall be as informal as possible to allow for the easiest and largest participation of university representatives, academics and administrative staff as they can and wish; same with the meeting agenda to allow for open brainstorming in order to ease discussions, favour constructive conclusions and concrete collective actions, based on the identification of needs and proposals for action. The topical group commits for a close cooperation between all interested alliances.