

Statement on Strategic Partnerships between European and Ukrainian Universities

13 March 2024

The European aspirations of Ukrainian higher education institutions have taken on a new dimension as a result of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the two-year Ukrainian struggle for freedom.

The educational and scientific communities of the European Union, and in particular the European University Alliances, have expressed their full solidarity with Ukraine and undertaken a number of grassroots initiatives to support Ukrainian higher education institutions, their students, and faculty members. Ukrainian higher education institutions have recognized the importance of this support to ensure their daily functioning in the current dramatic circumstances. In June 2022, the first joint statement of Ukrainian higher education institutions and European University Alliances was addressed to the European Commission and EU Member States, calling for measures to support the establishment of twinning partnerships.

Since then, a community-building process has developed and nearly thirty Ukrainian higher education institutions have joined European University Alliances in various cooperation schemes in education and research. In addition, several members of European University Alliances have and are collaborating in innovative pilot projects, such as the Erasmus + DigiUni project focused on creating a digital Open University in Ukraine – with the intention of sharing best practices in managing complex consortia and sharing good practices in delivering joint education and research opportunities.

In addition to the solidarity expressed by the EU Member States, the European Commission has been quick to adapt its programs and allow more flexibility to support students and faculty from Ukrainian universities. In February 2024, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union established a new Ukraine Facility, which will provide the framework for EU assistance to Ukraine for the period 2024-2027. The Facility will support Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction and modernization, and includes an opportunity for the thorough reconstruction and improvement of higher education institutions and an acknowledgement of their role in creating the conditions for sustainable growth.

In this context, we, Ukrainian higher education institutions and European University Alliances, jointly call upon the EU institutions and EU Member States to prioritize higher education and research when planning the reconstruction and modernization of Ukraine. We are ready to play an active role, building on our existing peer-to-peer cooperation and experiences, to help ensure that Ukrainian higher education institutions deliver high quality education and research consistent with European standards and academic freedom. We ask for further support in facilitating structural cooperation between Ukrainian and European universities, including the possibility of funding projects with Ukrainian associated members of the Alliances, until Ukrainian higher education institutions can fully engage in the European Universities Initiative.

The main objectives of these association projects will be institutional support and structural cooperation between Ukrainian and European universities. Pilot actions launched since 2022 have shown their positive impact. These projects could lead to the creation of training schools for academic staff, with a view to training in course management and quality and innovative teacher training, or in the development and sharing of online teaching resources. In all cases, support mechanisms need to be flexible to respond to the needs and opportunities for greater cooperation.

FEEDBACK BEST PRACTICES

Contact details: alliance & partner university(ies), contact person(s), email(s)

AURORA ALLIANCE

Partner University in Ukraine: **V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University - formal associate university partner**

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Report of experience (what have you done? Activities, messages, partnerships...? Objectives? Outcomes? Pictures, graphics...?)

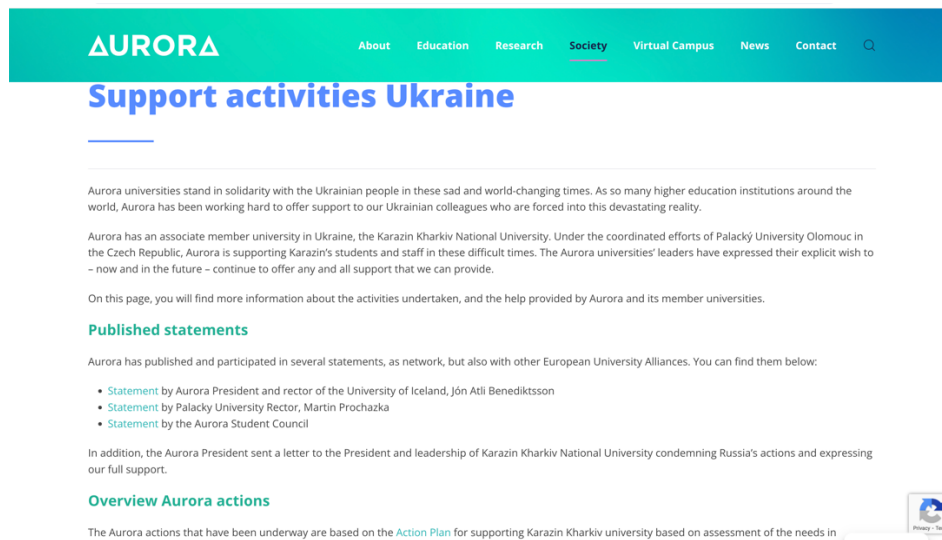
V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University has been participating in the Aurora Capacity Development Programme since the Aurora Alliance's establishment in November 2020. This activity aims to reduce disparities between the research-leading and research-emerging countries in Europe by assisting universities in Central-Eastern Europe to develop their institutional capacity for academic excellence and societal relevance.

With the Russian Federation's sudden invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the war that followed with various consequences for Ukrainian society, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University became directly affected and in need of comprehensive institutional support. In February 2022 Aurora Alliance universities responded by organising an immediate humanitarian response focusing on establishing the coordinated alliance-wide approach:

- Solidarity actions: The Aurora universities' leaders condemned the invasion and expressed letters of support and solidarity with Karazin University leaders underlining an explicit wish to – now and in the future – continue to offer any institutional support that we as an Alliance can provide.
- Karazin University Rector nominated the Aurora CDS program leader as Karazin Support Coordinator.
- Since March 2022, the Karazin Support Coordinator in close collaboration with Karazin's leadership has been fully managing the emergency response as well as designing and implementing the long-term, systemic and institutional support for this partner university in Ukraine.
- Aurora's unique CDS programme in Central & Eastern Europe was then transformed into a tailor-made support scheme to address the needs of the war-affected Karazin University.

As a result of this coordinated approach and alliance-wide efforts, the following key actions have been implemented so far that can be shared as best practices:

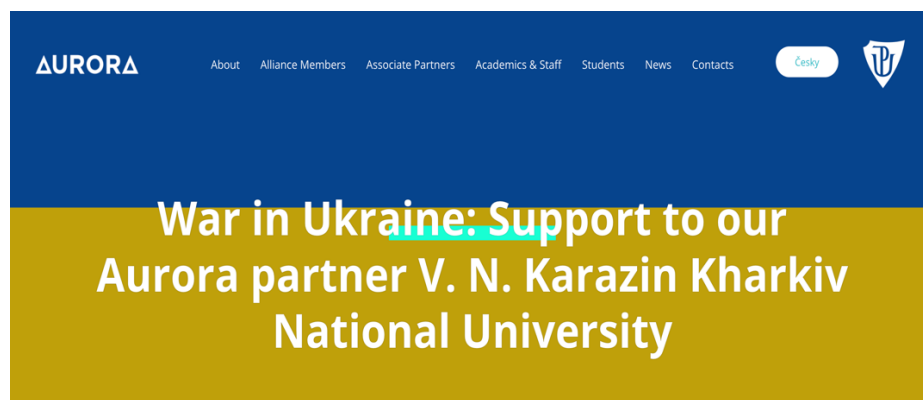
- ⇒ **Protection of Aurora Karazin Colleagues – relocating staff to safety**
- ⇒ **Karazin Donations Fund - Urgent and targeted fundraising to address institutional needs**
- ⇒ **Support Action Plan - jointly devised long-term and structural support plan**



Overview of step-wise efforts and activities according to the Action Plan (2022-2024):

1. Whole of Alliance approach - Coordination

Palacky University Olomouc took on a crucial role in Aurora's support and relief efforts, being nominated by UP Rector Martin Prochazka and Karazin University Rector Tetyana Kaganovska to **coordinate support from the entire consortium**, particularly through UP's Aurora Institutional Coordinator, Dr. Selma Porobic.

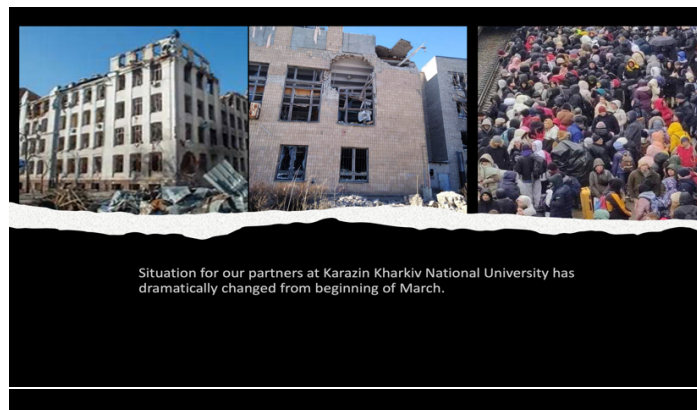


Initially, this enabled Rector Kaganovska and her crisis team to attend the Aurora Biannual Conference in May 2022 to deliver a heartfelt appeal to the Aurora community. A live stream of the speech can be found [here](#), and a press statement by Karazin's Rector can be found [here](#).



2. Addressing urgent needs- Targeted Fund Raising and saving lives

Aurora Universities through the Aurora Network association **established the Karazin Donation Fund** and immediately engaged in fundraising to gather donations for the Karazin University. Over 3 months, 51.000 EUR was gathered to address the urgent needs of our partner university in Ukraine.



AURORA

❖ Overview of Karazin university
CDS support for March - Jan 2023

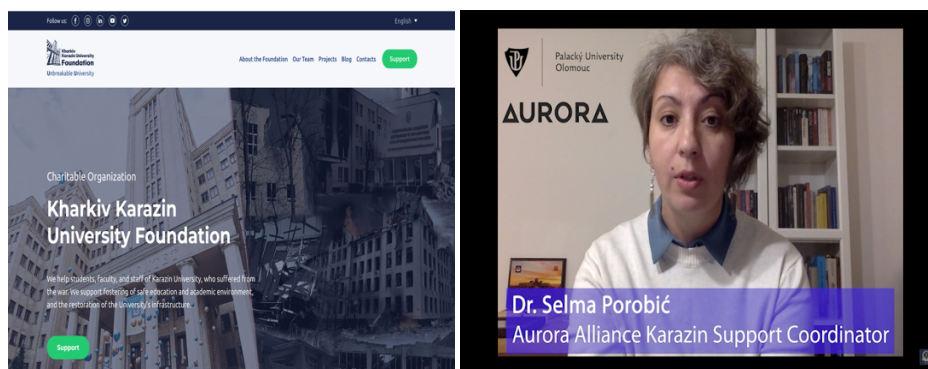
IV Core Support
Activities



Through Aurora's joint efforts, **over EUR 65,000** has been raised so far for our associate partner, Karazin University in Kharkiv.

Funds have been raised specifically for the relocation and accommodation of needs for the staff from Karazin as well as for the acquisition of equipment to support Karazin University's ongoing online teaching for the students and reconstruction of the devastated university buildings. Dedicated fundraising was also provided for the creation of the Peace Education Hub at the School of Sociology at Karazin University – as part of the conflict transformation efforts and post-war reconstruction and recovery support. All Aurora fundraising donations follow close monitoring and joint assessment according to the identified needs of our Ukrainian partners as the situation in Kharkiv and Eastern Ukraine evolves.

With these initial fundraising steps undertaken by Aurora CDS colleagues, **Karazin University was empowered to establish its own, Kharkiv Karazin University Foundation** to support their cause in coping with the war, displacement of students and staff and reconstruction of the devastated object. Aurora's Humanitarian Support Coordinator held an opening speech during the inauguration of the Foundation focusing on the strength and resourcefulness of the European university alliances in providing structural and systemic support. Full video can be found here: <https://youtu.be/UjUyvY8FwY4?si=22FM8zypmvZ7Rptr>



3. Structural and Systemic Approach - Support Action Plan

The Support Action Plan is a work in progress and has been developing collaboratively with the executive team at Karazin University through ongoing needs assessments. It consists of the identified activities that respond to their **immediate (humanitarian), mid-term (recovery) and long-term (development) needs**. For more information, please refer to the [Aurora Karazin Support Website](#).

We have worked with 3 strategic phases and Annual updates of the Action Plan together with Karazin senior leadership (the last Annual update is still pending for April 2023-2024):

1) Short-term priorities and actions for the immediate emergency period

For the immediate and urgent needs of Karazin University, the Aurora office and CDS staff at Palacký University Olomouc have been in regular and continued contact with Karazin International Office management to exchange information on necessary needs and identify support measures for their staff and students. Concrete Aurora support activities in this emergency phase are the following:

- Alliance-level fundraising to support Karazin online teaching. Aurora has so far raised central funds to purchase necessary equipment for Karazin staff in support of the online teaching process in Ukraine.
- Providing support for Karazin International office staff and Aurora contact persons including relocation, work and accommodation at the Aurora institutions
- Providing support for Karazin academic staff and students to study at the Aurora institutions and receive accommodations

2) Medium-term actions and plans for the continued functioning of Karazin University during war-period

- Ongoing fundraiser as a continuous effort to support the emerging needs of the institution under siege, during the war and dislocation phase.
- Securing/prioritising access to study programmes, enrolment and graduation of Ukrainian students across Aurora universities
- Securing/prioritising Karazin staff collaboration and further training opportunities via the CDS programme

3) Long-term actions for the post-war period

- Arranging donations and support for the recovery and reparations of the devastated teaching and support facilities of the Karazin University Campus
- Deepening partnerships and collaborations between Karazin University and Aurora University to enable staff and students exchanges
- Providing a Visiting Research programme for Karazin staff and enabling access to research infrastructure in Aurora (labs and equipment to support continued research work and publications)



On the 2nd and 3rd of February, Selma Porobic was invited to the Academic Cooperation Association's seminar "[What's new in Brussels? – Recent Developments in European Policies and Programmes](#)" to share Aurora's pioneering work on Eastern Partnerships exemplified by its [Capacity Development Support \(CDS\) programme](#) with special focus on its institutional support to the V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University in Ukraine. In her session, "Working with Global Regions – Eastern Partnership", Selma Porobic shared the results and best practices of Aurora's unique CDS programme in Central & Eastern Europe, and how it was transformed into a tailor-made support scheme to address the needs of the war-affected Aurora associate partner, V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. These activities set Aurora apart from other European University Alliances. More info here: <https://aurora.upol.cz/presenting-auroras-capacity-development-and-eastern-partnership-at-acas-whats-new-in-brussels/>

4. Saving lives and livelihoods & supporting crises management

Besides helping Karazin University with its fundraising for the crisis management, Aurora University helped with the **crisis management advice** (University of Iceland) as Karazin University was faced with downsizing due to massive scale staff and student displacement (over 50% of total Staff and students of the University).

Aurora University also stepped in by relocating Staff to safety through various internal institutional schemes. As a result, several Ukrainian colleagues have been relocated to Aurora Universities, including senior administrative staff from Karazin University (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Palacky University Olomouc).

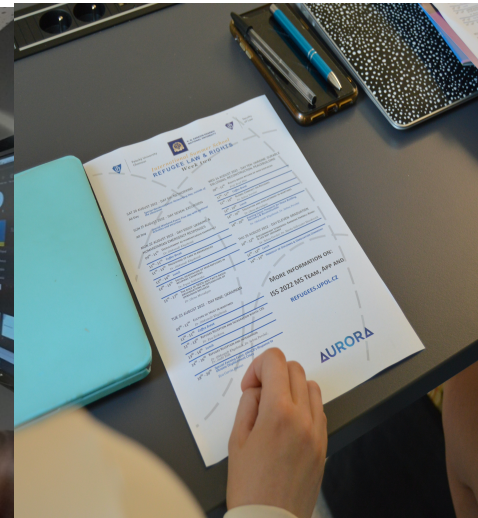
In addition to tailor-made Aurora schemes for support of Karazin staff and students many Aurora universities have offered Scholars at Risk programmes to various Ukrainian scholars.

5. Continued support to education in exile and capacity building training - International Summer School: Refugee Law & Rights

As continued support to Karazin educational mission, two editions of the [International Summer School in Refugee Law and Rights](#) have been donated to V.N Karazin Kharkiv National University in Ukraine and transformed into the summer schools entitled '[War-displaced Persons' Protection Rights - Case study Ukraine](#)'. Both were fully co-organized between Karazin University and Palacký University and hosted in exile by UP in Olomouc, offering a 10-day hybrid training programme.

A cohort of 18 in total of Karazin University Students have obtained training in international refugee law free of charge, while 13 professors from Karazin have also been engaged in delivering the classes together with Aurora colleagues from UP, Innsbruck, East Anglia, and other international experts.

As part of schools, students from Innsbruck's University Peace Studies MA program have also engaged with Karazin University's MA students in the plenary session '*Prospects for Peace Building, Recovery & Reconstruction.*'





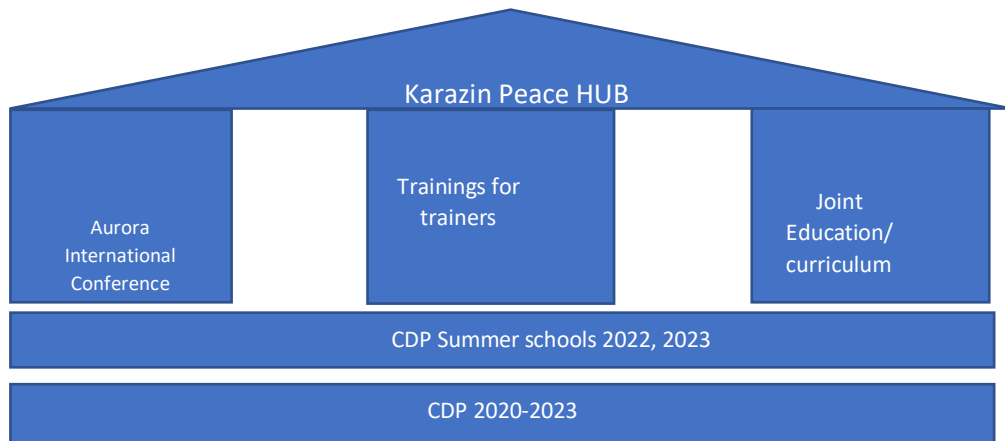
The school's website is www.refugeesupol.cz where more detailed information can be found. A detailed report of the **International Summer School on Refugee Law & Rights** can be found [here](#).

<https://aurora.upol.cz/looking-back-at-the-international-summer-school-refugee-law-rights/>

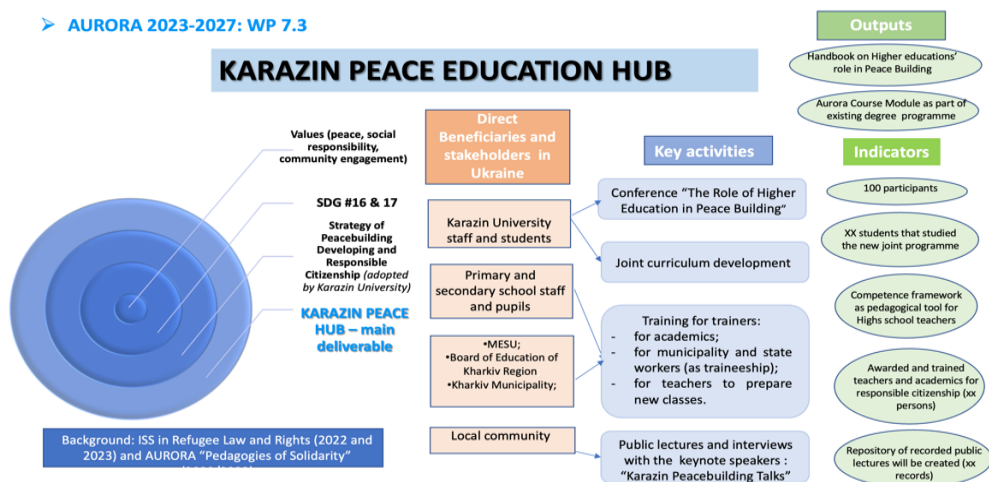
<https://aurora.upol.cz/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ISS-Report-08-09-22.pdf>

6. Creating Karazin Peace Education Hub in Aurora 2030

Based on this first pilot phase experiences and assessments of the Karazin University situation, we have developed a whole new Task team for the current programme phase (started in November Aurora 2030) that is focusing on the Creation of the Karazin Peace Education Hub. It will enable Karazin University to establish itself as a peace hub through systematic Aurora support in strengthening the capacity for education and training in conflict transformation and peacebuilding to overcome societal challenges in a(post)-conflict context. In addition, by embracing the values of peace education and linking these to the third mission of the university, we would like to support Karazin University's social responsibility and its civic engagement in society. We aim to do so by drawing on the Aurora resources and collaborations developed through CDS activity in the pilot phase. In the forthcoming Aurora programme, this task team will focus on both building and strengthening Karazin's co-engagement activities within the wider community of peacebuilders internationally, and on facilitating the community outreach activities in the educational sector of wider Kharkiv region. **Karazin peace hub - a platform for the promotion of democratic values, human rights, pacifism and peaceful living - is our main aim.**



➤ AURORA 2023-2027: WP 7.3



See here for information on the Aurora International Conference: The Role of Higher Education in Peacebuilding, organised with University of Innsbruck, marking the start of the Peace Hub activities, Spring 2025: <https://aurora.upol.cz/international-conference-on-the-role-of-higher-education-in-peacebuilding/>



International Conference: The Role of Higher Education in Peacebuilding

The Aurora Karazin University Peace Education Hub invites you to a 5-day International Conference on 'The Role of Higher Education in Peacebuilding' hosted by the Unit for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Innsbruck, from the 17th to 21st of February 2025.

This conference aims to bring together international experts – both academics and practitioners in the peacebuilding sector – with higher education policymakers from the Aurora Universities Alliance and its partners, to discuss how the higher education institutions in Ukraine and elsewhere can become a driver of peace and sustainable development.



7. Inclusion of Karazin University in other Aurora projects

SWAFS (Horizon 2020) – a joint Research MOU: an Aurora-wide MoU on joint research infrastructure sharing in October 2023 was signed by all Aurora Presidents. It included Karazin University and three other associate partner universities in CEE.

EURIDICE project (Digital Europe): Karazin University has been engaged in the Euridice project where several Aurora universities will be working towards developing a joint MA study programme in digital society and global citizenship as well as piloting certification of the microcredentials.

More information about Aururo-Karazin support:

- <https://aurora-universities.eu/support-for-karazin/>
- <https://aurora.upol.cz/war-in-ukraine-support-to-our-aurora-partner-v-n-karazin-kharkiv-national-university/>
- <http://www.refugees.upol.cz/>
- <https://aurora.upol.cz/aurora-spring-biannual-a-great-success-for-palacky-university/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1Yz9pWF82I>
- https://www.uibk.ac.at/media/filer_public/6e/03/6e03ee68-d2ac-4ccd-958f-42691a30aeec/kaganovska-press-statement.pdf

Perspectives (what have you envisioned or planned to do but not achieved? What could you do with more support?)

When we initially developed the Action Plan we were in the immediate humanitarian response phase and acted outside of the official alliance proposal programme to respond to the most urgent needs of our partner. However, our dedicated and structural support to V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University and its leadership involves long-term support planning that stretches over three time periods: immediate (humanitarian), mid-term (recovery) and long-term (development) support. So far, we have managed to address the most urgent needs but have also gradually moved forward and started to plan the recovery phase too. To this end, it has been proposed to the Aurora Board to fully take on board the Karazin University as a global member of the Aurora Network of universities. Decision to be made during General Council meeting in May this year.

In addition, Aurora 2030 programme envisions involving Karazin University's staff and student more systematically across the task teams. This is challenging as Ukraine is a non-Erasmus programme country and we lack the financial means from the EUN E+ grant to cover these collaborations.

Finally, more comprehensive support is needed in the time ahead of us. As part of the recent process to support the development of Karazin University's new University Strategy for 2022-2027, the following priorities have been identified by Karazin Support Coordinator for which Aurora Universities would require structural and EU-level support to implement:

- Reconstruct, and rebuild the war-devastated property of the university

- Enable all its units including dormitories for students to assume its function and be in use
- Further educate/train staff to work and readjust to post-war environment and conditions (resocialization of war veterans, counselling and support programmes in dealing with war experiences and trauma, psychosocial support to staff and students)
- Develop Outreach programmes for Karazin exiled staff (human capital) to continue cooperation while they are exiled and abroad, to enable them to return if wishing so, to build academic bridges, draw on external resources and promote networks with their hosting universities, and enable them to be part of and help support developments of post-war reconstruction and rebuilding of the university.
- Draw on diaspora resources to capacitate and further embed the university in European and global strategic partnerships (focus on previous Ukrainian Diaspora of scholars and recent exiled refugees) for funding and new collaboration projects and opportunities
- Further develop existing European partnerships (Aurora Alliance) to continue comprehensive internationalisation for quality assurance improvement in education/study programs, research, and mobility, as well as to improve Karazins international standings
- Enhance strategic collaboration with Aurora Alliance top management as well as project service centres and Aurora offices to further develop bilateral projects but also connect with the EC and other European Higher Education stakeholders and work towards joint projects and obtaining funding and investments for post-war reconstruction of the university
- Develop capacity for joint education programmes with existing international partners in the target areas of priority for Kharkiv region post-war reconstruction and economic development
- Partner up with stakeholders in the wide Kharkiv region to model social responsibility and drive forward the economic, social and cultural development
- Strengthen partnership ties with international offices of key local universities in Ukraine and internationally, within the EU to further develop joint capacity-building projects for supporting digitalisation, green transfer, inclusive education and the third role goals
- Act as Peace Education Hub across the region and Ukraine in a joint effort with Aurora Alliance partners and other EU partners as well as other Ukrainian universities to build prosperity for all citizens especially young generations to create social conditions conducive to peaceful living and prosperity