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**INNOVATING THROUGH ADVERSITY: BALTIC UNIVERSITIES'  
AND BUSINESSES' SYNERGIES FOR RESILIENCE**

**ІННОВАЦІЇ ВСУПЕРЕЧ ТРУДНОЦАМ: СИНЕРГІЯ БАЛТІЙСЬКИХ  
УНІВЕРСИТЕТІВ ТА БІЗНЕСУ ЗАДЛЯ СТІЙКОСТІ**

**Abstract.** The article examines the collaborative efforts between Baltic universities and businesses to support Ukraine amidst the ongoing crisis. Utilizing a qualitative research framework, the study focuses on a series of case studies to illustrate the transformative power of academia-business partnerships in fostering innovation, resilience, and societal progress, particularly in crisis contexts. These collaborations have been vital in addressing the immediate and long-term needs arising from the Russian-Ukrainian war, showcasing a diverse range of support actions including educational, psychological, and employment assistance. Results indicate a significant regional effort towards crisis response. The study highlights the importance of such synergies in crisis management and resilience building, recommending the formalization of partnerships, inclusion of affected individuals in initiative planning, and continuous adaptation and evaluation of actions.

**Анотація.** У статті розглядаються спільні зусилля балтійських університетів та бізнесу, спрямовані на підтримку України в умовах триваючої кризи. Використовуючи якісну методологію дослідження, автор зосереджується на низці конкретних прикладів, які ілюструють трансформаційну силу партнерства між академічними колами та бізнесом у сприянні інноваціям, стійкості та суспільному прогресу, особливо в кризових ситуаціях. Ця співпраця була життєво важливою для задоволення нагальних і довгострокових потреб, що виникли внаслідок російсько-української війни, демонструючи різноманітні заходи підтримки, включаючи освітню, психологічну допомогу та допомогу у працевлаштуванні. Результати свідчать про значні регіональні зусилля, спрямовані на реагування на кризу. Дослідження підкреслює важливість такої синергії в управлінні кризовими ситуаціями та розбудові стійкості, рекомендуючи формалізацію партнерств, залучення постраждалих осіб до планування ініціатив, а також постійну адаптацію та оцінку дій.

## **Introduction**

The intertwined destinies of Baltic universities and businesses in the face of the Ukrainian war have unfurled a compelling narrative of innovation through adversity, epitomized by the Baltics4UA project's support for Ukraine and its people. This collaborative effort illuminates the pivotal role of business-academia synergies in fostering resilience and societal impact during crises. Amidst the backdrop of a global landscape marked by escalating challenges, these institutions stand as beacons of hope and ingenuity, leveraging their collective strength to address the pressing needs of today while laying the groundwork for a more resilient tomorrow.

The Baltic region, known for its dynamic response to adversity, has witnessed an unprecedented surge in cooperative ventures between universities and businesses in the wake of Ukraine's crisis. These collaborations have transcended traditional boundaries, merging academic intellect with entrepreneurial spirit to spark innovations that promise not only immediate relief but also long-term sustainability. Through a meticulously curated collection of case studies, this article endeavors to capture the essence of these partnerships, showcasing the diverse ways in which they contribute to building robust communities capable of withstanding the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The present paper is part of the EU-funded Baltics4UA project [1] and is closely interrelated to its webinar "Business and academic resilience to support the Ukrainian crisis response in the Baltics" (April 11, 2023) [2]. The aim of this article is to illuminate the transformative power of business-academia collaborations in the Baltic region, especially in the context of responding to crises in Ukraine and fostering resilience. It seeks to unravel how these partnerships not only bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application but also serve as a catalyst for innovation and societal progress. Through a detailed exploration of case studies explored first within the Baltics4UA project, the paper underscores the critical role such collaborations play in enhancing the adaptive capacities of universities, businesses, and communities at large.

Central to our discourse are the mechanisms through which academic institutions and businesses can forge effective partnerships to navigate and mitigate the impacts of crises. The inquiry delves into the nature of innovation sparked by these collaborations, examining how they contribute to solving immediate challenges while paving the way for long-term sustainability and growth. Additionally, the paper probes the societal contributions of these partnerships, considering their impact on supporting displaced Ukrainian communities, fostering inclusive education models, and developing cutting-edge technologies within and beyond host communities in the Baltics.

At the heart of these narratives lies a profound commitment to adaptability, innovation, and citizen engagement - a triad that serves as the cornerstone of the Baltics4UA project. By drawing attention to the exemplary endeavours undertaken by these partnerships, the paper seeks to inspire a broader engagement across sectors, urging a reimagined approach to crisis response that is rooted in collaboration, creativity, and solidarity. As Baltic universities navigate the complexities of the current geopolitical landscape, their resilience journey offers invaluable lessons for academia and the corporate sector across Europe.

### **Literature review**

A foundational aspect of this paper is the evolving nature of university-industry partnerships, which have traditionally been centered around research and development but are increasingly embracing broader societal and economic challenges [3]. These partnerships are seen as vital triggers of innovation, providing a mechanism for the practical application of academic research and the commercialisation of new technologies [4]. The Baltic region, with its strong technological and educational infrastructure, emerges as a fertile ground for such collaborations, exemplified by initiatives like the Baltics4UA project, which extend beyond conventional university boundaries to address immediate social needs by emphasising collaboration among the quadruple helix actors (academia, business, policy, society) [5].

In this context, the literature also delves into the concept of resilience in the face of crises, defining it as the ability of systems, be they communities, economies, or ecosystems, to withstand, adapt to, and recover from adversities [6]. Hence, academic and industry partnerships are identified as crucial for building this resilience, offering the agility and creativity needed to respond to dynamic challenges.

Another significant component stressed in the existing literature is the societal impact of business-academia collaborations. Studies suggest that these partnerships can lead to increased societal benefits, including the development of more inclusive educational models, support for displaced communities, and the advancement of sustainable technologies [7]. The literature also points to challenges in maximising the potential of these partnerships, including issues of alignment between academic and industry objectives, the need for effective communication channels, and the establishment of trust and mutual understanding [8, 9]. Addressing these challenges is critical for enhancing the resilience and innovation capacity of societies, particularly in times of crisis.

Despite the apparent benefits, the literature identifies several challenges in fostering effective business-academia collaborations. These include cultural differences between institutions, misaligned objectives, and difficulties in intellectual property management [10]. These challenges are also seen as opportunities for developing new frameworks and policies that can enhance the effectiveness of these partnerships. There is a growing call for policies that encourage collaboration, support the co-creation of knowledge, and ensure that the benefits of such partnerships are widely distributed across society. All above mentioned underscores the significant potential of business-academia collaborations in fostering innovation, supporting crisis management, and contributing to societal resilience. While challenges exist, the evolving nature of these partnerships presents opportunities for enhancing their impact.

In response to the unfolding crisis in Ukraine, the Baltics have emerged as a pivotal region for innovative business-academia collaborations aimed at addressing immediate social needs. The Baltics4UA project is a prime example of this, designed to enhance the capacity of Baltic universities in crisis response through the upskilling of university staff and the strengthening of institutional capacities [1]. This initiative promotes cross-cultural dialogue, citizen engagement, and fosters cooperation between academia and the business sector. By stimulating innovative educational practices and staff development, Baltics4UA seeks to build a robust framework for responding to crises, thereby embodying the spirit of resilience and collaboration that is increasingly characteristic of university-industry partnerships in the Baltic region.

### **Methodology and data collection**

The methodology employed in this study adopts a qualitative research framework, centered around a comprehensive analysis of case studies that exemplify the collaboration between academia and businesses in the Baltic region, particularly in response to the Ukrainian war. This approach is grounded on qualitative research that, with its emphasis on exploring complex phenomena within their specific contexts, is well-suited to capturing the nuanced dynamics of business-academia partnerships and their impact on resilience and innovation.

The research undertaken to assess the corporate sector's contribution to assisting Ukrainians in the Baltics adopted a social action-focused approach, identifying and classifying activities that deliver societal benefits. Originating from an optimised typology developed by Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania [11], the categories of support actions were expanded to eight distinct types. This refined typology aligns with the university's efforts to support Ukrainians, providing a structured means to categorise and understand the nature of assistance being offered [12]. To systematically organize and analyze the data, a structured spreadsheet was utilized, enabling the categorization and detailed documentation of each initiative. This approach facilitated a thorough analysis of the nature, scope, and impact of the initiatives, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the initial efforts made by the business and academic sectors in the Baltics.

The methodology employed for this study was designed to systematically capture and analyze the breadth and evolution of business-academia collaborations in the Baltic region, particularly those aimed at supporting Ukraine amidst the crisis. This investigation was conducted

in two primary phases of data collection, each delineating a specific period and set of objectives to understand the progression and impact of these initiatives over time.

#### *Phase 1. Initial data collection*

The first phase commenced in April 2023, encapsulating a retrospective analysis from the onset of the conflict in Ukraine in February 2022 up to April 2023. This phase was pivotal in establishing a baseline understanding of the initial responses and strategies adopted by Baltic universities and businesses to assist Ukrainians. The comprehensive timeframe allowed for an extensive documentation and examination of the various initiatives developed during the early stages of the crisis. This period was critical for capturing the immediate reactions and the innovative solutions that were rapidly deployed to meet the urgent needs arising from the conflict. At this stage a total of 15 case studies were selected and analyzed to offer a comprehensive overview of the initiatives across Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

#### *Phase 2. Follow-up data collection*

The second phase of data collection was conducted in March 2024, focusing on the initiatives launched from January to March 2024. This phase aimed to capture the evolution of assistance efforts, reflecting on the changing dynamics of the crisis and the adaptation of strategies to meet the evolving needs of Ukrainians. This later stage of data collection was essential for understanding how the collaborative efforts between universities and businesses had progressed, highlighting any shifts in focus, the introduction of new initiatives, or the scaling of existing projects to address ongoing challenges. At this stage a total of 11 case studies were selected and analyzed to offer a comprehensive overview of the initiatives across Baltic States.

The delineation of these two distinct data collection phases allowed for a dynamic and temporal analysis of the initiatives, providing insights into the immediate and longer-term responses to the crisis in Ukraine. By examining the initiatives across these two periods, the study aims to offer a nuanced understanding of how business-academia collaborations in the Baltic region have evolved to foster resilience, innovation, and support for Ukrainians in the face of adversity.

A total of 26 case studies were meticulously selected and analyzed to offer a comprehensive overview of the initiatives across Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. These case studies were chosen based on their relevance to the study's objectives, their representation of a range of collaborative models, and their potential for scalability and impact. The selection process was guided by criteria that prioritized diversity in the nature of the collaborations, the sectors involved, and the types of challenges addressed.

The methodology's strength lies in its comprehensive and context-sensitive approach, which enables a deep dive into the specificities of business-academia collaborations in the Baltic region. By leveraging qualitative analysis of carefully selected case studies, the study offers valuable perspectives on the dynamics of resilience and innovation within these partnerships, contributing to a richer understanding of their role in crisis response and societal development.

#### *Limitations of the study*

The qualitative nature of the methodology, while rich in contextual detail, carries the limitations in terms of its scope for generalization. The selection of case studies, although

comprehensive, is subject to the availability of data and the transparency of reporting by the institutions involved, which may not capture all relevant initiatives or the full range of collaborative activities. Language barriers present a significant obstacle in this methodology, as vital information about joint initiatives is often published in the native languages of the Baltic institutions, which can impede access and understanding for international researchers. The focus on business-academia collaborations primarily within the context of crisis response may overlook the broader spectrum of partnership activities that contribute to resilience in non-crisis times.

## Results

Following the categorisation of social actions undertaken by business-academia collaborations as identified in our typology of actions [5, 12], we observe that the majority of actions were addressing studies-related support (Figure 1).

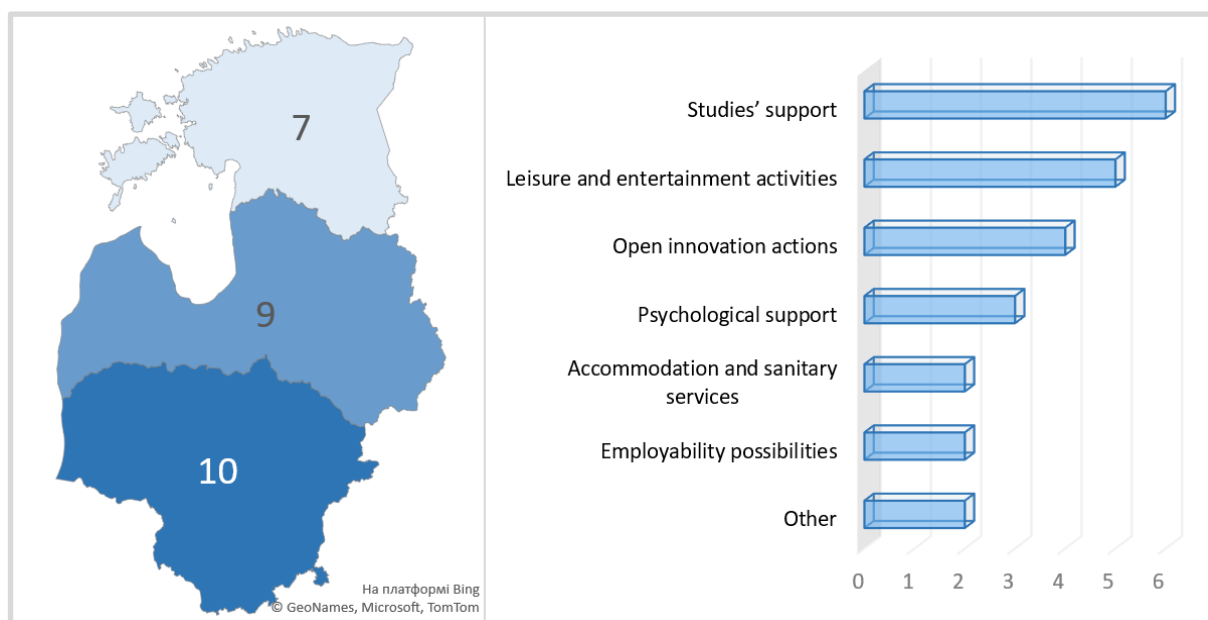


Figure 1 - Number of researched cases of business and HEIs collaboration by country and type of action

Resource: generated by the authors based on the results of the analysis

### *Country level analysis*

#### 1. Latvia

Latvia emerged with nine academia-business initiatives, showcasing a robust response to the crisis. This indicates a strong willingness among Latvian universities and businesses to leverage their resources and expertise in addressing the challenges posed by the Ukrainian war. The nature of these collaborations suggests a strategic approach towards not only immediate crisis management but also long-term resilience building within the academic sector and beyond.

## 2. Lithuania

Lithuania, with ten case studies, stands out as the country with the highest number of documented initiatives. This suggests a slightly more pronounced engagement, reflecting a possibly more integrated network of academic institutions and businesses. The initiatives in Lithuania may represent a broad spectrum of interventions, from research and development projects aimed at addressing specific crisis-related challenges to educational programmes designed to support displaced students and scholars.

## 3. Estonia

Estonia contributes with seven case studies, indicating a substantial yet slightly lesser degree of involvement compared to its Baltic neighbours. Despite this, the Estonian case studies are indicative of a deeply committed approach towards harnessing the potential of business-academia partnerships in Ukrainian crisis response. It is possible that these collaborations focus on niche areas or have taken innovative approaches that could offer unique insights into the dynamics of effective crisis management and resilience building.

Based on our analysis, the types of business-academia actions encompass a broad range of support, with "Studies' support" being the most prevalent, followed by "Leisure and entertainment activities," and "Open innovation actions." These represent the highest counts of actions taken, suggesting a significant emphasis on supporting the educational needs of Ukrainians, providing avenues for rest and recreation, and fostering innovative solutions to emerging challenges. "Psychological support" also figures prominently, indicating a recognition of the mental health impacts of the crisis and the importance of addressing them. Actions like "Accommodation and sanitary services" and "Employability possibilities" reflect a more foundational level of support, addressing the immediate needs for shelter, health, and economic stability. The category "Other" indicates additional forms of support that do not neatly fit into the predefined categories but are nonetheless significant in the overall response. This includes various forms of aid that are unique to the specific needs of the Ukrainian community or innovative responses not previously considered.

The analysis of these 26 case studies across the Baltic States reveals a commendable region-wide effort to respond to the crisis in Ukraine through academia-business collaborations. Despite the variations in the number of initiatives among the countries, the collective endeavour reflects a shared understanding of the importance of such partnerships in navigating and overcoming complex social and humanitarian challenges, such as those posed by the Ukrainian war. The collaborations vary in nature and scope but are united in a common goal: to leverage the combined strengths of the academic and business communities in fostering resilience and offering tangible solutions to the crisis.

By 2024, the number of innovative cases appears to have decreased to 2, which might suggest that as the immediate urgency of the crisis subsided, there was less of a drive for innovative solutions, or that the most critical innovations had already been implemented and were continuing to be used without the need for additional ones. Meanwhile, the other cases decreased to 12, which might imply an overall stabilisation or decrease in new initiatives, possibly due to a reduction of

immediate needs or the shift to more sustainable, long-term forms of support rather than addressing emerging ones (Figure 2).

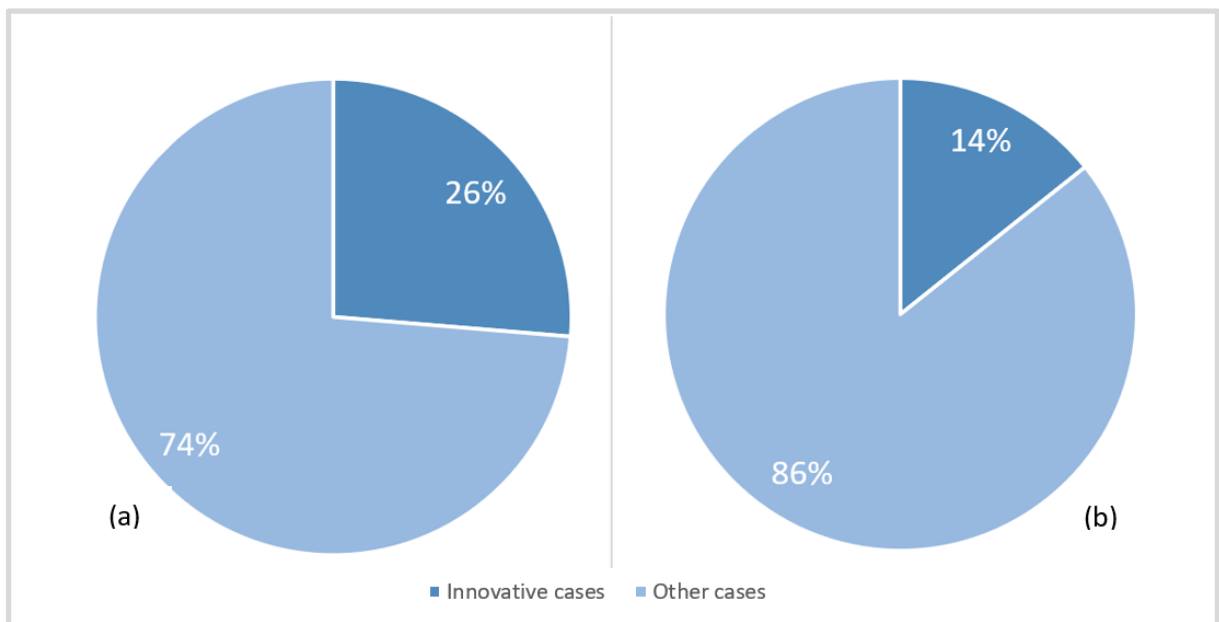


Figure 2 - Proportion of innovative researched cases of business and HEIs collaboration in total for 2023 (a) and 2024 (b).

Resource: generated by the authors based on the results of the analysis

The decline in both innovative and other cases from 2023 to 2024 could reflect a variety of factors, including the evolution of the crisis, changes in funding or focus areas of corporate support, or the integration of the most effective actions into standard practice, reducing the need for new case implementation. As the situation evolves, we also observe that the type of support required shifts, and thus the categorisation of initiatives as 'innovative' is subject to change over time.

In 2023, the data points to a concentrated effort from certain academic institutions, with Vilnius University leading with five initiatives, followed by RISEBA University of Applied Sciences with four (Figure 3). In 2024, the spread of initiatives appears more evenly distributed across different universities, each listed as contributing one initiative, except for the University of Tartu with two, and Vilnius University which remains active with three. This shift could suggest a broadening in the engagement of universities in the response efforts or a change in the operational capacity or strategic focus of each institution.

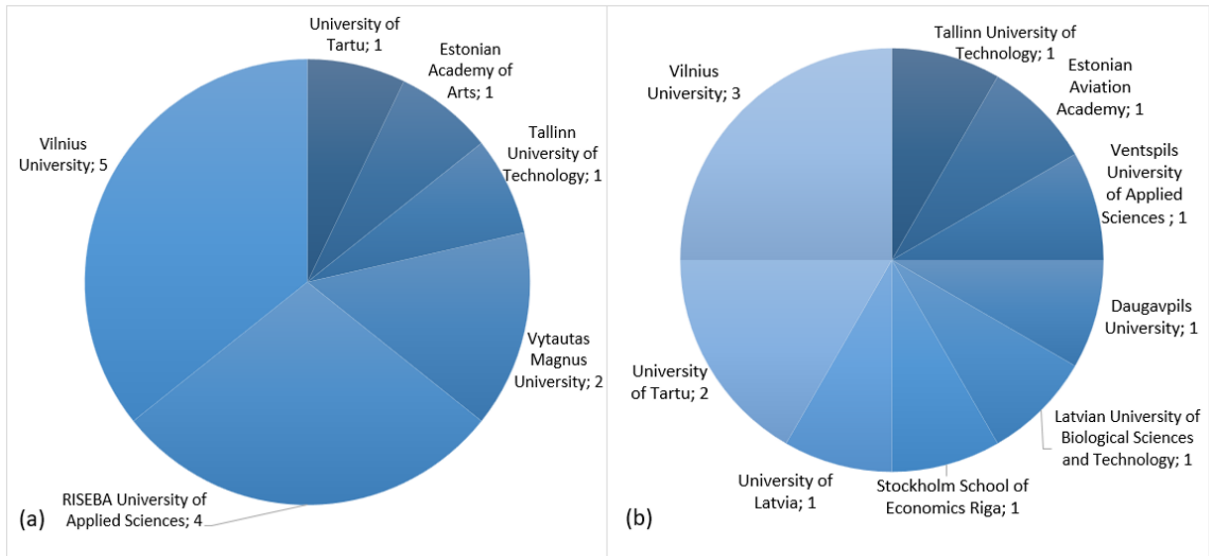


Figure 3 - Distribution of the proportion of studied cases for HEIs in 2023 (a) and 2024 (b)  
Resource: generated by the authors based on the results of the analysis

This regional response not only highlights the capability of the Baltic universities to mobilise and innovate in times of need but also sets a precedent for how cross-sectoral collaboration can be a powerful tool in addressing crises. The insights gleaned from these case studies serve as a valuable resource for other regions and countries looking to enhance their crisis response mechanisms through strengthened business-academia partnerships.

The conducted analysis reveals patterns of engagement, shifts in focus, and the dynamics of institutional responses to crises, as evidenced by their collaborative efforts (Figure 4). In 2023-2024, the data reflects a significant involvement of universities in such collaborations. Vilnius University took the lead with five initiatives, indicative of a strong commitment to leveraging academic resources in partnership with industry to address the crisis in Ukraine. RISEBA University of Applied Sciences followed with four initiatives, suggesting a proactive stance in crisis response and resilience building. The University of Tartu and Vytautas Magnus University also showed noteworthy involvement with two and one initiatives respectively.

The 2024 data indicates a notable decrease in the number of initiatives across nearly all institutions, with Vilnius University's involvement being reduced to three and the University of Tartu being the only institution to increase its participation, from one to two initiatives. This suggests that the University of Tartu may have developed a sustainable model for engagement in business-academia collaborations that allowed it to maintain, if not enhance, its activities in this area. Meanwhile, institutions like the Estonian Academy of Arts, RISEBA University of Applied Sciences, and Vytautas Magnus University did not invest in new actions, which may reflect a shift towards consolidation and continuation of existing projects rather than the initiation of new ones.

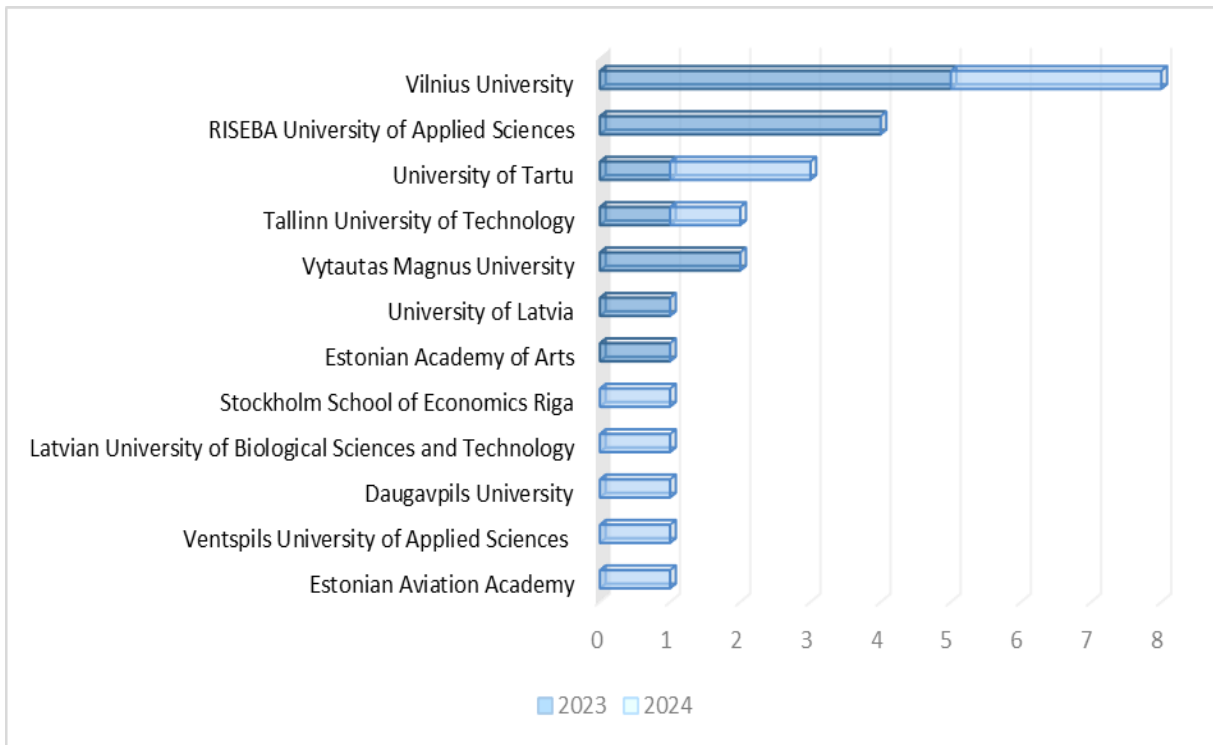


Figure 4: Number of studied cases of HEIs collaborating with businesses  
Resource: generated by the authors based on the results of the analysis

Several institutions commenced their engagement in 2024, such as the Estonian Aviation Academy, Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, Daugavpils University, the Latvian University of Biological Sciences and Technology, and the Stockholm School of Economics Riga, each reporting one initiative to tackle the Ukrainian war's consequences. This could be indicative of these institutions' evolving recognition of the importance of collaborative efforts in the face of the crisis that reached fruition in 2024. The Tallinn University of Technology and the University of Latvia showed consistent involvement across both years, although the University of Latvia's engagement dropped from one initiative to no new one in 2024. This consistency could suggest that these institutions have embedded crisis response collaboration into their regular activities, reflecting a strategic commitment to sustained engagement with the business sector.

The comparative analysis suggests a dynamic landscape of business-academia collaborations in the Baltic region, with variations in the level of involvement likely influenced by strategic priorities, available resources, and possibly the changing nature of the crisis itself. The decrease in the number of initiatives in 2024 might also hint at a transition from a reactive to a more sustainable and integrative approach to collaboration in the longer term, as immediate crisis-driven needs are addressed and the focus potentially shifts to enduring resilience and recovery.

In Lithuania, initiatives like Norfa's scholarships and Moody's Lithuania financial aid, both involving Vilnius University, demonstrate the financial support businesses can offer to Ukrainian refugee students and researchers, ensuring that education persists despite geopolitical upheaval. Vilnius University's multiple partnerships, including the CargoGO's support initiative and the symbolic solidarity shown by Korgas, signify the university's central role in engaging with business to provide both tangible and psychological support.

Vytautas Magnus University, in collaboration with BoulderHouse, aims to foster not just academic resilience but also the well-being and community integration of Ukrainian students, illustrating a holistic approach to support that transcends the classroom. Meanwhile, RISEBA University of Applied Sciences in Latvia engages in initiatives such as the psychological support networks with Ideaport Riga, Bite Latvija, and Webmultishop, focusing on the profound mental health challenges faced by displaced individuals.

In Estonia, the collaboration of the Estonian Academy of Arts with TSENTER and Garage48 in the "Future of Wood" project showcases an innovative thrust towards rebuilding and sustainability, harnessing the potential of modern design and materials. On the other hand, the University of Tartu, through its Natural History Museum and Botanical Garden, offers educational leisure activities, addressing the therapeutic aspect of learning and engagement with nature.

The Tallinn University of Technology stands out with its book fair project, fostering a recurring support system that blends cultural enrichment with financial aid for students. Likewise, the Latvian University of Biological Sciences and Technology, in partnership with Eesti People to People, focuses on employability through skill-building in digital marketing, demonstrating a strategic approach to economic resilience of Ukrainian refugees. Employment initiatives, such as those undertaken by Norfa and Novatore, emphasise the role of businesses in not only providing relief but also facilitating the continuation of professional and academic careers, hence contributing to the socio-economic stability of refugees. The diversity of support types, ranging from financial and material aid to psychological support and employment opportunities, reflects an acknowledgment by HEIs and their business partners of the multifaceted needs of Ukrainians impacted by the war.

## **Conclusion**

The case studies analysed reveal a multifaceted landscape of business-academia collaboration across the Baltics during the ongoing Ukrainian war. Each initiative, while unique in its approach and scope, contributes to a composite narrative about the power of synergy between HEIs and businesses in times of need.

This comparative analysis reveals that the differing approaches of HEIs and their business partners are shaped by institutional capacities, resource availability, and the nature of partnerships formed. Such collaborations not only provide immediate support but also build frameworks for resilience, equipping individuals with the tools and opportunities to withstand and recover from the crisis. The case studies exemplify how businesses and academia can come together to create a network of support that extends beyond immediate relief into the realms of development and empowerment. Indicatively, HEIs like Vilnius University and the University of Tartu have emerged as hubs of innovation and support, mobilising resources and expertise in cooperation with business entities. Our analysis underscores the value of adaptability and responsiveness, showcasing how tailored initiatives can meet specific challenges presented by crises.

Nevertheless, it is critical to maintain flexibility in these collaborations to adapt to the evolving nature of crises and the constantly changing needs of those affected. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to establish more long-term, sustainable initiatives that not only address

immediate needs but also anticipate future challenges, preparing individuals and communities for post-crisis recovery and development.

Strategic recommendations include the formalisation of partnerships to streamline efforts and resources, the inclusion of students and refugees in the planning and execution of initiatives to ensure relevance and effectiveness, and the commitment to continuous evaluation and adaptation of programmes. Sharing best practices and lessons learned among Baltic HEIs and businesses could serve as a catalyst for improved responses to future crises. Emphasising the importance of such collaboration can spur further innovation and resilience-building in other regions and contexts, highlighting the universal value of such partnerships in the face of adversity.

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