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## European universities tackling the Ukrainian refugee crisis: insights into grassroots digital actions



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## List of Abbreviations

The following table presents the acronyms used in the deliverable in alphabetical order.

Abbreviations	Description
EU	European Union
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UNHCR	Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees

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## Executive Summary

The role European universities play in humanitarian crises is well documented throughout history. What is less analysed, on which the present publication lays emphasis, is the innovation that bottom-up actions at universities, led by staff and students acting either individually or collectively, bring when tackling crises. This study serves as a first systematic mapping of both institution-led and community-led actions at universities, by taking Ukraine as a case study of particular importance and relevance to European higher education institutions and its people.

The key aspects on which this study sheds light are:

- the grassroots dimension of European universities' actions for Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP);
- the relevance of technology;
- the types of actions and their value in terms of citizen engagement and innovation.

15 indicative actions were analysed based on a peer-reviewed methodological framework, covering all stages, from desk research, to screening of actions and their analysis.

Eventually, by adopting a broader understanding of university-society interaction in crisis response, this publication draws attention to the evolving nature of academia's social mission, while endorsing further collaboration among the quadruple helix actors (academia, society, industry and policy) to enhance institutional and social resilience.

Hence, we adopt the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis as a case study to better understand academic resilience in emergency situations, acknowledging that this is not the only humanitarian crisis with which European universities are faced. Additionally, the study's focus on Ukraine allows for a meaningful comparison of common features across collected actions, thus manifesting a replicability potential that can benefit the European Higher Education Area at large.



# 1. Background

# 1. Background

Although there have been several crises in parallel worldwide, indicatively the protests in Iran<sup>1</sup> and the worsening situation in Afghanistan<sup>2</sup>, the widest impact and largest reaction across Europe has undoubtedly unfolded for Ukraine, as a neighbouring country whose crisis has been widely felt in the old continent.

Hence, by bringing our focus on the academic sector, we aim to explore how European universities reacted to this crisis. Precisely, we turn our attention on participatory and bottom-up actions organised by academic communities of staff and students. This way, we seek to move beyond a mere top-down approach and interpretation of academia's capacity to forge institutional and social resilience.

Moreover, this study highlights the digital dimension of community-led and institutional-led university actions for Ukrainian refugees and IDP as digital technologies have become an integral part of interventions in times of crisis<sup>3</sup>.

In this publication, we analyse and bring to the forefront the grassroots and digital dimension of initiatives by European universities to address the humanitarian, social and educational needs of Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons.

## The AGILE project

This publication is a result of the EU-funded AGILE project ("Higher education resilience in refugee crises: forging social inclusion through capacity building, civic engagement and skills recognition", <http://www.agileproject-erasmus.eu/>), whose aim is to increase resilience of HE systems to address the ongoing needs of refugees through social participation and skills recognition. The AGILE project aims to enrich HE curricula by proposing new pedagogical designs that encourage grassroots and digitally-enhanced actions in both formal and informal learning environments.

The project is coordinated by the University Paris 8. The consortium is made up of six universities (University Paris 8, Bordeaux Montaigne University, University of Hamburg, University of Ljubljana, Lviv Polytechnic National University, Kaunas University of Technology), one think-tank (Polish Rectors Foundation) and one business partner (Web2Learn) who specialises in open recognition systems and social learning.

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<sup>1</sup> BBC (n.d.). 2022 Iran protests. <https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/cw97d85vjzmt>

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR (n.d.). Afghanistan situation. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/afghanistan-situation>

<sup>3</sup> OCHA. (April 11, 2017). The role of technology in crisis response. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. <https://www.unocha.org/es/story/future-technology-crisis-response>



## 2. Rationale

## 2. Rationale

In this section, we explain the motivation of the study by depicting (a) the role of digital technologies in crisis response (2.1), (b) the capacity of European universities to enhance resilience in refugee crises through digital action (2.2), and (c) the contribution of this publication to the literature review of university-driven actions for Ukrainian refugees (2.3). Moreover, a set of definitions of key terms used in this publication is also provided (2.4).

### 2.1. Digital technologies in strengthening crisis response mechanisms

The rapid digitalisation of life, from the individual to the institutional level, has revolutionised the way people perceive, mobilise and react to social crises. In particular, we refer to digitalisation as “tools, systems and devices that can generate, create, store or process data” (Jonhston, Kervin, & Wyeth, 2022). In this context, several sectors, such as healthcare, education, and communication, have quickly adopted and integrated digital technologies, especially in crisis response.

What studies have shown (Corvello et al.; Durst et al., 2022), is that digital technologies have a positive role in strengthening readiness of individuals as well as institutions in emergency situations. As crises keep people away from the physical spaces where they are used to live, work and socialise (e.g., conflict areas, COVID-19 quarantines), people have turned to digital spaces to mitigate the loss of physical contact and action. The provision of digitally-mediated health support (Budd et al., 2020) or the monitoring of environmental damages via online platforms are just a few examples of the use of digital technologies in crises.

The social impact of this phenomenon is showcased at European and international levels through a series of conferences, such as the Digitalize in Stockholm 2020 Conference and the Virtual Conference on Remote Management, Monitoring & Verification (RMMV) 2023 that examine how digital technologies would enhance capacity building and resilience in future crises.

We thus observe that digital technologies have moved beyond being complementary tools to crisis response to becoming key means of effectively tackling crises while enhancing individual and social resilience.

### 2.2. Universities building resilience through bottom-up digital action

Social challenges, such as climate change and large-scale displacements of people, create a fertile ground for citizens to question the capacity and resilience of their community to handle crises. But why is resilience important?

Resilience can be understood as a process and the result of adapting to challenging conditions<sup>4</sup>. To strengthen resilience, societies need to promote close collaboration of all quadruple helix actors (policy, industry, science, society) to foster preparedness and build effective crisis response mechanisms.

In this social equation, universities have a key role to play. One of the latest examples of university-led digital actions to address a social challenge is the COVID-19 pandemic. As governmental restrictions on movement promoted the uptake of digital technologies and digital spaces, administrative, academic staff and students engaged in community problem-solving through digitally-enhanced actions. In particular, the results of the Erasmus+ project HEIDI (“Digital action at HEIs as a catalyst for social change in the COVID-19 crisis”) are representative of how academic communities have leveraged the potential of digital technologies in grassroots actions for social purposes during the pandemic<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, in an increasingly interconnected and digital world, universities retain the advantage, as knowledge hubs, to conceptualise, integrate and expand the use of technologies for the benefit of societies.

### **2.2.1. Cross-institutional collaboration to tackle the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis**

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine acted as a trigger for several scholars and university students in Europe who took immediate action to mitigate the consequences of the conflict on their colleagues. Amid disruptive social conditions, the role of digital technologies has been crucial in bringing initiatives such as #Science4Ukraine and #ScholarshipForUkrainian citizens into life.

Specifically, the #Science4Ukraine initiative is a bottom-up crowdsourcing action that seeks to gather and provide accurate information about study and work opportunities within and beyond Europe for Ukrainian students and scholars<sup>6</sup>. Triggered by a tweet<sup>7</sup> of Latvian scholar Sanita Reinsone, #Science4Ukraine relies on a network of more than 130 volunteers who regularly update the platform with new information for Ukrainian people (Rose et al., 2022).

Likewise, the Ukrainian war stimulated a quick reaction from European scholars who leveraged the outreach potential of social media to disseminate information on available scholarships for Ukrainians. This is the example of #ScholarshipForUkrainian citizens, at the initiative of associate professor at KU Leuven, Yannis Pontikes, who launched the LinkedIn group “#ScholarshipForUkrainian<sup>8</sup> citizens” a few days after the war outbreak in February 2022. The group acts as an online space in which Ukrainian people can look for

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<sup>4</sup> American Psychological Association (n.d.). Resilience. APA Dictionary of Psychology.

<https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>

<sup>5</sup> The Erasmus+ HEIDI project. <https://heidiproject.eu/>

<sup>6</sup> Science For Ukraine (n.d.). About us. <https://scienceforukraine.eu/about>

<sup>7</sup> Tweet by Sanita Reinsone (February 26, 2022),

<https://twitter.com/sanitare/status/1497526983932186628>

<sup>8</sup> #ScholarshipForUkrainian citizens LinkedIn group, <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12630487/>

news on study and research scholarships within and beyond Europe. This grassroots initiative counts more than 930 members who upload posts on scholarships offered by universities and research institutes worldwide.

### **2.2.2. European university networks supporting refugee students**

As Europe is one of the main destination for migrants and refugees who abandon their homes in search of a better future, a series of solidarity and assistance networks have been built on the old continent. European HE systems could not be an exception to this rule, especially as universities are actively involved in the reception and integration of newcomers.

Another example is the French network “MEnS” (Migrants in Higher Education) that aims to support the education of migrant and refugee populations in France<sup>9</sup>. Especially since February 2022, MenS’ actions for Ukrainian refugees are in the forefront of academia-society collaboration for students and researchers in exile. The network has established also bridging programmes<sup>10</sup> that allow migrant and refugee students to continue their studies and apply for scholarships in France.

Furthermore, in November 2022, UNHCR founded the European Academic Refugee Interdisciplinary Network (EARIN) that aims to promote the Global Compact on Refugees<sup>11</sup> in Europe.

### **2.2.3. Indicative EU-funded projects**

To tackle the consequences of the Ukrainian crisis, European universities are implementing EU-funded projects to enhance inclusion and upskilling of Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons.

Indicatively, the Erasmus+ project Baltics4UA<sup>12</sup> (“Supporting Ukraine through citizen engagement at Baltic Universities”) aims to address the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis in the Baltics by fostering bottom-up and university-led action taking for a social purpose. The project applies open innovation and civic engagement through a series of formal and informal learning practices.

Another bottom-up initiative by academic researchers to support rebuilding of Ukraine is the HROMADA (“Nordic-Baltic knowledge-based input network to the rebuilding of Ukraine”) network<sup>13</sup>. HROMADA comprises researchers from Nordic and Baltic countries who provide policy recommendations to help Ukraine to decision-makers in their regions.

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<sup>9</sup> Réseau MEnS. (n.d.). Qui sommes-nous? <https://reseau-mens.org/presentation/>

<sup>10</sup> R-e-s-o-m-e-. (n.d.). Bridging programs. <https://www.resome.org/en/les-programmes/>

<sup>11</sup> Global Compact on Refugees. (n.d.). European Academic Refugee Interdisciplinary Network. <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/compact-action/initiatives/gain/european-academic-refugee-interdisciplinary-network>

<sup>12</sup> Baltics4UA project, <https://baltics4ua.eu/>

<sup>13</sup> HROMADA network, About, <https://hromada.network/about/>

Finally, in the field of digital cultural heritage protection, the Erasmus+ project Data4UA (Capacity building for data-driven cultural heritage management in Ukraine) will enhance knowledge on innovative academia-society cooperations to safeguard Ukrainian cultural heritage. The project starts on November 2023.

#### **2.2.4. Some definitions**

As this study is built on the notions of digital action, citizen engagement and grassroots innovation, we provide indicative definitions of these key terms to streamline understanding.

##### **Digital action**

Digital actions can be understood as “instances of social and political campaigning practice that use digital network infrastructure” (Zourou, 2021). Digital action is not characterised exclusively by its digital dimension but also for its social orientation. Specifically, in this study, we refer to digital actions that are designed to address a social purpose (cf. assist refugees and IDPs of the Russo-Ukrainian war), thus outlining a close connection between digitally-enhanced actions and the socio-environmental context in which they take shape.

##### **Citizen engagement**

We define citizen engagement as the interaction between citizens, scientists and policymakers to address social issues (European Commission, 2020). Over the last two decades a growing attention on citizen engagement on the EU level is being observed, as well as the multiplication of efforts to leverage the role of citizen engagement in national as well as European policies (Kotanidis & Del Monte, 2022). Numerous studies have also mapped and outlined the spectrum of citizen participation forms, such as the OECD report on citizen deliberation (2020)<sup>14</sup>. An additional evidence of the EU’s focus on citizen participation is the recent establishment of the Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy at the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission in 2018<sup>15</sup>.

In the context of the present study, we delve into the level of citizen engagement in actions organised by universities to highlight connections between specific kinds of actions and their impact on citizens’ empowerment.

##### **Grassroots innovation**

We adopt Bernstein’s et al. (2021) definition of grassroots innovation as “home-grown inventions or novelties developed by everyday people to address challenges that directly or indirectly influence their lives” (p. 7). In the present study, grassroots innovation is used to shed light on community-led and bottom-up actions in universities that often adopt hierarchical approaches to knowledge production.

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<sup>14</sup> OECD (2020), Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en>

<sup>15</sup> European Commission. (June, 30, 2022). About the Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy. [https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/participatory-democracy/about\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/participatory-democracy/about_en)

### **2.3. Gaps in the literature review and the contribution of the present study**

Since February 24, 2022, European universities have organised actions to mitigate the effects of the conflict on displaced persons and refugees. These actions have largely been documented and showcased in news articles and university webpages. Moreover, the Ukrainian HE system has been facing a continuous humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian invasion in the eastern part of Ukraine since 2014. As a result, the concept of “displaced higher education institutions” emerged.

Despite ongoing and numerous actions carried out by European universities, their digital and social dimension has not been sufficiently mapped and analysed. In this context, this study aims to present university-driven actions for Ukrainian refugees and IDPs by bringing to the fore the following dimensions:

- **The grassroots dimension**

Moving beyond top-down actions by the administrations of European universities, this study investigates actions that are organised by university students and staff as a bottom-up reaction to the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis. By highlighting the grassroots dimension of these actions, we foresee expanding present understanding of bottom-up crisis response mechanisms developed by universities and bring to the fore their social value in emergency situations.

- **The evolution of academia’s social relevance**

This study aims to call attention to the evolution of universities’ social mission that cannot remain limited in formal educational activities and top-down crisis response mechanisms. What the Ukrainian case study has shown is a hidden social potential in bottom-up actions carried out by higher education staff and students that embrace a more participatory, open and socially relevant approach to crises management.

- **The potential socio-digital networks**

The technological evolution, coupled with the rapid digitalisation of societies, has fostered the integration of digital technologies in actions for the benefit of Ukrainian populations. Through this study, we intend to map and identify potential connections between the various technologies used to launch, implement and expand these actions. Thus, the study emphasises the digital dimension that facilitates and empowers action taking by universities.

- **The role of citizen engagement**

In emergency conditions, the mobilisation of wider social actors and citizens becomes a critical element to the success of the implemented actions. In this publication, we shed light on the different levels of citizen engagement to offer an indicative, yet meaningful, delineation of people’s involvement in university-driven actions for Ukrainian refugees.



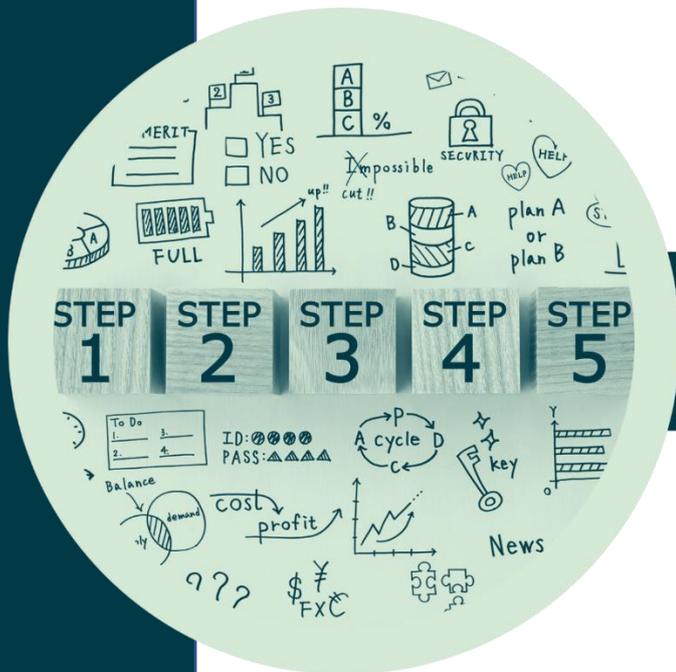
## 3. Scope

### 3. Scope

This publication aims to offer an analysis of a curated selection of digital actions in which European academic communities and citizens were engaged in solidarity to refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Thus, the scope is twofold. Firstly, we aim to provide a cross-country mapping of bottom-up digital actions carried out by European universities to respond to the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis. Secondly, we incorporate the citizen engagement and grassroots dimensions to emphasise citizens' role in the selected actions. Hence, our approach is based on the identification of grassroots digital actions that have enhanced European universities' resilience to the crisis while assisting Ukrainian refugees and IDP. In this framework, this publication intends to enable more participatory digital action as a means of effective crisis response during emergencies (cf. war, conflict).

Actions that serve society, as all selected actions highlight, are manifestations of social responsibility of the academic community. This is also in line with a novel understanding of the role of researchers that goes beyond core teaching and research. The value of academic staff's contribution in activities of social relevance is treated in the broader discussion on academic merit and assessment (Pain, 2023).



# 4. Methodology

## 4. Methodology

### Overview

This section presents the methodological steps through which the collection and analysis of actions have been carried out. By outlining a coherent methodological framework, we aimed to ensure a solid desk research and analysis of results. Hence, we adopted a 3-step methodological process outlined below.

#### 4.1. Conceptual framework and criteria definition

We first produced the conceptual framework, which was composed of the aim and objectives, key definitions (present hereby), duration and timeframe of the research. The aim of Step 1 was to produce a pool of digital actions for Ukrainian refugees and IDP by European universities. All AGILE partners participated in the desk research that began in April 2023 and was completed by May 2023.

Part of the conceptual framework was the identification of five selection criteria, namely:

- (1) the involvement of a university,
- (2) the geographical focus (Europe),
- (3) the benefit of the action for Ukrainian displaced populations,
- (4) the connection to a type of action from the established typology,
- (5) the connection to a type of technology from the established typology.

Further in the definition of the conceptual framework, we detailed the approach to analyse the 3 components of the study (digital action, citizen engagement, grassroots innovation). To do so we set out a typology for each component (cf. Step 2 & 3).

By looking closely at the particular aspects of these 3 main components, we aimed to provide a more nuanced and context-specific analysis of results, thus depicting the range of activities and potential of the selected actions. In this framework, the three applied typologies facilitated the mapping and identification of actions, while they further ensured their alignment to the selection criteria.

To better frame the study, the 3-step methodological process figures below (Figure 1).

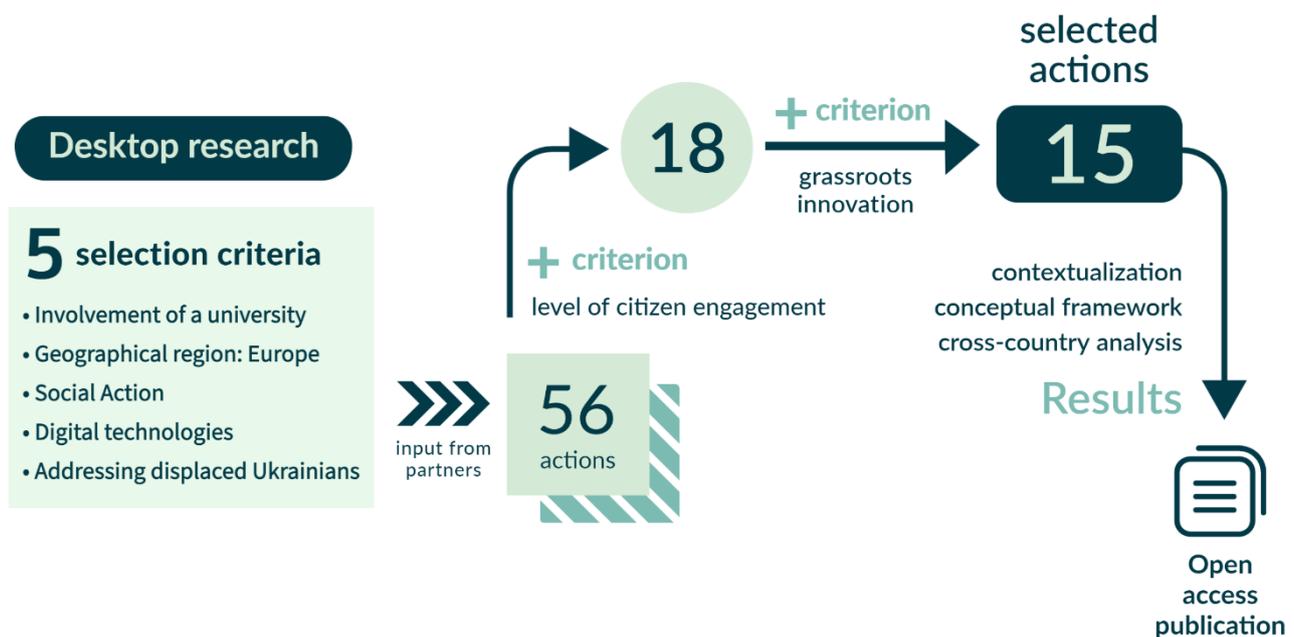


Figure 1 Methodological steps

### The desk research: method and contributions

A shared spreadsheet was made available for AGILE partners to fill in. The instruction given was to collect actions that took place from the war outbreak until the end of the desk research (May 2023). AGILE partners were asked to provide at least five actions covering the five criteria. Once all entries were added by partners, the authors screened them to validate their compliance to the selection criteria, which are outlined below:

#### 1. Universities' involvement in the action

Partners collected actions that have been carried out by universities and their academic communities (staff, students, researchers) since February 2022. Hence, the involvement of at least one university was a prerequisite.

#### 2. Geographical focus: Europe

Partners gathered examples of actions undertaken by European and Ukrainian universities. We have also included actions that have a transnational dimension, namely co-organised by more than one university, thus acknowledging that digitally-enhanced initiatives facilitate remote participation beyond physical boundaries and open up collaboration perspectives in times of crisis.

#### 3. Actions for the benefit of Ukrainian refugees and IDPs

The collected actions needed to refer to initiatives developed to respond to the educational and social needs of Ukrainian refugees and IDP in Europe.

#### 4. The typology of actions

A typology of actions has been designed to ensure that all actions, irrespectively of their differences (organising university, aim, timeframe and design of the action, to name but a few) fit in this categorisation. We were inspired by the typology used by Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) for Ukrainian refugees and students displaced in Lithuania<sup>16</sup>. The VMU typology has been expanded with the inclusion of some additional action types emphasising social relevance. The typology is presented hereafter:

1. Citizen Science
2. Hackathon
3. Crowdfunding
4. Crowdsourcing
5. Do-it-yourself
6. Art event (theatrical plays, music concerts, exhibitions etc.)
7. Scholarship
8. Tuition free studies
9. Free accommodation
10. Psychological counselling
11. Podcast
12. Campaign
13. Public lectures
14. Legal counselling
15. Networking event
16. Summer camp
17. Educational equipments
18. Working/Research group

This typology of actions has been first applied in the Zourou, Oikonomou, & Samiotis (2023) study on Baltic universities' social actions for Ukrainian refugees, which was released in the framework of the EU-funded Baltics4UA project<sup>17</sup>.

#### 5. The typology of technologies

This typology serves to map the role and value of digital tools in the collected actions and contains 7 items:

1. Mobile applications
2. Video games
3. Interactive whiteboards (e.g., Google Jamboard)
4. Learning management systems (Moodle, Google Classroom, etc.)
5. Online collaboration spaces (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Google Drive)
6. Social media platforms (facebook, twitter, etc.)
7. Virtual reality

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<sup>16</sup> Vytautas Magnus University. (n.d.). Support to UA. <https://www.vdu.lt/en/support-to-ua/>

<sup>17</sup> Baltics4UA project, <https://baltics4ua.eu/>

Additionally, common descriptors were provided to each action to increase visibility and comparison among them. These descriptors were: (a) the status of the action (ongoing or completed) and (b) the university/-ies who carried out the action.

With the completion of the desk research (Step 1), AGILE partners had gathered 56 initiatives. They were then screened by the authors to ensure full alignment to the selection criteria. This led to a selection of 38 actions at the end of Step 1.

#### 4.2. Second screening of actions: emphasis on citizen engagement

In step 2, the 38 actions were screened based on their (low/high) level of citizen engagement. Although citizen engagement may be present in actions for a social purpose, not all actions were characterised by the same level of citizen engagement. In the literature of citizen science, typologies of engagement are common, one of which is the widespread categorisation by Bonney et al. (2009) in 3 levels (cf. contributory, collaborative, co-creative). Nevertheless, we found this typology to be more suitable for citizen science-oriented actions and projects rather than for the types of actions identified by partners in step 1.

Therefore, we analysed actions based on the level of citizen engagement as outlined by the World Bank Working Group on Citizen Engagement (2015), as we believe it better fits to the needs of the present study; namely it is more relevant to the types of actions identified and the degree in which we can identify the level of citizen engagement in them. The levels of citizen engagement are four, namely:



**Figure 2** Levels of citizen engagement, Source: World Bank WG on Citizen Engagement (2015)

As with the typology of actions, these four levels of citizen engagement were also applied to the study “Baltic universities fostering citizen engagement through social actions for Ukrainian refugees” (Zourou, Oikonomou, Samiotis, 2023) in the context of the Baltics4UA project.

In the data collection spreadsheet, the column “Levels of citizen engagement” contained a dropdown list with the four items above plus “None” as an option.

Once the level of engagement of each action had been identified, we removed actions that didn’t meet this criterion. Hence, from an initial set of 38 actions, we reached a new set of 18 actions containing one level of citizen engagement.

### **4.3. Identification of the 15 actions**

In step 3, we screened actions against an additional criterion, namely the grassroots innovation dimension. We thus eliminated three actions that lacked a grassroots innovation dimension. This way, we reached the number of 15 actions.

#### **Limitations**

It is worth mentioning some limitations of this study. First, the timeframe of this desk research was short (from April to May 2023). The collection is also indicative of the plethora of initiatives in Europe; despite our efforts to intensively collect as many actions as possible, we cannot claim that the study is exhaustive. Finally, the analysis of each action is a (subjective) interpretation of the authors.



## 5. Digital actions

## 5. 15 digital actions by European universities

This section highlights the 15 university-driven actions which were selected on the ground of three main criteria: a) the relevance of technology, b) the level of citizen engagement and c) the degree of grassroots innovation. A presentation template common to all actions helps the reader dive into each action and at the same time grasp the bigger picture across all selected actions.

The order in which the 15 actions appear is random.

### Selected practices at a glance

- 1 Water Rangers in Twente
- 2 “Brother nations” concert
- 3 Ukraine Conversations in Time of War
- 4 Online Admission System for Candidates from Ukraine
- 5 Hackathon4Ukraine
- 6 Ukraine’s Virtual House
- 7 The Association of Ukrainian Students in France
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- 15 Scholarships For Ukrainian citizens

## #1 Water Rangers in Twente

A citizen science project with Ukrainian children

[https://www.itc.nl/research/open-science/citizen\\_science/towards-geo-cs-hub1/projects/#water-rangers-in-twente](https://www.itc.nl/research/open-science/citizen_science/towards-geo-cs-hub1/projects/#water-rangers-in-twente)



### Short Description

Researchers of the University of Twente organised an action for displaced Ukrainian children to foster inclusion through an experience-based discovery of Twente as their new “home”.

This socially oriented action is a form of citizen science that aimed to enhance community bonding between displaced youth, their families, and locals. The project was part of the national campaign “Catch the Monster” and was open to Ukrainian children who temporarily reside in the area.

By engaging in water sampling, children identified water body areas as spaces for recreation and solidarity, while insights on how to build more inclusive and youth- attractive spaces were generated for urban planners.

### Key Features



#### Country

The Netherlands



#### University Involved

University of Twente



#### Type of social action

Citizen Science



#### Level of citizen engagement

Collaboration



#### Target group/s

Ukrainian displaced children



#### Status

Completed



#### Technology

Mobile application

### Technologies for citizen engagement

By using water sampling methodologies and online data collection and analysis tools, participants experienced how digital technologies can serve as facilitators of environmental awareness, social inclusion and wellbeing. In this action, technology fostered citizen engagement as it gave the opportunity to Ukrainian children to come closer and interact with fellow youth, thus addressing the social needs of people directly (Ukrainian children) and indirectly (their families) involved in the action.

## #2 “Brother nations” concert

A charity concert for Ukrainian early-career researchers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5wsYSWHdBE>



### Short Description

The National Representation of Doctoral Candidates of Poland organised a concert entitled “Brotherly Nations” which took place on the 23th of April 2022 in the Crystal Hall of Warsaw University of Life Sciences. The concert was broadcasted widely and featured folk music of Ukraine and Poland to showcase the bonding of the two nations.

The concert was part of a campaign launched by the National Representation of Doctoral Candidates of Poland earlier in the year. The campaign also included a fundraising action to collect money for the doctoral researchers’ community staying in Ukraine. All the funds raised were donated to the Human Charity Fund that provided 31 laptops for early-career researchers on the occasion of the 31st Anniversary of Independence of Ukraine.

### Key Features



#### Country

Poland



#### University Involved

SGH Warsaw University of Life Sciences



#### Type of social action

Art event; Campaign



#### Level of citizen engagement

Empowerment



#### Target group/s

Ukrainian early-career researchers



#### Status

Completed



#### Technology

Social media platforms

### Technologies for citizen engagement

Motivated by their willingness to take immediate action for the benefit of their Ukrainian colleagues, Polish doctoral candidates organised an art event that was widely communicated and disseminated through social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, YouTube). By leveraging the outreach potential of social media, initiators were able to engage more people, thus achieving their dual goal of awareness raising and collecting funds to tackle Ukrainian early-career researchers’ needs.

## #3 Ukraine Conversations in Time of War

Webinar series on support measures of Polish universities to Ukrainian refugee students

<https://gazeta.sgh.waw.pl/konferencje-debaty-spotkania/rozmowy-przy-drugiej-kawie-rozmowy-o-ukrainie-w-czas-wojny>

### Short Description

The team of the plenipotentiary for education quality management and the Student Self-Government of the Warsaw School of Economics set up a webinar series titled "Ukraine Conversations in Time of War". The series aimed to provide a platform of discussion on how Polish universities could further assist Ukrainian universities and academic communities.

The webinar series are part of the "Talking over a second cup of coffee" meetings that are carried out by the Warsaw School of Economics (Szkoła Główna Handlowa w Warszawie, SGH) since 2020. The focus of the webinars shifted to Ukraine and the needs of its higher education sector since the outbreak of the war in February 2022.



### Key Features



#### Country

Poland



#### University Involved

Warsaw School of Economics



#### Type of social action

Public lectures



#### Level of citizen engagement

Consultation



#### Target group/s

Ukrainian refugee students and lecturers



#### Status

Ongoing



#### Technology

Online collaboration spaces

### Technologies for citizen engagement

The webinar series were delivered through the use of online collaboration spaces, especially videoconferencing platforms. The online nature of the events has been instrumental to reach wider audiences in Poland and Ukraine amid socially disruptive conditions (cf. war). Thus, technology played a key role in the delivery of the series, as well as in the communication of the ongoing support measures undertaken by the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH) for Ukraine.

## #4 Online Admission System for Candidates from Ukraine

A platform for Ukrainian refugee students and university staff

<https://ukraina.irk.edu.pl/en-gb/>

### Short Description

The Online Admission Platform for Candidates from Ukraine is built to facilitate the acquaintance of Ukrainian refugees with education and employment opportunities at Polish universities.

The platform serves Ukrainian citizens who wish to begin their studies' journey, as well as students and academic staff from Ukraine who seek to continue their professional trajectory. The online admission system facilitates integration of Ukrainian future and current students and academic staff into the Polish higher education system.

The online system offers admission to a full cycle of studies as well as to study programmes that had already begun at a Ukrainian university; Candidates can also select to enroll in specific classes, carry out studies at doctoral schools, or look for cooperation and job opportunities (i.e. internships) at higher education institutions.

### Technologies for citizen engagement

This action is a result of a collaborative effort between the academic community of the University of Warsaw and the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools of Poland. Information is provided in a crowdsourcing style and uploaded in the platform by Polish HE staff and researchers. Thus, this digital space acted as a trigger of increased citizen engagement by Polish university staff.



### Key Features



#### Country

Poland



#### University Involved

University of Warsaw



#### Type of social action

Campaign; Crowdsourcing



#### Level of citizen engagement

Collaboration



#### Target group/s

Ukrainian citizens, students, academic staff



#### Status

Ongoing



#### Technology

Online collaboration spaces

## #5 Hackathon4Ukraine

Creating solutions for Ukraine

<https://www.pw.edu.pl/engpw/News/Hackathon4Ukraine-winning-ideas>

### Short Description

By leveraging the power of hackathons to provide immediate solutions to social problems, students of the Warsaw University of Technology and Imperial College London organised a hackathon for the benefit of Ukraine and its people.

This 24-hours hackathon was launched on March 19, 2022 and awarded three teams for their innovative ideas and prototypes. In particular, the winning team “Search4Ukraine” developed an application that gives Ukrainian refugees easy access to credible information about the situation in their country.

The second place was awarded to a group of programmers who created a “Damage Map” that traces and monitors the degree of destruction of public buildings. Eventually, the third award was given to a team of students who developed the “Disinfo Fighter”, a Google extension that detects fake news on Twitter.



### Key Features



#### Country

Remote participation worldwide



#### University Involved

Warsaw University of Technology and Imperial College London



#### Type of social action

Hackathon



#### Level of citizen engagement

Collaboration



#### Target group/s

Ukrainian citizens and refugees



#### Status

Completed



#### Technology

Online collaboration spaces

### Technologies for citizen engagement

Students, hackathon enthusiasts and mentors collaborated to generate solutions to some of the Ukrainian population’s ongoing problems. The grassroots dimension of the hackathon, in combination with the digital potential that was manifested through it, make this action exemplary for its high level of citizen engagement and digital innovation. This hackathon showcased the opportunities offered by digital technologies when fused with a co-creative approach to innovation that enhances citizen engagement.

## #6 Ukraine's Virtual House

A crowdfunding campaign to host Ukrainian students

<https://www.ciup.fr/en/discover-the-maison-de-lukraine/>

### Short Description

The International University Campus of Paris- the main housing institution for foreign students- launched a crowdfunding campaign to provide free accommodation to Ukrainian refugee students.

Ukraine's Virtual House was an action with a dual scope. First, to provide free housing to Ukrainian refugee students in the Paris universities' campuses, and second, to widen the pool of people who become aware of the situation and engage in the action.

To increase the attractiveness of its campaign, the organisers asked architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte to create a virtual house titled "Ukraine's Virtual House" that can be purchased, as an image, by donors.

The virtual house was presented in three versions that could be bought online by students and people who wished to contribute to the campaign.



### Key Features



#### Country

France



#### University Involved

Universities of the city of Paris



#### Type of social action

Crowdfunding; Free accommodation



#### Level of citizen engagement

Collaboration



#### Target group/s

Ukrainian n refugee students



#### Status

Completed



#### Technology

Virtual reality

### Technologies for citizen engagement

This crowdfunding campaign was entirely run online, thus manifesting the new opportunities arisen by digital means used to address social issues. In particular, the campaign included an online-based call for donations as well as participation of potential donors in an online auction set up in collaboration with Sotheby's digital marketplace. Thanks to the use of virtual reality for the creation of Ukraine's Virtual House, this action successfully combined grassroots mobilisation with technological innovation to tackle a pressing social challenge (e.g., housing and study needs of displaced Ukrainians in Paris).

## #7 The Association of Ukrainian Students in France

An organisation promoting Ukrainian students' rights in France

<https://www.facebook.com/aeuf.org/>



### Short Description

The Association of Ukrainian Students in France is the only representative group that aims to support and promote Ukrainian students' needs and rights in the French territory. Initially with a cultural vocation, the association has taken a new turn since the beginning of the Ukrainian revolution in November 2013.

The outbreak of the war in February 2022 fostered the Association's involvement in the reception and accommodation of refugee students. The Association aims to defend the interests of Ukrainian students (refugees or not) in France, whether it is about the provision of financial aid, housing as well as support for residence permits' procedures and university enrollment.

### Key Features



**Country**  
France



**University Involved**  
French universities are indirectly involved



**Type of social action**  
Educational equipments



**Level of citizen engagement**  
Collaboration



**Target group/s**  
Ukrainian students in France



**Status**  
Ongoing



**Technology**  
Social media platforms

### Technologies for citizen engagement

This grassroots initiative is an expression of a collaborative effort uptaken by Ukrainian students who were in France before the war outbreak and wish to help their newcomer countrymen. By setting up its own Facebook page, the Association has reached Ukrainian students throughout France. Moreover, social media help promote the Association's advocacy campaigns to raise awareness on the status of Ukrainian refugee students and mobilize the support of French authorities and local hosting communities.

## #8 Lithuanian Students' Union mentoring programme

An action to foster integration of Ukrainian students

<http://www.lss.lt/prasidejo-ukrainieciams-studentams-skirta-mentorystes-programa/>



### Short Description

The Lithuanian Students' Union (LSS) started a mentoring programme to help incoming Ukrainian students join the Lithuanian academic community.

LSS seeks to finance studies of Ukrainian students, as well as provide scholarships and accommodation for post-war students. To achieve its goals, LSS monitors the existing support mechanisms in Lithuania and performs advocacy actions where needed.

One of the main objectives of LSS is to ensure that Ukrainian students receive support during summertime as well, regardless of the study holidays period.

### Key Features



#### Country

Lithuania



#### University Involved

All Lithuanian universities



#### Type of social action

Campaign; Networking event



#### Level of citizen engagement

Empowerment



#### Target group/s

Ukrainian refugee students



#### Status

Ongoing



#### Technology

Social media platforms

### Technologies for citizen engagement

The mentoring programme initiated by the Lithuanian Students' Association is an empowering action that demonstrates how university students can become a solid pillar of academia's social mission. The technological dimension of this action is manifested through the dissemination of the call for volunteer mentors on the Association's website as well as its promotion through its social media handles on Facebook and Instagram.

## #9 Hack4UA

A hackathon for the benefit of Ukrainian refugees

[https://it-family.od.ua/en/news\\_one/rezultaty-hakatonu-hack4ua/](https://it-family.od.ua/en/news_one/rezultaty-hakatonu-hack4ua/)



### Short Description

The Hack4UA hackathon was held in October 14-21, 2022. The hackathon was organised by several academia and business partners, among which the Kharkiv Technological University, the Kharkiv IT Cluster and the Israeli company CyBureau.

The hackathon encouraged participants to create lectures with advanced design tools, cyber security and protection of information resources for the benefit of Ukrainian refugees.

The winning team from Odessa Polytechnic created the "Voluntera" online platform that solves administration problems in organisations that work in humanitarian aid and are in contact with displaced persons.

### Key Features



**Country**  
Ukraine



**University Involved**  
Kharkiv Technological University  
+ other Ukrainian universities



**Type of social action**  
Hackathon



**Level of citizen engagement**  
Collaboration



**Target group/s**  
Ukrainian refugees



**Status**  
Completed



**Technology**  
Learning Management Systems

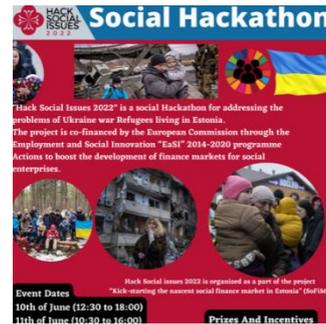
### Technologies for citizen engagement

University students mobilized their knowledge and creativity to develop innovative solutions for Ukrainian refugees through the use of digital technologies. Specifically, the role of learning management systems, as well as cyber security tools, was decisive for the generation of digitally-enhanced solutions. Thanks to technology that transformed ideas into hands-on prototypes, this hackathon is a successful example of grassroots innovation in times of crisis.

## #10 Social hackathon

A hackathon to address Ukrainian refugees' needs

<https://www.tlu.ee/en/yti/mediahub/blogs/hack-social-issues-2022>



### Short Description

This 2-day hackathon was hosted by masters' students of Tallinn University on June 10-11, 2022. The hackathon was part of the students' final project and was designed to create solutions for Ukrainian refugees in Estonia.

The hackathon was open to everyone who wished to join efforts to address socio-environmental problems faced by Ukrainian refugees and local hosting communities.

Two teams were awarded. In particular, team "You (Maze) Me" took the first award earning a Social Incubator place at Tallinn University and a mentorship. The team developed an Idea that aimed to facilitate physiological aid to refugees. The second team "Social Restaurant" won a 4-hours mentorship by Social Enterprise Estonia. The Idea involved the provision of a place where refugees can share their traditional dishes and socialise with Estonian citizens.

### Key Features



**Country**  
Estonia



**University Involved**  
Tallin University



**Type of social action**  
Hackathon



**Level of citizen engagement**  
Collaboration



**Target group/s**  
Ukrainian refugees



**Status**  
Completed



**Technology**  
Online collaboration spaces

### Technologies for citizen engagement

This socially-oriented hackathon was designed to encourage participation and engagement of university students as well as people beyond the academic community of Tallinn University. Through the use of online collaboration spaces (e.g., slack), this hackathon entailed a grassroots innovation dimension as participants created digitally-powered solutions that aimed to improve the management of the Ukrainian refugee crisis in Estonia.

## #11 University of Hamburg for Ukraine

The University of Hamburg for Ukrainian refugee students

<https://www.uni-hamburg.de/en/uhhhilft-ukraine.html>



### Short Description

The University of Hamburg (UHH), in collaboration with the students' association, the City of Hamburg and the German Academic Exchange Service, have undertaken a series of support measures for the benefit of Ukrainian and Russian students.

UHH actions aim to enhance inclusion and facilitate integration of refugee students in their new socio-cultural environment.

Actions include, among others, the provision of services such as academic advice, legal advice through the establishment of a Law Clinic for refugees and support for researchers in the form of tuition free studies and scholarships.

### Key Features



**Country**

Germany



**University Involved**

University of Hamburg



**Type of social action**

Educational equipments;  
Tuition free studies



**Level of citizen engagement**

Collaboration



**Target group/s**

Refugee students  
(Ukrainian and Russians)



**Status**

Ongoing



**Technology**

Learning Management Systems

### Technologies for citizen engagement

The University of Hamburg has developed a digitally-powered action plan for refugees of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Through the use of learning management systems, UHH builds a collaborative culture to foster the creation of programmes for refugee students, and researchers. Within this framework, UHH staff and students make use of online learning tools and systems to produce modules and release lectures for refugees who proceed their studies or professional career in UHH.

## #12 Bunte Hände for refugees of the Ukrainian war

Students' support for refugees at the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences

<https://www.haw-hamburg.de/en/international/students-with-refugee-experience/bunte-haende-for-more-diversity/>

### Short Description

Bunte Hände (*colourful hands* in English) was founded in August 2018 as a student-driven initiative made of German, international and students of refugee background at the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (HAW).

Bunte Hände is considered a student project that organises leisure and cultural actions to foster the inclusion of refugee students in HAW. In light of the war in Ukraine, Bunte Hände has been active in welcoming refugee students as well as assisting them in navigating the administrative and studies' landscape of HAW.

Bunte Hände's members also organise engagement and bonding activities where refugee students of different socio-cultural origins can come together and form spaces of solidarity and awareness.

### Technologies for citizen engagement

The activities organised by Bunte Hände are a proof of the active role that university students ought to take in times of crises. The mobilisation of HAW refugee students testifies an extraordinary citizen engagement potential in actions that enable empowerment attitudes and skills among students. Strengthened and expanded through the use of social media, Bunte Hände's actions are exemplary not only in a formal educational context but also in terms of societal engagement, as citizens are called to participate in them as well.



### Key Features



#### Country

Germany



#### University Involved

Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (HAW)



#### Type of social action

Campaign;  
Educational equipments



#### Level of citizen engagement

Empowerment



#### Target group/s

Refugee students  
(Ukrainian and Russian)



#### Status

Ongoing



#### Technology

Social media platforms

## #13 Alicante Platform for Ukraine

A crowdsourcing platform for Ukrainian refugees in Alicante, Spain

<https://pau-alicante-ucrania.org/en/>



### Short Description

The Alicante Platform for Ukraine (PAU) is an online space for Ukrainian refugees in Alicante. The platform aims to build the necessary welcoming and hosting mechanisms and infrastructure that will allow the effective reception of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Alicante.

PAU is developed by citizens in coordination with public authorities that are responsible for the supervision of the platform's activities. Indicatively, the University of Alicante has launched a cycle of public talks about the Russo-Ukrainian war, a series of linguistic and translation support by volunteer university staff as well as a donation campaign to provide humanitarian aid in Ukraine.

PAU welcomes everyone who wishes to contribute, ranging from citizens to civil society organisations, industry and public institutions.

### Key Features



**Country**  
Spain



**University Involved**  
University of Alicante



**Type of social action**  
Crowdsourcing



**Level of citizen engagement**  
Collaboration



**Target group/s**  
Ukrainian refugees in Alicante



**Status**  
Ongoing



**Technology**  
Online collaboration spaces

### Technologies for citizen engagement

By developing a digitally-enhanced crowdsourcing action, citizens and institutions are empowered to contribute in the evolution and expansion of the platform for the benefit of Ukrainian refugees. In this context, the support provided by the academic community of the University of Alicante is further communicated among people in need thanks to the outreach potential provided by the online platform that is easily accessible by refugees.

## #14 Science For Ukraine

A grassroots initiative to support Ukraine's academic community

<https://scienceforukraine.eu/>

### Short Description

Science For Ukraine, widely known as #ScienceForUkraine, is a grassroots initiative founded and carried out by scholars who wished to provide immediate support to Ukraine's academic community. It was launched on February 26, 2022, right after the outbreak of the war.

Motivated by the urgency of the situation, volunteer scholars shape, build and sustain the crowdsource-based #ScienceForUkraine platform, thus manifesting a high level of citizen engagement that could not be expressed in such a degree without the use of digital technology.

#ScienceForUkraine counts on the support of more than 130 committed volunteers who regularly update the website with research and job opportunities and raise awareness of the needs of Ukraine's academic community.

### Technologies for citizen engagement

#ScienceForUkraine is an ongoing action whose impact and outreach are growing thanks to the use of digital technologies that make this initiative possible. Specifically, the role of social media platforms, in particular Twitter, was fundamental to bring together the initiators of the action. Interestingly, the tweet launched by scholar Sanita Reinsone with the hashtag #ScienceForUkraine highlights the moment of birth of the idea that was quickly transformed into action. Additionally, thanks to the creation of the online platform, volunteer students and staff achieve to gather up-to-date information on studies and employment opportunities for Ukrainian students and scholars within and beyond Europe.



### Key Features



#### Country

International initiative



#### University Involved

Several universities within and beyond Europe



#### Type of social action

Crowdsourcing



#### Level of citizen engagement

Empowerment



#### Target group/s

Ukrainian academic community



#### Status

Ongoing



#### Technology

Online collaboration spaces

## #15 Scholarships for Ukrainian citizens

A crowdsourcing action by scholars for Ukrainian citizens

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12630487/>



### Short Description

“Scholarship for Ukrainians” was initiated by Greek scholar at KU Leuven university, Giannis Pontikes, in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Through the creation of a LinkedIn group titled “ScholarshipForUkrainian” citizens, the aim of the action is to collect and disseminate information on scholarship opportunities for Ukrainian university students, staff and researchers within and beyond Europe.

As of June 2023, the group counts 936 members. This grassroots action functions as a crowdsourcing initiative whose impact is expanding thanks to the participation of volunteer scholars who join the group.

### Key Features



#### Country

International Initiative



#### University Involved

Several universities within and beyond Europe



#### Type of social action

Crowdsourcing; Scholarship



#### Level of citizen engagement

Empowerment



#### Target group/s

Ukrainian citizens



#### Status

Ongoing



#### Technology

Social media platforms

### Technologies for citizen engagement

In this action, members of European and international academic communities engage in a form of digitally-enhanced and social media-driven action for Ukrainian citizens. Following their willingness to reach wider audiences of Ukrainian citizens, volunteers leverage the power of social media (cf. LinkedIn) to convey their support to audiences that cannot easily navigate, or don't have access, to universities' webpages. Thus, this action is a powerful example of grassroots digital action that was rendered possible thanks to the spread of socially-oriented technological tools and means.



## 6. Analysis

## 6. Analysis

In this section the analysis of the 15 actions is deployed in 6 strands, namely (a) universities' involvement in actions for Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons, (b) the geographical focus (Europe), (c) the types of action, (d) the types of technology, (e) the level of citizen engagement, and (f) grassroots innovation.

### 6.1. Universities' involvement in actions for Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons

The actions gathered show a diversity of actors behind each initiative, ranging from students and researchers to administrative staff at universities. Specifically, our collection brings emphasis on community-led actions, either by individual academic staff and students or collectives, next to actions initiated by the central decision making bodies of the universities.

Both community-led actions by individual students and researchers as well as institution-led actions undertaken by central university administrations have triggered an unprecedented response to the crisis. In particular, 12 out of the 15 actions were initiated by academic staff and student communities, thus triggering support by university administrations. Actions [2], [7] and [12] are indicative examples of HE staff and students' mobilisation for the benefit of refugees. The concert [2] organised by Polish Doctoral Candidates, the establishment of the association of Ukrainian students in France [7], as well as the initiatives undertaken by Hamburg University of Applied Sciences students within the Bunte Hände project [12] form part of a wider spectrum of actions in which universities become pillars of socially beneficial actions for refugees.

### 6.2. Geographical focus: Europe

The present study brings attention to actions carried out by European universities. Figure 3 below offers an overview of the spread of all 56 collected actions as well as the 15 selected ones. As it is observed, there is a denser presence of actions in Central European countries that are directly affected by the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis. Moreover, we see several actions in western Europe, particularly France and Germany, as well as Eastern Europe (cf. Poland) and the Baltics that have welcomed significant numbers of Ukrainian refugees<sup>18</sup>.

This result can be plausibly justified by considering that AGILE partners were more familiar with initiatives in their national context rather than abroad. Although AGILE partners gathered actions from all over Europe, the subsequent screening and identification of the 15 selected ones shows that these are located in nine European countries (see dark blue pins in figure 3).

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<sup>18</sup> UNHCR (n.d.). Ukraine refugee situation. UNHCR Operational Data Portal, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>



**Figure 3** Geographical distribution of the 56 actions

Furthermore, we mapped 10 transnational actions, from the overall 56 collected ones (cf. figure 4), the majority of which operate via digital technologies that facilitate remote participation.

Thanks to digitally-enhanced actions, we observe a huge potential in cross-country solidarity initiatives for a common cause. As new and more flexible forms of social participation emerge through digital technologies, universities are enabled to work collaboratively, across European borders, on forging resilience at transnational level.

Thus, the opportunities offered by digitally-mediated actions are true game-changers in crisis response and resilience building for universities, its communities and society. Indicatively, actions [5] [14] and [15] are transnational actions that mobilised university staff and students in action taking across HEIs worldwide.

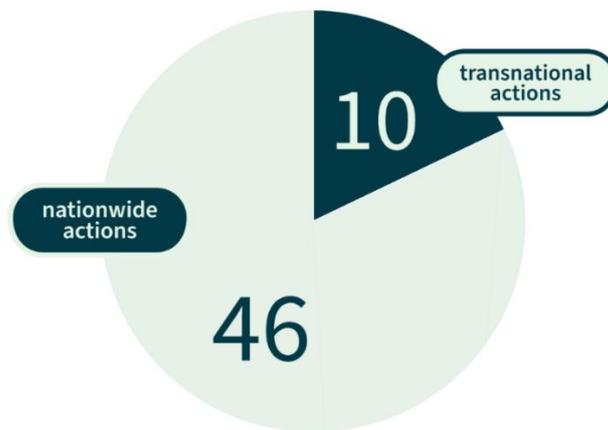


Figure 4 Transnational actions

### 6.3. Types of actions

#### Overview

The analysis shows that the 15 selected actions fall within 12 specific types of action from the overall 18 types present in the typology. According to figure 5 below, from the 15 actions, 3 are crowdsourcing actions, 3 are campaigns, 3 are hackathons, while 2 are categorised as “educational equipments”. Moreover, we identified one action per the following types: a citizen science project, an art event, a public lecture and a crowdfunding campaign.

Water Rangers in Twente 	“Brother nations” concert 	Ukraine Conversations in Time of War 	Online Admission System for Candidates from Ukraine 	Hackathon4Ukraine 
Ukraine’s Virtual House 	The Association of Ukrainian Students in France 	Lithuanian Students’ Union mentoring programme 	Hack4UA 	Social Hackathon 
University of Hamburg for Ukraine 	Bunte Hände for refugees of the Ukrainian war 	Alicante Platform for Ukraine 	#ScienceForUkraine 	Scholarships For Ukrainian citizens 

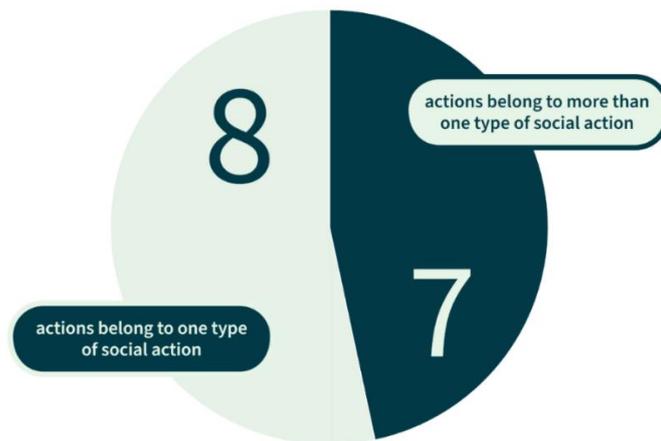
#### Types of social actions



Figure 5 Types of social actions

Additionally, we gave AGILE partners the opportunity to list a second type of action that might be present within the same initiative, to investigate whether there are several types that come together in one action. The analysis of results demonstrates that 7 of 15 actions also include a second type of action, as it is evidenced in figure 6.

Thus, we interpret this plurality of action types as the willingness of organisers to fulfil multiple objectives through one initiative. Moreover, the dynamic social context under which these actions are carried out (cf. war), trigger a multiplicity of emerging needs that need to be addressed, thus making organisers to consider several action types to achieve effective crisis response.



**Figure 6** Number of action types in the 15 initiatives

As figure 6 shows, there are specific actions that comprise more than just one type of action. In particular, we identify an art event [action 2] that combines also an awareness and funding raising campaign for Ukrainians. Likewise, action [4] is a campaign that also unfolds as a crowdsourcing activity, action [6] was a crowdfunding campaign that delivered free accommodation to Ukrainian students in Paris, while action [8] is a students' campaign that organises also networking events and opportunities for refugees. Eventually, action [11] provides "educational equipments" but also tuition free studies to Ukrainian students; action [12] is a campaign that includes the provision of educational equipments as well, while action [15] is a crowdsourcing action that results in scholarships to Ukrainian students and scholars. What these actions highlight is a duality of objectives and means of actions that are combined to deliver a variety of support measures to Ukrainian refugees.

### **Crowdsourcing actions**

The need to mobilise as many resources (including humans) as possible to effectively tackle the Ukrainian refugee emergency seems to be adequately addressed by

crowdsourcing. Fostered by the power of crowds that collectively contribute to a social purpose, crowdsourcing has gained in prominence, especially with the rise of digital technologies<sup>19</sup>.

We identified 3 crowdsourcing actions in which the role of technology has been instrumental to their successful organisation and implementation. In particular, action [13] is an online platform developed by citizens of Alicante region, Spain. The University of Alicante contributes to this civic crowdsourcing platform through the engagement of HE staff who upload actions organised by the university for Ukrainian refugees. Similarly, action [14], #ScienceForUkraine, and action [15], #ScholarshipForUkrainian citizens, are examples of grassroots crowdsourcing actions that leveraged the outreach potential of digital technologies to convey their resources to Ukrainians in need of support.

By looking into these 3 actions, we notice how crowdsourcing manages to accomplish collection and dissemination of resources in far greater volume than a single university or public authority initiative could do on its own. In an emergency like the one faced by Ukrainian refugees, acquiring instant access to a diversified and up-to-date pool of information is crucial for the improvement of the social conditions of war-affected persons.

## Campaigns

Campaigns are means to involve people in awareness raising and support actions for Ukrainian refugees. Campaigns usually include a series of initiatives that build up engagement of participants to a cause. In this publication, we identified three actions, namely [4], [8] and [12].

All three actions are highly participatory and grassroots in nature as university students and researchers are directly involved in the ideation (actions [4] and [12]) and implementation (action [8]) of a series of events that are designed to foster inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in HE systems in Poland [4], Lithuania [8] and Germany [12]. Thus, campaigns offer the opportunity to both university and refugee students to meet each other and forge more solid and long-term bonds; something that barely occurs in one-off events.

## Hackathons

When looking into the grassroots innovation dimension, a widespread type of action is hackathons<sup>20</sup>. In particular, actions [5], [9] and [10] were hackathons organised by

universities to provide innovative solutions to Ukrainian refugees' needs.

By acknowledging the diversity of hackathons in terms of organisation, participation and final outcomes, we observe that action [5] was a hackathon by and for university

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<sup>19</sup> Howe, J. (2006, January 6). The rise of crowdsourcing. Wired magazine, 14(6), 1-4.  
[http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds\\_pr.html](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds_pr.html)

<sup>20</sup> Hackathon.com (December 22, 2021). What is A Hackathon?  
<https://tips.hackathon.com/article/what-is-a-hackathon>

students of three universities, while actions [9] and [10] issued an open call for volunteer participants who could join the competition, from local citizens to refugees and the business sector.

Besides this difference in participation, all three hackathons encouraged collaboration between team members and mentors who facilitated the creation of solutions that could mitigate some of the most pressing issues of Ukrainian refugees (e.g., reliable information about available humanitarian aid, shelter, etc.).

### **Educational equipments**

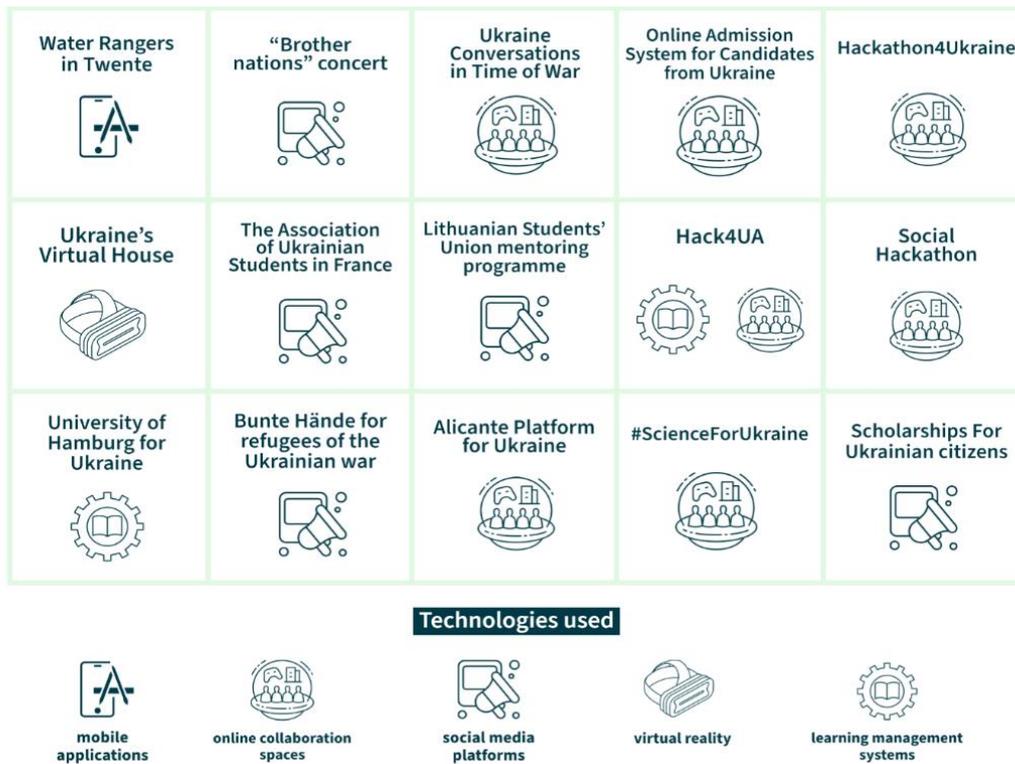
As our research focuses on university-driven actions, the launch of initiatives that foresee the provision of educational materials and equipment (e.g., online courses) could not be missing. Specifically, actions [7] and [11] form part of this category, as their aim is to foster smooth integration of Ukrainian refugees in the French and German HE systems respectively. Through the organisation of information sessions, the production of online modules and the provision of support services to help Ukrainian refugees navigate a new educational environment, actions [7] and [11] bring their focus onto the facilitation of the learning trajectory of refugees.

### **Other types of actions identified**

The collection comprises also a citizen science project [1] (for Ukrainian children to foster their integration and bonding in their hosting communities) and an art event [2] (by doctoral candidates in Poland whose aim was to raise awareness of the needs of Ukrainian early-career researchers and showcase cultural connections between the two countries through a music concert). Additionally, action [3] was the organisation of a webinar series for Polish universities' support measures to Ukrainian universities and students and, action [6] entailed a crowdfunding campaign to provide free accommodation to Ukrainian refugees in Paris.

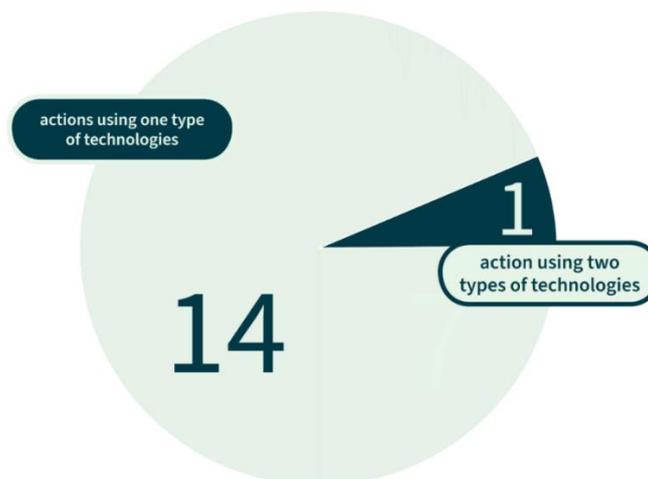
## **6.4. Types of technology**

The analysis illustrates the presence of 5 main types of technologies used, namely online collaboration spaces, social media platforms, learning management systems virtual reality and mobile applications (cf. Fig. 7).



**Figure 7** Types of technologies used in the 15 actions

Moreover, we investigated the presence of more than one type of technology used. Our analysis demonstrates that in action [9] there is more than one digital technology used (c.f. Fig. 8). In digitally-mediated actions, the utilisation of various technologies can be interpreted as the organisers’ willingness to benefit from the increased potential offered by technological innovations and tools. In action [9], it was a hackathon competition that encouraged participants to include multiple digital technologies to develop their solutions, thus expressing the multiplicity of digital tools available to address a social challenge.



**Figure 8** Second type of technology in the 15 actions

## Online collaboration spaces

In a highly interconnected world, in which remote working and collaboration has been accentuated because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of online collaboration spaces has been on the rise. Online collaboration spaces have been documented in 6 of the 15 actions, therefore they are the most widespread technology in our sample. Indicatively, actions [3], [4], [13] and [14] are based on online collaboration spaces both to deliver their action (cf. [3] and [4]) and to advance coordination between volunteers who engage in them (cf. [13] and [14]).

## Social media platforms

One of the most popular ways to communicate and engage people in support actions for Ukrainian refugees, social media platforms are the main source of technology used in 5 of the 15 actions. From the art event [2], to the actions organised by student associations ([7], [8], [12]) and the LinkedIn group #ScholarshipForUkrainian citizens [15], social media are integral part of actions, especially those set up by university students. The case of action [15] is an emblematic example that uses social media not only to propagate its results but has rendered LinkedIn a unique digital space through which Ukrainians can seek opportunities to continue their studies and professional journeys.

## Learning management systems

The learning dimension of the selected actions is justified by the nature of the institutions and individuals engaged in them (mainly HE staff and students). Thus, the use of learning management systems (LMS) is present in two actions, namely [9] and [11]. In action [9], the hackathon #Hack4UA [9] encouraged, among others, HE students to use advanced learning systems and tools to provide innovative educational solutions to Ukrainian refugees and IDPs. Similarly, although in a different context, in action [11], for the creation of online modules and courses by university staff and students, the University of Hamburg chose the learning management systems to implement and host the final outputs of the actions. The use of LMS in education is widespread, and its use in actions for a social purpose, as these examples reflect, is an interesting new perspective that combines the educational with the social words on the ground of community action.

## Virtual reality

Even as a minority with respect to the range of technologies, virtual reality is present in one action [6]. This initiative entailed the production of a virtual model to attract the public's attention on the housing problem of Ukrainian students in the city of Paris. To make the project feasible, the Cité Internationale Universitaire launched a call for donations, and an NFT sale of Jean-Michel Wilmotte's drawings and an auction sale at Sotheby's France and New York planned on June 9. The money collected will also be used to create an emergency fund.

Thanks to virtual reality, the initiators of the action achieved to bring the French public closer to the harsh reality faced by refugees and share with them the dream of a house away from their country of origin. The symbolism of this virtual house is further accentuated and communicated through virtual reality that allows people to emerge in a different world, sense it, and thus forge an emotional bond with it.

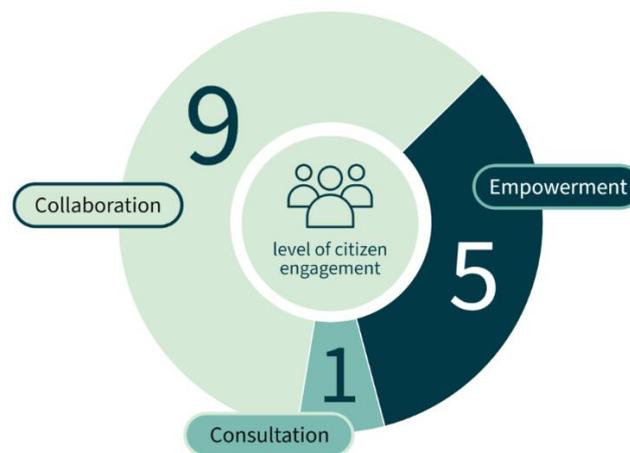
## Mobile applications

As the use of mobile phones (smartphones) is widespread, it may come as no surprise that participatory actions include the utilisation of mobile applications to deliver their activities. What is special in this context is the impact of mobile applications to public engagement and knowledge diffusion. In the citizen science action [1], Ukrainian children used water quality sampling tools and a mobile application to store and monitor their data in their host country (Twente, The Netherlands), thus becoming aware of how easy-to-use technology can serve community learning and social integration.

### 6.5. Levels of citizen engagement

The differences in terms of citizen engagement across all actions are worth exploring further for their meaning in civic participation, and the societal role of HEIs. We distinguished actions on 3 levels (consultation, collaboration and empowerment, cf. Step 2 Methodology).

Figure 9 demonstrates a prevalence of collaborative actions in our sample.



**Figure 9** Levels of citizen engagement in the 15 actions

Specifically, we mapped action [3] that entailed a rather low level of citizen engagement, namely consultation, as participants were mostly informed by following the webinar series, while they were able to express their views and ideas during these online events.

9 actions adopted a collaboration-based approach in which participants were actively contributing to the action in a two-way meaningful interaction with the organisers. These actions include the citizen science project [1], the hackathons ([5], [9], [10]), crowdsourcing ([13]) and crowdfunding initiatives ([6]), as well as campaigns such as action [4].

5 actions correspond to empowerment that express a significant citizen engagement potential amid disruptive social conditions. Interestingly, these empowerment actions are among the most grassroots and bottom-up ones, such as #ScienceForUkraine [14], the #ScholarshipForUkrainian citizens action [15] and the music concert organised by Polish doctoral candidates [2].

### 6.6. The grassroots innovation dimension

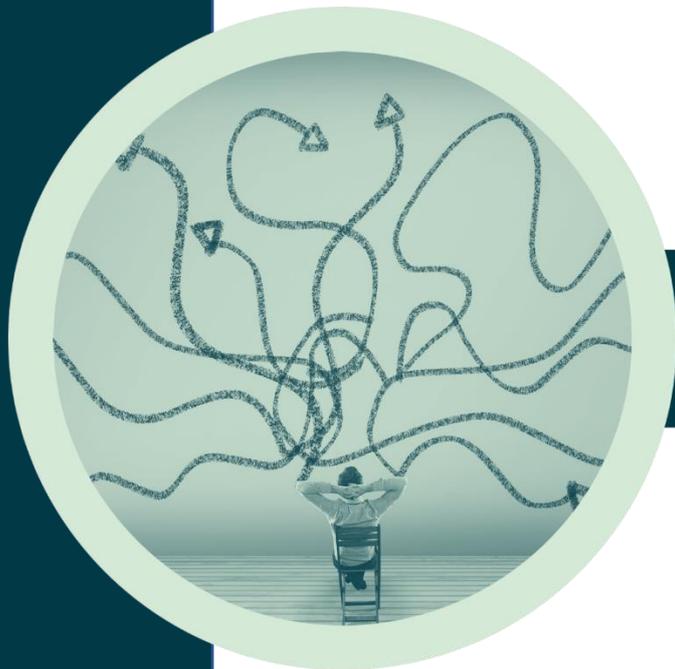
Grassroots innovation has been scrutinised as a selection criterion based on which the identification of the 15 actions was achieved. All actions have been scrutinised against their grassroots innovation dimension (cf. Step 3 in Methodology), which has been present in 4 actions (cf. Fig. 10).



**Figure 10** The grassroots innovation dimension in the 15 actions

These actions are the three hackathons ([5], [9], [10]) and Ukraine’s Virtual House [6]. All four actions combined grassroots participation of volunteers with a significant degree of innovation, both digitally-enhanced and social-oriented, that distinguishes them from the rest of actions.

Overall, our attention to grassroots innovation is not to criticise the actions not encompassing this dimension, but rather to map an under-explored field that may play a crucial role in enhancing crisis response and resilience of universities and societies in the future.



## 7. Conclusions

## Conclusions

The present publication aimed to provide a first mapping and analysis of university-driven actions (both institution- and community-led) for the benefit of Ukrainian refugees to build institutional resilience in times of unpredicted affluence of displaced persons. To enhance the replicability potential, we used analytical instruments allowing cross-case comparison, and focused on Ukraine as a case study. The desk research that led to a collection of 56 actions spanning across Europe of which we identified the 15 most relevant ones with respect to the 3 core concepts: (a) digital action, (b) citizen engagement and (c) grassroots innovation. Some key messages are presented hereafter, with the aim to expand the knowledge base of university-society resilience in crisis contexts, and to foster future cooperation, and strengthen solidarity.

In terms of action types of university innovation in the humanitarian crisis, the first three most used are crowdsourcing, hackathons and campaigns. In the sample of 15 actions, nine belong to these highly engaging, community-led types, which is indicative of the increased innovation and empowerment potential they contain. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that seven initiatives combine more than a type of action, which indicates the variety and wealth of combinations in participatory actions for a social purpose.

In terms of citizen engagement, a positive landscape emerges as most actions are based on collaboration between actors involved, while five of them are categorised as empowering, thus depicting a huge potential for active citizenship through digital action.

With regards to digital technologies, the use of online collaboration spaces and social media was particularly widespread among the 15 actions. The use of digital tools and social networks is integral part of outreach as well as support mechanisms developed especially by university students and researchers.

In terms of grassroots innovation, four out of the fifteen actions comprised of this dimension, thus marking a new territory of underexplored bottom-up and digitally-enhanced actions for a social purpose.

In this context, it should be highlighted that the analysis of results didn't explore socio-cultural aspects that could provide a more nuanced overview of the selected actions, as they would lead us away from the objectives of the present study. Additionally, the study's focus on Ukraine should not be seen as an exclusion factor to other crises that European universities were called to deal with, but rather as an example of academic resilience in humanitarian crises in general. Thus, we hope this study acts as a trigger for further bottom-up and participatory actions organised by university staff and students in the future.

Eventually, we will keep enriching our understanding of grassroots digital actions and their value for citizen engagement and resilience in times of crises by observing concrete and hands-on experimentations between university communities, citizens and refugees that are part of the upcoming activities of the AGILE project.

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