

# Transitional Justice Solutions for Human Rights Challenges in War-time Ukraine

(UK-Ukraine R&I Twinning Grants Scheme)

*Evaluation Report*

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December 2023

Edge Hill  
University

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Unit for  
Evaluation &  
Policy Analysis



# Evaluation Report

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## Background

Before the backdrop of the Ukraine conflict and the resulting displacement of Ukrainian scholars, EHU and the NLU engaged in a collaborative project which emerged as a vital initiative to address the academic and research challenges arising from the crisis. The project sought to not only enhance scholarly capacities but also to facilitate international cooperation in the face of the pressing post-conflict issues that Ukraine is navigating. The Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit at EHU was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the project in order to assess whether it achieved its aims and objectives and to produce actionable recommendations for future similar projects in the field.

## Programme description

This collaborative project brought together EHU and the Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University (NLU) to address a range of significant objectives. The project was a collaborative endeavour and comprised three primary strands which were organised and led by different members of the research team, which reflected strong partner relationships as they developed through the project.

### 1. Capacity Building and Postgraduate Training

EHU was to focus on enhancing the research methodology skills of Ukrainian scholars. Building on EHU's Graduate Teaching Assistant scheme, which has grown substantially since its inception in 2012, this project aimed to engage a community of researchers in a comprehensive research training program. This training formed the foundation of a broader effort, where EHU planned to share its expertise online with NLU. Moreover, the project included customised training requested by NLU, which was to be delivered through a summer school scheduled for July 2023, with a particular emphasis on supporting Early Career Researchers. The summer school was led by Dr Jennifer Giblin.

### 2. Research and the International Justice and Human Rights Centre (IJHRC)

EHU and NLU were to collaborate on research initiatives, primarily led by the newly established IJHRC. The IJHRC's launch on March 15, 2023 was to delve into "Developments in international law triggered by the Russia-Ukraine war." This event led to the co-editing of a book and the organization of a webinar series, inviting NLU academics to participate. A conference interpreter was to be engaged to broaden the project's reach. Dr Jennifer Giblin, Dr Patrick Butchard, Dr Olena Chub and Prof Oksana Senatorova are the co-editors of the edited book collection.

### 3. Knowledge Exchange and Policy Support

Dr. Patrick Butchard, a Senior Lecturer at EHU's Law School and an International Law Researcher for the House of Commons Library, was to lead the production of policy briefing papers in partnership with NLU. These papers were to address critical issues related to "Sanctions and Reparations for Ukraine." The intention was to present these

papers to stakeholders at the House of Commons and engage in discussions with relevant parties in Ukraine, including the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights, civil society organizations, academic and expert communities.

Throughout the project's duration, EHU planned to employ Dr. Olena Chub, a displaced academic from NLU, as a Postdoctoral Fellow. Her role was multi-faceted, including nurturing the relationship between the two universities, planning joint activities starting in September 2023, and applying for funds to facilitate their successful development.

In summary, this comprehensive project sought to enhance the research capabilities of Ukrainian scholars, establish a Centre for International Justice and Human Rights, conduct a summer school for Early Career Researchers in international humanitarian law, and provide policy support through briefing papers, all aimed at actively contributing to the reconstruction and policy development in Ukraine. This collaborative effort underlined the commitment of both institutions to furthering academic and research capacities, fostering international cooperation, and making a meaningful impact in addressing the post-conflict challenges faced by Ukraine.

#### How success was assessed by project leads

The project leads identified a range of indicators for success which informed this evaluation. The project's success would manifest through the strengthening of research methodology skills among Ukrainian scholars, fostering international cooperation and engagement between EHU and the Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University. The establishment of the Centre for International Justice and Human Rights, the publication of an edited book resulting from a thematic conference, and the successful organization of a summer school in England for Early Career Researchers in international humanitarian law would also underscore the project's impact. Additionally, the project's effectiveness was to be reflected in the production and presentation of policy briefing papers on 'Sanction & Reparations' at Westminster, engaging influential stakeholders in the rebuilding of Ukraine. Furthermore, the employment of Dr. Olena Chub as a Postdoctoral Fellow was to signify the project's commitment to nurturing the relationship between the two universities and planning future joint activities, ensuring the sustainability of this collaborative effort in the post-conflict landscape of Ukraine.

There were some specific indicators which would allow project leads to measure successful project completion.

Firstly, in the strand of Training and Summer School, success was to be gauged by assessing the number of participants who have completed the training sessions and attended the Summer School. This included an examination of how many participants successfully completed these programs, and their respective grades. Course evaluations by the participants would also provide valuable insights into the success of this aspect of the project.

Secondly, in the Research strand, success hinged on the recruitment of co-authors for the edited book, emphasising the diversity of co-authors involved. This was to be measured by determining the number of planned chapters and the co-authors

associated with each. The project's commitment to inclusivity and diversity would be assessed, while the number of attendees at the webinar series would also serve as an indicator of success in disseminating research findings.

Lastly, the success of the project's Dissemination component was to be evaluated based on the successful delivery of the Parliamentary event. Feedback from the participants at this event provided valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of the project's outreach efforts.

These indicators collectively offered a comprehensive assessment of the project's success, reflecting achievements in training, research, and dissemination, all contributing to its overarching goals. The project final report to funder from 8 October 2023 reported on these measures and indicators.

## Project Evaluation- What we did

We were guided in our evaluation by the following questions.

1. Has the project achieved its overall impact?
2. What impact did the project have on the beneficiaries and wider university community?
3. Which aspects of the project were most impactful?

The evaluation design encompassed both formative and summative elements to provide insights into project implementation, its impact, and areas for improvement.

### Data Collection Methods

Our methodology involved the adoption of a qualitative approach complemented by an analysis of project-related documents. We conducted in-depth interviews with key project stakeholders, such as project leads, scholars, and participants. These interviews delved deeper into the experiences and perceptions of the project's impact. Open-ended questions were used to explore the nuances of the project's effects.

We analysed project-related documents, including project reports, policy briefing papers, conference proceedings, and any other relevant documents. This analysis provided us with objective data on the project's output, reach, and influence.

### Data collection instrument

An interview schedule comprising seven open-ended questions was developed. It began with basic questions about participants' roles in relation to the programme and covered their opinions about programme impact, experiences of programme implementation, wider concerns, and key lessons learned. To facilitate discussion during the interviews and capture richer data without missing any key information, the interviewer explored concepts and responses in more depth through follow-up questions. All interviews took place in October 2023 and were conducted remotely online using Microsoft Teams at a time convenient to the participants. The interviews lasted between 14 and 36 minutes with an average of 22 minutes. All the interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants, transcribed and anonymised.

### Data analysis

The anonymised interview transcripts were imported into Atlas.ti (Version 23.3.0) to conduct a thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis framework. Data were coded and analysed by one member of the project team. For confirmation purposes, identified themes were discussed and disagreements resolved through consensus. The themes were examined against the aims and objectives of the project. Findings from the thematic analysis were further validated by a select number of anonymised quotes presented in the findings section. To protect confidentiality of the respondents, quotes are indicated by numbered identifiers.

### Confidentiality

As an evaluation, ethical review and approval was not required. However, we protected the confidentiality of all respondents in line with relevant EHU regulations on informed consent.

### Reporting

We report our findings in the section below and produce actionable recommendations for future projects of similar scope and nature.



## Evaluation Results- What we found

We have aligned our findings from the thematic analysis with the three domains relating to generic project objectives, impact, challenges and barriers, and lessons and insights. Within each domain we identified key themes which are reported below and validated by illustrative verbatim quotes.

### Domain 1 – Project Objectives

#### Training and Career Development

The Training and Career Development strand, closely aligned with the project's first strand, emphasised career advancement, particularly for early career researchers. The project effectively achieved this objective through the implementation of the summer school and online webinars. These activities offered valuable opportunities for postgraduates and early career researchers to enhance their research skills and explore areas for potential collaboration.

*"The first strand was focused on career development, particularly for early career researchers. One of the main projects that we had was the summer school, to give them an opportunity to come to the UK to enhance their research skills and to identify areas where we can collaborate. The summer school worked really well as a catalyst for all those things."*

The summer school not only served as a platform for skill development but also played a pivotal role in discussing future projects like the edited collection and the Parliamentary event. This strand highlights the project's commitment to nurturing talent and fostering career growth among the participants, aligning with the project's objective of enhancing research methodology skills and supporting Early Career Researchers.

#### Research

The Research strand was a central component of the project, aligning with the project's aim to develop research capacity among participants. This strand encompassed the ongoing plan for a co-edited book based on the program's themes and a webinar series. The second strand of the project focused on research synergies between Edge Hill and NLU, emphasising the development of research capacity among colleagues at NLU. The project effectively accomplished one of its primary objectives, securing a contract with Routledge for the edited collection, ensuring open access. This achievement was particularly noteworthy, considering the challenges that can arise when dealing with publishers.

*"Developing research capacity of NLU participants was an integral part of the project... one aim was to have a contract in place for an edited collection and that, we managed to get a contract with Routledge and to have that open access, and that was all put in place by the end of the funding period, which was a success. But it was successful, and we made it happen."*

This strand underscores the project's success in nurturing research collaboration, facilitating the creation of an edited collection, and recognising the significance of a book launch. It aligned seamlessly with the project's second strand, which focused on research collaboration and the co-editing of a book based on the program, demonstrating the tangible outcomes of this objective.

### Knowledge Exchange

The Knowledge Exchange strand primarily centred on the parliamentary event, which was a vital element of the project's third strand. This aspect included the production of policy briefing papers in collaboration with NLU Ukraine and the organization of the parliamentary event. The event was a significant platform for knowledge exchange.

*"And then the third strand was knowledge exchange, and that was the Parliamentary event. In terms of the Parliamentary event, we highlighted some areas of research that the specialists in Parliament were either not aware of or would like to enhance or continue with further. And made some connections there... an avenue for the Ukrainian researchers to be able to make an impact with their research."*

This strand aligned with the project's third strand and its focus on knowledge exchange and policy support. The parliamentary event served as a bridge between academia and policymaking, providing a platform for specialists in Parliament to gain awareness of research areas and fostering connections between researchers and policymakers. It showcased the project's commitment to supporting policy development, particularly in the context of Ukraine's post-conflict challenges, and engaging influential stakeholders.

### Domain 2- Impact

We identified 8 broad themes in this domain and report each of them in turn below.

#### Impact Theme: Cultural Exchange and Knowledge Sharing

The project has effectively facilitated cultural exchange and knowledge sharing among researchers from different countries, particularly benefiting those from NLU. This exchange offered them the opportunity to learn about British culture and enhance their English language skills, which was mentioned as a significant benefit in feedback. Moreover, the summer school served as a fruitful platform for mutual learning. Researchers from EHU shared their research methods and funding approaches, while NLU participants contributed their expertise in various fields. This collaborative learning not only advanced understanding of Western research demands and nuances but also encouraged meaningful cultural exchange and cooperation. Participants emphasised the value of this experience for understanding different educational systems and the potential for its application at their home university.

*"The project provided an opportunity for researchers from different countries to share ideas and research experiences, thereby creating a platform for mutual learning and knowledge sharing."*

This impact theme underscores the project's successful cultural exchange and knowledge sharing, reflecting its commitment to strengthening academic and research capacities, international collaboration, and supporting Early Career Researchers, in alignment with the project's overarching goals.

#### Impact Theme: Increased Research Capacity

The impact theme of Increased Research Capacity stands out as a notable achievement of the project. Through enhanced training and skill development, participants experienced significant improvements in their understanding of research methods, publishing, accessing research funding, and identifying diverse funding opportunities. The project's emphasis on developing research-focused skills was particularly noteworthy.

*"[I] learnt a lot about research methodologies and legal research... how to apply for opportunities. The summer school was fantastic, we had an excellent group of researchers come to Edge Hill and they learnt from us, in terms of our research methods, our approach to research funding and the different opportunities that are available."*

This quote highlights the substantial progress made by participants in learning about diverse research methodologies, publishing techniques, and accessing research funding. They also underscore the development of English language proficiency as an additional benefit. The project's webinars played a pivotal role in providing insights into getting published and searching for funding, which was a novel experience for Ukrainian participants. The project's success in enhancing research capacity aligns with its objective of strengthening academic and research capacities and promoting international cooperation, particularly for Early Career Researchers.

#### Impact Theme: Strengthened Institutional Ties

The impact theme of Strengthened Institutional Ties demonstrates the project's success in fortifying and enhancing existing collaborations between EHU and the Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University. While discussions between the two universities had occurred before the project's initiation, this endeavour provided a unique opportunity to further strengthen and sustain these ties.

*"Even though there were discussions between the two universities before the commencement of the present project, this project provided an opportunity to further strengthen, boost, and maintain existing ties between the two Universities."*

The project's Twin for Hope Campaign funding opportunity allowed for the identification of ideal collaborative fits within the schools and the International Justice and Human Rights Centre. The launch of the International Justice and Human Rights Centre was tied to the project, reflecting the project's success in strengthening ties due to overlapping research interests. The project also aimed to identify not only research objectives but sustainable, long-term collaboration. This focus on building lasting connections aligns with the project's objectives of promoting international cooperation, nurturing the relationship between universities, and planning joint activities for the

future. It serves as a boost for the ongoing cooperation, emphasising the project's commitment to long-term institutional ties and collaborations.

### Impact Theme: Research Support and Collaboration

The impact theme of Research Support and Collaboration highlights the project's effective efforts to facilitate and advance research activities between EHU and the Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University. The project's impact is evident in the provision of guidance, publishing opportunities, funding opportunities, improved understanding of research in different contexts, international exposure, and knowledge exchange. This aligns closely with the project's objectives of enhancing research methodology skills, fostering research collaboration, and supporting policy development.

*"There were targeted efforts by EHU to facilitate and advance research activities with NLU, which has led to providing guidance, publishing opportunities, funding, understanding research in different contexts, international exposure, and knowledge exchange."*

The collaboration and relationship between the two institutions have significantly benefited from the project. It has fostered a strong and fruitful relationship, which is essential for the project's overarching goals. Additionally, the project's connection with the UK Parliament has opened doors for further collaborations and engagement with members of select committees and policy makers, facilitating a dynamic exchange between academics and policy stakeholders. This aspect aligns with the project's aim of providing policy support through briefing papers and engaging influential stakeholders in the rebuilding of Ukraine.

The project's commitment to research support and collaboration is evident through its delivery of more than promised. Participants of the summer school, for example, received extended access to the library, further enhancing their research capabilities and reinforcing the project's commitment to academic support and collaboration.

These impacts collectively reflect the project's dedication to nurturing research support and fostering collaborations, resulting in a successful alignment with its aims and objectives.

### Impact Theme: Perspective on Ukraine International Law and Human Rights

The impact theme of offering a more visible perspective on Ukraine's International Law and Human Rights emerged as a significant achievement of the project. The project has effectively introduced a unique and novel perspective on Ukraine's International Law, human rights, and the ongoing conflict. This fresh viewpoint aligns seamlessly with the project's overarching objectives to promote international cooperation, strengthen academic and research capacities, and provide policy support.

*"Given a voice to Ukrainian academics... development of the academic area, this Ukrainian angle on the Ukraine conflict. So, there's the development there in terms of the academic area, this I suppose, Ukrainian angle on the Ukraine conflict, and that's quite a novel area within international law."*

The project has provided a platform for Ukrainian academics to voice their insights and perspectives, contributing to the development of a unique academic angle on the Ukraine conflict within international law. It has enabled the exchange of research perspectives and facilitated collaborative projects, strengthening the academic and research capacities of participants.

The project's impact in offering a more visible and novel perspective underscores its role in enhancing international cooperation, academic development, and research in the field of international law and human rights.

### Impact Theme: Policy Engagements

The impact theme of Policy Engagements reflected the project's success in creating opportunities for NLU researchers to engage with members of the UK Parliament on policy matters. This engagement has led to the establishment of valuable ongoing connections between the Parliament, EHU, and the Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University. The impact has been substantial, contributing to increased visibility for NLU and facilitating meaningful policy interactions.

*"The parliamentary event provided a very good opportunity for NLU researchers to engage members of the UK Parliament on policy matters, leading to interesting new ongoing connections being built between the parliament, EHU, and NLU. This has contributed to increasing the visibility of NLU."*

The project's parliamentary event focused on specific research topics, particularly related to Ukrainian research in international law and human rights post-conflict with Russia. Its main aim was to create research briefings and foster policy engagements with Members of Parliament, enhancing connections between academia, Parliament, and Ukrainian experts in the field. The event highlighted research areas that Parliament specialists were either unaware of or wished to explore further, facilitating valuable interactions.

The project's emphasis on policy engagements was further demonstrated through the collaboration with specialists in various branches of law, including international law, constitutional law, criminology, and criminal law. This collaborative exchange extended beyond the event, as participants received links and feedback, indicating the potential for maintaining connections and developing future policy interactions.

The impact of policy engagements aligned with the project's objective to provide policy support through briefing papers and engage influential stakeholders in rebuilding Ukraine. It signifies the project's success in promoting knowledge exchange and facilitating connections with policymakers, contributing to the project's overarching goals.

### Impact Theme: Book Project and Academic Collaboration in Law Studies

The book project underscored the successful academic collaboration in law studies, particularly in international law, involving international lawyers from various European institutions, including the NLU. The project's partnership in an edited collection project

aimed at bringing together international lawyers holds particular importance in the field of law.

*"We've partnered now on this edited collection project, where we're bringing together international lawyers from various European institutions, but a lot from NLU as well... So, there's the development there in terms of the academic area, this I suppose, Ukrainian angle on the Ukraine conflict and so that's quite a novel area within international law."*

This impact theme highlights the essential role of academic collaboration in law studies, which is not limited by geographic boundaries. It emphasises the project's success in bridging the gap for international lawyers who may face challenges in publishing their work within English academic circles. The project's ambitious aim to secure a contract for an edited collection with Routledge is a testament to its commitment to advancing academic contributions in international law.

In the field of law studies, such academic collaboration serves as a vital mechanism for sharing diverse legal perspectives and promoting a broader understanding of complex legal issues, particularly those related to international law. The project's accomplishment in bringing together international lawyers and providing opportunities for them to publish their unique perspectives contributes significantly to the advancement of knowledge in the field of law, reflecting the project's objectives to enhance research methodology skills, foster research collaboration, and strengthen academic and research capacities.

#### Impact Theme: Future Collaboration Opportunities

The impact theme of Future Collaboration Opportunities underscored the project's success in initiating discussions between both universities about the potential for ongoing partnership and collaboration in various areas. The impact is evident in the project's efforts to identify research projects, align interests, and build strong relationships between EHU and the NLU. This emphasis on future collaboration aligns closely with the project's objectives of enhancing research methodology skills, fostering research collaboration, and supporting policy development.

*"We chatted to the participants a lot about future cooperation and ensuring that this just wasn't a one-off situation. So, we really thought about how we could continue our partnership going forward and could build on this."*

The project's success in developing strong relationships and aligning interests with NLU has paved the way for future growth and collaboration, particularly in the context of the reconstruction efforts in Ukraine. Participants expressed a strong desire to continue collaboration, indicating that the impact of the project goes beyond its initial phase. The project's emphasis on giving a voice to Ukrainian academics and facilitating academic exchange underscores the importance of ongoing collaboration.

In summary, the project's impact on Future Collaboration Opportunities highlighted its contribution to fostering long-term partnerships, aligning interests, and building strong academic relationships, all of which are crucial for achieving its objectives and promoting international cooperation.

## Domain 3 – Challenges and Barriers

Our analysis also revealed some challenges which the project leads and participants encountered. We have summarised them below around the prevailing themes as articulated in our interviews.

### Challenges and Barriers Theme: Organisational Efficiency with Reference to Project Aims and Objectives

In the context of the project's aims and objectives, the theme of Organisational Efficiency stands out as a testament to the project's success in achieving its goals. The project had several ambitious objectives, including building the research capacity of Ukrainian scholars, establishing a Centre for International Justice and Human Rights, and promoting policy support for rebuilding Ukraine. The absence of significant logistical challenges underscores the project's efficiency in pursuing these objectives.

The smooth execution of all tasks demonstrates that the project effectively managed the complex logistics of training sessions, the summer school, academic exchange, and policy engagement. This operational success aligns with the project's aim to enhance research methodology skills, foster research collaboration, and support policy development.

By achieving organisational efficiency, the project ensured that the participants' experience was positive and free from disruptions, enabling them to fully engage in the training, research activities, and policy events. This efficient execution of tasks enabled the project to fulfil its broader objectives of promoting international cooperation, strengthening academic and research capacities, and giving a voice to Ukrainian academics. The absence of significant logistical challenges reflects the project's commitment to providing a seamless and productive experience for all involved.

### Challenges and Barriers Theme: Gender Disparity

One theme that was articulated by respondents was gender disparity and how this was affected by the conflict situation in Ukraine. While the project aimed to provide opportunities for academic exchange and collaboration for all, the prevailing conditions prevented males from leaving the country. As a result, the summer school was predominantly attended by females, with only one male participant who was already living in Germany.

Despite this challenge, the project's organisers recognised that this situation was beyond their control and was a consequence of the conflict in Ukraine. The project design stage had envisaged this issue and worked with the participants who could travel. This approach demonstrates the project's adaptability and commitment to providing opportunities even in challenging circumstances.

In the context of the project's objectives, the gender disparity challenge underscores the importance of creating inclusive opportunities for all scholars, regardless of their gender. While the project may not have fully met its aim of diverse participation due to external factors, it highlights the project's commitment to inclusivity and adaptability.

The presence of the one male participant, who was able to join from Germany, serves as a positive example of the project's flexibility and determination to overcome barriers in pursuit of its objectives.

#### Challenges and Barriers Theme: Amendment of Policy Brief

This theme illustrated the project's adaptability and responsiveness to its objectives. While the original plan aimed to disseminate policy papers to influential Ukrainian actors, the project encountered an amendment that incorporated this objective into a more comprehensive approach.

In response to this challenge, the project team rolled the dissemination of policy papers into the Parliamentary event, ensuring that the dissemination was part of a more significant initiative. Additionally, the team decided to write their own report and explore the creation of policy briefings. These briefings would not only be disseminated among influential actors within the UK Parliament but would also strengthen connections at NLU and their networks within Ukrainian institutions.

This approach reflects the project's capacity to address challenges and make strategic amendments that align with its broader goals. The project's adaptability ensures that its policy dissemination efforts remain effective and well-integrated with its overall objectives, contributing to the project's overall impact and success.

#### Challenges and Barriers Theme: Language Barrier

The Language Barrier theme presented a challenge related to language proficiency among the project participants. However, within the context of the project's eligibility criteria and objectives, this challenge was effectively addressed.

The project required participants to have some knowledge of English as a prerequisite for eligibility, and this criterion was assessed through the motivation letters submitted with their applications. While English might not be the first language for some participants, the project's careful selection process ensured that they possessed sufficient English language skills to engage in the training and activities.

The language barrier, although recognised as a potential issue, was managed successfully. Participants acknowledged the opportunity to further develop their English language skills, which was an additional aspect of skill development that the project provided.

In the context of the project's objectives, the ability to manage the language barrier demonstrated the effectiveness of the eligibility criteria and the commitment to ensuring that participants could actively engage in training, research, and policy engagement activities. This approach aligned with the project's aim to create an environment for meaningful academic exchange and collaboration.



## Domain 4 – Lessons and Insights

In addition, we also identified some potential lessons and insights gained by participants and project leads from the programme. We added them in the section below since they may play an important role in informing future programme development and implementation.

### Lessons and Insights Theme: Extended Summer School Period and Valuable In-Person Meetings

The project participants and organisers provided valuable insights into the duration of the summer school and the significance of in-person meetings. Participants expressed a desire to extend the summer school beyond its initial one-week duration, aiming for a more comprehensive program. One participant noted:

*"I think the only thing is that it was one week long, and there was a desire from the participants that it would be at least two weeks long so we could fit more in."*

Additionally, project organisers recognised the value of in-person meetings, emphasising the benefits of a prolonged period of face-to-face interaction. They found that such meetings allowed for a deeper understanding of project objectives and personal connections. This experience highlighted the effectiveness of dedicating a significant amount of time to in-person collaboration.

In the context of the project's objectives, these insights suggest that extending the summer school period and prioritising in-person gatherings could enhance the project's impact, fostering a more comprehensive academic exchange experience for all participants. We think that our analysis shows that a comprehensive set of lessons and insights has materialised, shaping the contours of effective project management. We synthesised our findings in a series of these lessons and insights in the next section.

## Lessons and insights

From our project evaluation, several fundamental principles have surfaced which may guide the course of future effective project development and implementation in this field. Foremost among these is the emphasis on clear communication and expectations. The success of any project is intricately tied to the ability to articulate and define project goals, roles, and responsibilities, coupled with the establishment of transparent expectations concerning contributions, timelines, and anticipated outcomes. The project clearly achieved this which was echoed by all participants.

Cultural sensitivity emerges as another crucial insight, underscoring the importance of recognising and respecting diverse cultural perspectives. Fostering an inclusive environment that values these differences not only enriches collaboration but also amplifies the breadth of perspectives within the programme.

In addition, flexibility and adaptability are indispensable qualities in the face of unforeseen challenges. A commitment to adjusting project plans ensures the nimbleness required to effectively navigate unexpected hurdles. The project made some minor adjustments which were clearly justified and contributed to the successful completion of the programme.

Building trust is a cornerstone of successful collaboration. The investment of time in cultivating trust through open and honest communication lays the groundwork for flourishing project endeavours. Face to face meetings were an indispensable component in creating trust between participating organisations and programme beneficiaries.

Regular check-ins and consistent communication channels play a pivotal role in project success. This practice serves as a linchpin for tracking progress, promptly addressing emerging issues, and ensuring alignment among all team members with the overarching project goals. The deft project management of project leads was appreciated by project participants from all sides.

Also, the incorporation of in-person meetings, when feasible, is recognised as highly advantageous. Beyond logistical considerations, these meetings contributed to the cultivation of stronger personal connections, deeper mutual understanding, and a more enriched collaborative spirit among team members.

Providing opportunities for skill development and training also emerges as pivotal. This empowerment not only enhanced individual contributions but also strengthened the collective effectiveness of the entire project.

The project also engaged in collecting feedback from project beneficiaries, which offered invaluable insights, serving as a compass to identify areas for improvement and refine strategies for future endeavours in this field.

Project leads appeared to consider the issue of long-term sustainability which are vital for maintaining connectivity between organisations and individuals. Identifying

avenues to maintain and expand the project's impact ensured that collaboration remained fruitful beyond its initial phase.

Leveraging the project as a platform for networking and partnership expansion also emerged as a strategic insight. It seemed that the project provided a prime illustration that collaborating with other institutions and experts not only broadens perspectives but also enriches the project with a diverse range of expertise.

Anticipating and addressing potential crises or unexpected challenges appeared to be a hallmark of effective project management. Developing contingency plans, especially in the face of variables such as political instability or travel restrictions, ensured a proactive approach to crisis management.

As a final lesson, the importance of sharing best practices and lessons learned was clearly articulated. Contributing to the academic community by disseminating knowledge garnered from the project experience may pave the way for the success of future collaborative programmes.

These lessons and insights can help guide academic collaborative projects across national boundaries, ensuring their success and sustainability while mitigating challenges that may arise.

## Recommendations

We believe that there are some recommendations which can be drawn from our findings. We outline the 10 most important recommendations below. These recommendations aim to enhance the project's effectiveness, sustainability, and overall impact while addressing potential challenges and ensuring that lessons learned can benefit future academic collaborations.

1. **Extend the Summer School Duration:** Given the desire expressed by participants for a longer summer school, consider extending its duration to allow for a more comprehensive academic exchange.
2. **Prioritise In-Person Meetings:** Recognise the value of in-person meetings and dedicate time to face-to-face interactions whenever possible. Consider organising regular in-person gatherings to strengthen collaboration.
3. **Clear Communication:** Maintain clear and open communication channels among all project stakeholders to ensure everyone is aligned with project goals and expectations.
4. **Diversify Participants:** While considering the current challenges, explore ways to diversify participant representation by accommodating those who may face travel restrictions.
5. **Skill Development:** Continue to offer opportunities for skill development and training, especially in areas relevant to the project's objectives, to empower participants.
6. **Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Integrate cultural sensitivity training into the project to foster a more inclusive and respectful collaborative environment.
7. **Flexibility in Project Plans:** Build flexibility into the project's design to accommodate unexpected challenges or changes in the project's scope.
8. **Impact Assessment:** Implement a robust evaluation mechanism to continuously assess the project's impact and gather feedback from participants and stakeholders.
9. **Long-Term Sustainability:** Develop a strategy for the project's long-term sustainability, including plans for maintaining and expanding its impact beyond the initial phase.
10. **Sharing Best Practices:** Share the project's experiences, best practices, and lessons learned with the academic community to contribute to the success of future collaborative projects.