Research Paper

Ukraine Forum

November 2026

Ukraine's war veteran challenge

How a reformed veteran support system can strengthen Ukraine's recovery and European security

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Contents

	Summary	2
01	Introduction	5
02	Structural challenges for Ukraine's veteran policy	10
03	Current veteran policy, ongoing reforms and critical gaps	16
04	Implications of veteran policy for domestic and European resilience and stability	37
05	Recommendations	40
06	Conclusion	48
	About the author	50
	Acknowledgments	51

Summary

The war with Russia has left Ukraine with a vast and growing cohort of military veterans. Improving and systematizing their care, and their reintegration into civilian life, is critical to Ukraine's recovery and defence readiness. It also matters for wider European security.

— **Ukraine faces the enormous challenge of building a comprehensive veteran support system while fighting a high-intensity war against Russia under severe demographic and fiscal constraints.** The government is restructuring an ineffective, Soviet-era system of veteran benefits – which emphasized lifelong provision of privileges and cash payments – in favour of a needs-based model focused on individual circumstances and on the reintegration of veterans into active economic life. This paper examines how well the current system is working, evaluates the reforms under way, and recommends further actions for the Ukrainian authorities, the private sector, civil society and international donors.

— **The new system must accommodate historically unprecedented demand for veteran support.** Veterans now number in excess of 2 million. Of these, over 1.4 million have combatant status, while at least 11 per cent of veterans registered as combatants live with service-related disabilities. Meeting veterans' needs as well as those of their family members means that Ukraine's veteran support policy may eventually need to serve up to 6 million people, nearly a sixth of Ukraine's (much depleted) current population.

— **Ukraine is pioneering a reintegration model that differs fundamentally from methods often employed elsewhere.** First, unlike in some contexts (such as the US or UK) when professional soldiers return to peacetime conditions in their home countries, this model is designed for adoption in an active conflict zone in which service personnel consist primarily of mobilized and volunteer civilians. Second, whereas traditional approaches facilitate a one-way exit from military service, Ukraine's model must accommodate recurrent moves between military and civilian life due to both the protracted nature of the war and Russia's long-term threat (which increase the likelihood of veterans being remobilized). Third, Ukraine relies on cross-sector networks across government, business and civil society; this allows other actors to fill gaps in state-led provision, but the resulting ecosystem of service providers can be complex for veterans to navigate.

- **Ensuring Ukrainian veterans' successful military-to-civilian transition is a strategic necessity for post-war economic recovery, social stability and long-term European security.** Returning service members bring valuable skills in leadership and crisis management. Many have specialist expertise, acquired or honed during the war, relevant to potential growth sectors of the economy, such as IT and emerging military technologies such as drone warfare. Veterans enjoy high levels of public trust, so have a potentially central role to play in post-war political renewal. In addition, they are likely to form the core of the reserve force that will need to be maintained to deter future Russian aggression.

- **Conversely, if veteran support is poorly designed or implemented, it could create risks for both Ukraine and Europe.** Grievances among marginalized veterans could increase, causing political and social polarization, making veterans vulnerable to substance abuse and extremist recruitment, and facilitating Russian destabilization tactics. Inadequate veteran support would also likely trigger a new wave of Ukrainian emigration, derailing the country's domestic recovery, straining European welfare systems and fuelling populist narratives in countries that receive migrants.

- **The need to address psychological trauma and severe physical injuries suffered by veterans is paramount to Ukraine's long-term security and economic recovery.** Common adaptation and reintegration challenges include psycho-emotional instability, social isolation and substance abuse. Ukrainian casualties from the war with Russia are often characterized by complex polytrauma and high amputation rates, the result of injuries from heavy artillery and landmines and of evacuation delays. Adaptive sports provide one proven route for supporting veterans, but the facilities currently available are limited. Flagship programmes in major cities already provide high-quality veteran rehabilitation. However, rural and regional facilities suffer from acute shortages of prosthetists and trauma specialists. Nearly half of veterans report that public spaces in their host communities lack adequate accessibility provision for disabled visitors.

- **Ukraine's conflict-related demographic crisis has resulted in widespread labour shortages. This makes bringing working-age veterans into the labour force both an economic imperative and a vital element of eventual post-war recovery.** The Ukrainian government, civil society and businesses are championing initiatives that emphasize veterans' economic agency – these initiatives include training programmes, provision of business grants and targeted career counselling. However, veterans continue to face obstacles to finding employment after leaving the armed forces; typical challenges include employer prejudice, physical accessibility constraints in the workplace, and difficulties translating military skills into corporate roles. Ukrainian businesses, civil society organizations (CSOs) and national government programmes are pioneering solutions such as specialized job-matching tools, workplace adaptations and veteran-specific corporate roles. However, broader corporate readiness remains uneven, highlighting the ongoing need for systemic workforce integration.

- **Despite high levels of public trust in the armed forces, returning service members face social stigma and alienation from their communities.** This is partly driven by sensationalist media framing of the war (for example,

combatants may be either over-heroized, or reductively portrayed as unstable), and by the pervasive myth that all combat veterans suffer from severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Such simplifications can breed workplace discrimination, encourage self-isolation and reinforce cultural barriers to mental healthcare access. To tackle this problem, the Ukrainian government is deploying 'veteran support specialists' – professionals who provide individual case management – and is expanding provision of 'veteran spaces'. These municipal and civil society hubs offer peer-to-peer support, legal aid and trauma-informed care to empower veterans, rebuild trust within communities and secure long-term community cohesion.

- This paper provides targeted policy recommendations for addressing the challenges outlined above. It considers how to eliminate structural barriers to the transition to civilian life, scale up proven interventions, and enhance cross-sectoral coordination across government, business and civil society. Key recommendations (elaborated in Chapter 5) include the following:
  - **The position of minister of veterans' affairs should be elevated to the level of deputy prime minister.** This will help to institutionalize veteran policy as a cross-governmental priority. It will strengthen horizontal coordination across ministries and enhance vertical alignment between the central government and hromadas ('community-level administrations').
  - **The government should establish a national peer-to-peer residency and exchange programme for local government officials who work with veterans.** This will help scale up proven reintegration practices, maximize the impact of municipal budgets, and establish a consistently high standard of veteran care across the country.
  - **Businesses should be encouraged to create the position of chief veterans' officer (CVO) to lead reintegration strategies.** The aim of this executive role, which would be reserved for qualified veterans, should be to help counter persistent stigma suffered by veterans in the workplace, smooth the transition of veterans into civilian corporate culture, and evaluate potential or actual employees' military experience so that former service members can be placed in suitable positions.
  - **The government should launch nationwide public awareness campaigns, paired with community-level dialogue, to bridge the growing cultural divide between civilians and returning combatants.** Educating communities on the challenges faced by returning veterans can help to reduce social friction. It can contribute to a shift in public attitudes, so that veterans are perceived as active members of civilian society.
  - **Veteran affairs should feature more prominently in donor policy.** The Ukraine Donor Platform (UDP) should set up a permanent civil society council, with at least 15 per cent of seats assigned to members of veteran-led organizations and to reintegration experts nominated by CSO networks. This will ensure that financial assistance is directed towards meeting the real needs and priorities of veterans and their families.

01 Introduction

The key to improved veteran services in Ukraine is to make a success of the government's desired shift from a post-Soviet model of state handouts to a modern, needs-focused system that integrates rehabilitation, targeted support and economic opportunity.

Ukraine faces an unprecedented challenge in caring for its military veterans: it must design and deliver a comprehensive veteran support framework amid huge demographic pressures and fiscal constraints while withstanding a high-intensity war against Russia. Central to this task is the need to overhaul a Soviet-era system of privileges and cash benefits for veterans. Although reform is under way – involving a shift away from a model in which veterans were largely treated as passive benefit recipients to one in which targeted assistance is matched to individual needs, and allied with active promotion of social and economic reintegration – continued work is needed to ensure that veterans receive appropriate support in a fiscally sustainable manner.

The pre-existing model has not only proven ineffective but is also unaffordable given the burden the war has placed on Ukraine's public finances, and given the certainty that the costs of post-war recovery will be monumental. Continuing to provide veterans with lifelong benefits – including annual cash handouts, utility subsidies and free public transport – would hugely strain the national budget at a time when the country needs to fund the ongoing war effort and plan for economic recovery. Ukraine's GDP is 21 per cent lower in real terms than in 2021, before Russia's full-scale invasion.[1] Given its inability to make significant territorial gains, Russia has intensified air attacks on ports, railways, warehouses and steel plants to effectively destroy the Ukrainian economy.[2]

Moreover, the number of veterans and their family members needing support will only grow. As of September 2026, the number of registered veterans had reached over 2 million, with over 1.4 million individuals having confirmed combatant status

1 Centre for Economic Strategy (2026), 'Ukraine War Economy Tracker', https://ces.org.ua/en/tracker-economy-during-the-war (accessed 15 Oct. 2026).
2 Deprez, F. (2026), 'Russia's new air campaign seeks to destroy Ukrainian economy', *Financial Times*, 20 September 2026, https://www.ft.com/content/0ecc81ad-2119-4763-90fb-ba5d399d913d?syn-25a6b1a6=1.

and more than 159,000 individuals suffering from service-induced disabilities.[3] Projections indicate that upon eventual demobilization, the country will need to support between 5 million and 6 million people – including both veterans and their family members; this number would be equivalent to roughly 15 per cent of Ukraine's current (greatly reduced) population.[4]

This paper argues that supporting the transition of Ukrainian veterans to civilian life is essential for Ukraine's long-term economic recovery, social cohesion and national security, and that it will yield significant spillover benefits for Europe as a whole.

In terms of their potential contribution to the economy, returning service members possess critical technical skills, crisis management experience and operational leadership capabilities; they also have skills directly applicable to high-priority sectors such as construction, logistics, energy, engineering, IT and military technology.

Having earned widespread public trust on the battlefield, Ukrainian veterans will also be central to political renewal once martial law ends and democratic processes resume.

On a societal level, facilitating veterans' successful return to civilian life honours the sacrifices of those who put their lives on hold to defend the nation, and fulfils a crucial moral obligation that will be indispensable to maintaining social cohesion once hostilities end. Having earned widespread public trust on the battlefield, Ukrainian veterans are not only uniquely positioned to spearhead societal demands for political accountability under the current conditions of martial law; they will also be central to political renewal once martial law ends and democratic processes resume.

Structured support for veterans is also critical to Ukraine's long-term security, as inevitably it will need to be veterans who form the backbone of a highly trained reserve capable of ensuring force rotations in the military and deterring future Russian aggression.[5] Experienced Ukrainian service personnel – whether those in active service or combat veterans – are already utilizing their front-line expertise to train armed forces in NATO countries.[6]

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3 Markina, K. (2026), 'В Україні вже понад 2 мільйони ветеранів: які області в лідерах' [There are already over 2 million veterans in Ukraine: which regions are in the lead?], Chesno, 8 June 2026, https://www.chesno.org/post/6867. As of June 2026, the number of people with disabilities in Ukraine stood at 3.4 million – this number is expected to increase further. See Ukrinform (2026), 'War increases number of people with disabilities in Ukraine by 600,000, Ombudsman representative tells UN', 12 June 2026, https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-society/4132988-war-increases-number-of-people-with-disabilities-in-ukraine-by-600000-ombudsman-representative-tells-un.html.

4 World Bank (2026), *Ukraine: Fifth rapid damage and needs assessment*, p. 51, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099022026094036395/pdf/P514499-22f93f3a-4278-42bc-b907-db9553d12069.pdf.

5 At the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine's initial defence relied heavily on hundreds of thousands of volunteers, many of whom were veterans with combat experience dating back to 2014.

6 MacDonald, A., Seligman, L. and Michaels, D. (2026), 'U.S. and Ukrainian forces went head-to-head in an exercise. Ukraine's drones won', *Wall Street Journal*, 13 August 2026, https://www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/u-s-and-ukrainian-forces-went-head-to-head-in-an-exercise-ukraines-drones-won-cc3663d5; Siebold, S. (2026), 'Ukrainian trainers will help German army get ready to defend against Russia by 2029, chief says', Reuters, 11 March 2026, https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/ukrainian-trainers-will-help-german-army-get-ready-defend-against-russia-by-2029-2026-03-11; Mykhailenko, D. (2025), 'Ukrainian medics lead first tactical medical training for Lithuania's emergency teams', United24 Media, 12 November 2025, https://united24media.com/latest-news/ukrainian-medics-lead-first-tactical-medical-training-for-lithuanias-emergency-teams-13344; Safronov, T. (2025), 'Ukrainian military to train Polish troops in counter-drone warfare on home soil', Militarnyi, 15 September 2025, https://militarnyi.com/en/news/ukrainian-military-to-train-polish-troops-in-counter-drone-warfare-on-home-soil.

Significantly for the prospects of reforming veteran care, the points outlined above chime with much of the Ukrainian government's own veterans' strategy for the period to 2030. The strategy, launched in 2024, includes the following goals:[7]

- Restoring Ukraine's much-depleted human capital, and boosting the well-being of veterans and their families, by providing veterans with comprehensive physical and psychological rehabilitation, housing support, re-skilling and employment pathways.
- Fostering a culture of honour and respect for defenders of Ukraine by preserving the memory of the fallen and recognizing their contribution to Ukrainian security and society.
- Strengthening national security by integrating veterans into national defence, increasing their civic engagement, and bolstering their contribution to broader societal resilience.

The stakes are high not only because a failed veteran reintegration policy would threaten Ukraine's own recovery, but also because it would carry consequences for European security. If robust support structures and viable economic prospects are lacking, a sense of marginalization and grievance among Ukrainian veterans is likely to increase. This could create fertile ground for internal polarization, extremist recruitment and Russian destabilization tactics. In a country already facing an existential demographic crisis (with millions of citizens displaced abroad), disillusioned veterans might choose to emigrate upon demobilization. This brain drain would undermine Ukraine's post-war recovery and give political ammunition to populist forces across the continent.

This paper examines the structural barriers Ukrainian veterans face in their transition to civilian life – including physical and psychological health needs, social stigma, a lack of access to professional up-skilling or retraining resources, and difficulties adjusting to civilian culture – and the ways to address these challenges.

The paper evaluates the current interventions being deployed by different stakeholders: national ministries, regional and local authorities, civil society organizations (CSOs), private businesses and higher educational institutions.[8] Together, these efforts constitute what could be deemed an emerging 'Ukrainian model' of veteran reintegration. This model differs significantly from those identified in Europe and other contexts, which often involve professional soldiers returning from overseas combat deployments to peacetime conditions in their home countries. Ukraine's evolving veteran reintegration model is distinct for four key reasons:

- It is being developed during an ongoing, large-scale, interstate war.
- It anticipates fluid, repeated transitions between military and civilian life, driven by a protracted conflict and the persistent threat from Russia.

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7 The strategy was accompanied by an operational action plan for 2024–27. See Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine (2024), 'Уряд схвалив Стратегію ветеранської політики на період 2030 року' [The government approved the Veterans Policy Strategy for the period up to 2030], https://mva.gov.ua/prescenter/category/86-novini/uryad-shvaliv-strategiu-veteranskoi-politiki-na-period-2030-roku.
8 This paper does not cover existing international technical assistance projects focused on veteran reintegration in Ukraine.

— It delivers support services through a cross-sectoral network of state agencies, local communities, private businesses and civil society.

— It operates at an unprecedented scale, offering holistic support that extends beyond veterans to include their families.

In addition, the paper examines the potential risks and benefits for Europe that are contingent on the success or failure of Ukraine's veteran reintegration policy. Finally, the paper outlines actionable policy recommendations for enhancing coordination among stakeholders and scaling up high-impact programmes of proven benefit. In doing so, the paper seeks to elaborate on the proposed 'whole-of-society' approach to Ukrainian recovery articulated in a recent Chatham House Ukraine Forum research paper, published for the 2026 Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC),[9] and addresses in particular how that model can be applied to veteran policy. According to survey results reported in the URC-related paper, 73 per cent of CSOs involved in recovery efforts identify veterans' reintegration as the top social challenge.[10]

This research draws on 25 semi-structured interviews with Ukrainian national government officials, members of regional and local authorities, civil society leaders, business representatives, healthcare providers, social case managers, and independent experts specializing in the military-to-civilian transition of Ukrainian veterans. Of these, seven interviewees were veterans themselves. The interviews were conducted in Kyiv, Lviv and Gdansk in June 2026, and online in July and August 2026. Bringing together these perspectives helps to illustrate how different stakeholders are already contributing in some ways to a 'whole-of-society' approach to veteran care.

However, as the analysis will also make clear, Ukrainian state and non-state actors must coordinate more closely in helping veterans return to communities. According to unpublished data collected as part of the above-mentioned survey of CSOs, 48 per cent of respondents working with veterans and their families rate their collaboration with local authorities positively, but 58 per cent report that civil society remains sidelined in broader recovery planning. In addition, 60 per cent believe that the lack of political will from the top levels of government is one of the main obstacles to strengthening civil society's engagement in recovery.

While the term 'reintegration' appears selectively throughout the text for ease of reference, it is worth emphasizing that the term itself is widely disfavoured in Ukraine, where 'transition' [*perekhid*] or 'return' [*povernennya*] is strongly preferred as a more neutral term. 'Reintegration' [*reintehratsiya*] is seen as problematic because the term can be interpreted, some argue, as placing the burden of adaptation too much on veterans. This in turn can foster the misleading notion that veterans are somehow maladapted to a static, 'normal' society, and ignores

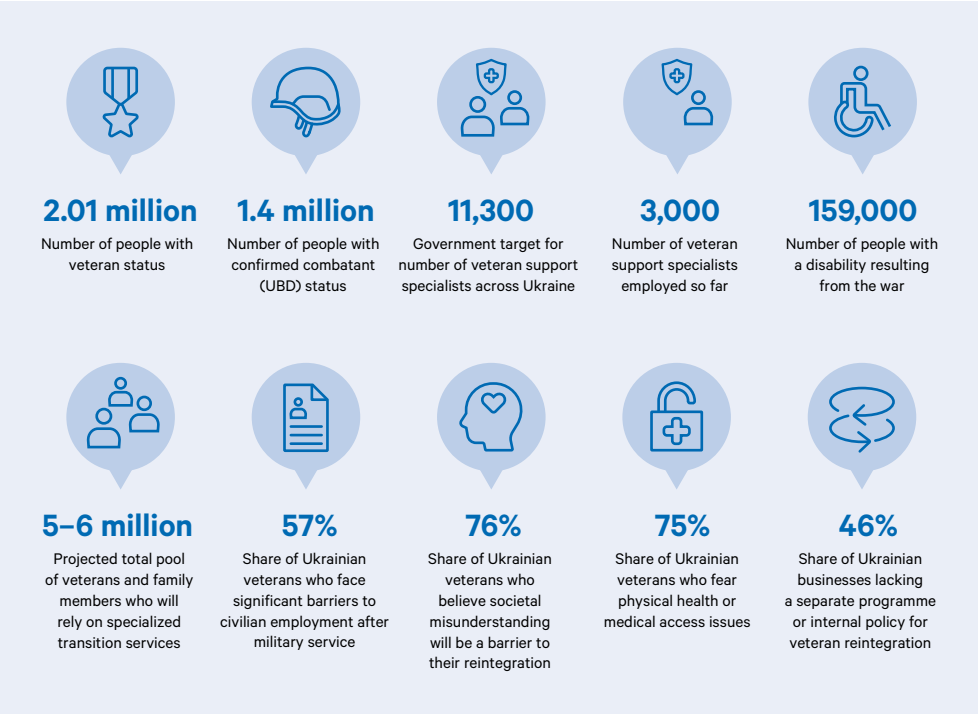
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9 Lutsevych, O. and Barbieri, J. (2026), *Why a 'whole-of-society' model is essential for Ukraine's recovery. Restoring the country's human capital through state–civil society cooperation*, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, https://www.chathamhouse.org/2026/06/why-whole-society-model-essential-ukraines-recovery.
10 Ibid., Q.11, p. 57.

how war has permanently changed both veterans and the society they have fought to protect.[11] To be successful and fair, the military-to-civilian transition will require adaptation on the part of veterans and wider society alike.[12]

Figure 1 illustrates the scale of this challenge, with data from the Ukrainian government and other public sources.[13]

Figure 1. The scale of Ukraine's veteran-care challenge in numbers



Note: Data current as of September 2026.

11 Author's interview with Yana Chapailo, director of Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Centre, Kyiv Mohyla Academy – Kyiv, 17 June 2026.
12 Author's interview with Maria Panchenko, expert, Veterans' Policy Department, Pryncyp NGO – Kyiv, 18 June 2026.
13 Markina (2026), 'В Україні вже понад 2 мільйони ветеранів: які області в лідерах' [There are already over 2 million veterans in Ukraine: which regions are in the lead?]; Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine (undated), 'Відповіді на ключові питання щодо впровадження у громадах фахівців із супроводу ветеранів війни та демобілізованих осіб' [Answers to key questions regarding the introduction of support specialists in communities for war veterans and demobilized persons], https://mva.gov.ua/prescenter/category/86-novini/vidpovidi-na-kluchovi-pitannya-schodo-vprovadzhennya-u-gromadah-fahivtsiv-iz-suprovodu-veteraniv-viyni-ta-demobilizovanih-osib; Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine (undated), 'Як ветеранам й ветеранкам знайти фахівця із супроводу' [How veterans can find a support specialist], https://mva.gov.ua/prescenter/category/86-novini/yak-veteranam-y-veterankam-znayti-fahivtsya-iz-suprovodu; Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (2025), *Портрет ветерана 2025* [Portrait of a veteran 2025], p. 11, https://veteranfund.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Portret-veterana-2025.pdf; European Business Association (2025), *Ветерани в українському бізнесі: стратегічні підходи до реінтеграції та управління змінами* [Veterans in Ukrainian business: Strategic approaches to reintegration and change management], p. 9, https://eba.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/EBA-Veterans-16.12.2025-1.pdf.

02 Structural challenges for Ukraine's veteran policy

The state's attempts to improve, and widen access to, veteran services are complicated by the fact that Ukraine is still at war, by the fiscal and operational challenges of meeting diverse veteran needs, and by insufficient coordination among the many actors with a stake in veteran care.

Ukraine's veteran policy faces three structural challenges. The first is that unlike in some traditional post-conflict scenarios (in which, for example, US or UK soldiers might return home from combat zones overseas), Ukrainian veterans are not coming back to a peaceful society. They are transitioning back into civilian life within a nation still actively under fire, facing massive infrastructural destruction and deep economic uncertainty.

A ceasefire and negotiated settlement with Russia remain unlikely for the foreseeable future. It is also worth remembering that general demobilization remains formally suspended under martial law, meaning that mobilized personnel face potentially indefinite periods of service.[14] These circumstances are radically different from

14 Due to the prolonged nature of the war, the government is already considering options for a phased demobilization, prioritizing people who have served the longest. See Pryamyi (2026), 'Ukraine to begin demobilizing long-serving troops by year's end', 14 June 2026, https://prm.ua/en/in-ukraine-by-the-end-of-the-year-the-dismissal-of-military-personnel-who-have-served-since-2014-and-2022-will-begin.

those sometimes encountered by Western professional militaries, for example, where service members complete deployment rotations in a combat zone, return to a peaceful home base, and are eventually discharged after completing their period of service.

Ukraine's current military reserve system places a disproportionate burden on combat veterans instead of evenly distributing mobilization duties across the broader eligible population.

Under the current conditions of martial law in Ukraine, an individual's discharge from active duty does not automatically mean they are retired from military service. The only grounds on which an individual can permanently leave the military include severe medical unfitness/disability or when a person reaches the maximum age limit for service (60 years).[15] Other statutory grounds, such as caring for three or more dependent children under the age of 18 or for disabled relatives, provide *conditional* discharge from active duty, meaning the individual concerned remains liable for service.[16] Although compulsory mobilization itself applies exclusively to men aged 25 to 60 (for women, military service is strictly voluntary), the above-mentioned rules apply to any man or woman who is *already* in the military. Under peacetime conditions, Ukrainian service personnel who completed their active duty would simply be discharged into the country's general reserve. During periods of national crisis or martial law, discharged service members, particularly those with recent combat experience, are automatically enrolled in a high-readiness operational reserve.[17] This allows the Armed Forces of Ukraine to rapidly recall experienced veterans to their assigned units if needed. Given these circumstances, as Ukrainian human rights group Pryncyp puts it, 'a full transition to civilian life for the majority of those discharged from service is conditional and often temporary'.[18] In other words, Ukraine's current military reserve system places a disproportionate burden on combat veterans instead of evenly distributing mobilization duties across the broader eligible population. Moreover, veterans are often called back without sufficient time for physical recovery, psychological rehabilitation or readaptation to civilian life. Human rights advocates are calling for structural reforms that would introduce adequate recovery times, legal protections for veterans facing recall, and financial incentives for returning to active duty.[19]

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15 Halan, L. et al. (2025), *Transition from military service to civilian life: Contexts, experiences, solutions*, Kyiv: Pryncyp, p. 17, https://www.pryncyp.org/en/analytics/transition-from-military-service-to-civilian-life-contexts-experiences-solutions.
16 *Sudovo-Yurydychna Gazeta* (2026), 'When a serviceman can be discharged from service due to family circumstances: a complete list of grounds', 27 May 2026, https://sud.ua/en/news/ukraine/362190-kogda-voennyy-mozhet-uvolitsya-so-sluzhby-po-semeynym-obstoyatelstvam-polnyy-perechen-osnovaniy.
17 Verkhovna Rada (2026), 'Закон про військовий обов'язок і військову службу' [Law on military duty and military service], Document no. 2232-XII, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2232-12#Text.
18 Halan et al. (2025), *Transition from military service to civilian life*, p. 17.
19 Alokhinsson, A. (2026), 'Резерв без рівності: чому ветерани знову йдуть до війська першими' [Reserve without equality: why veterans are joining the armed forces first again], Radio Khartiia, 15 June 2026, https://radiokhartia.com/news-and-comments/rezerv-bez-rivnosti-chomu-veterany-znovu-idut-do-viiska-pershymy.

The second challenge is that not all veterans face the same problems after their discharge. While it may be important, from a policymaking point of view, to articulate a relatively standardized indicative model of what a successful transition looks like, a veteran's path is shaped by their specific military experience and individual attributes. Providing the targeted support strategy this implies is difficult within a severely resource-constrained fiscal environment such as Ukraine's. The state budget for 2026 allocated UAH 18.9 billion (roughly £315 million) to veteran policy. This represents an increase of UAH 6.3 billion on the allocation in 2025, but still accounts for only 0.4 per cent of the national budget.[20] While additional funding for veteran-related support comes from healthcare, social security and defence budgets, the above figures highlight a stark reality: without sustained international assistance, Ukraine's domestic financial capabilities cannot meet the immense costs of veteran care and reintegration.[21]

The third structural challenge is that veteran policy is inherently cross-sectoral (touching on medical care, mental health, social benefits, employment, housing, etc.). While the Ministry of Veteran Affairs (MoVA) both coordinates veteran policy and directly implements aspects of it, many of the actual services and resources associated with veteran reintegration fall under the responsibility of other line ministries, primarily the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the Ministry of Social Policy (MoSP), the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Economy and Environment (MoEE).[22] Cross-ministerial (i.e. 'horizontal') coordination remains ineffective, negatively impacting policy quality and the overall experience for veterans and their families.[23]

In addition to its coordination role, the MoVA is responsible for overall policy direction, maintaining veteran status registries and overseeing veteran-specific initiatives. The MoD controls medical military commissions (VLK – bodies that assess a person's fitness for military service), military discharge paperwork and service logs. The MoH manages long-term medical rehabilitation and prosthetics certification. However, prosthetic provision, disability classifications, housing allowances and direct financial assistance are the responsibility of the MoSP. The MoEE leads job-placement incentives, vocational retraining and entrepreneurship grants (e.g. through the eRobota platform).[24]

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20 Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2025), 'State Budget for 2026 adopted: Yulia Svyrydenko', 3 December 2025, https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/derzhavnyi-biudzhet-na-2026-rik-ukhvaleno-iuliia-svyrydenko.
21 At the 2026 Yalta European Strategy conference in Kyiv, Roksolana Pidlasa, head of Ukraine's parliamentary budget committee, admitted that due to the growing economic costs of Russia's war, Ukraine is forced to use international funding to cover soldiers' salaries. See Matthew, D. (2026), 'Hard times ahead: Russian attacks put Ukraine's finances under pressure', TVP, 12 September 2026, https://tvpworld.com/95356634/russian-attacks-cost-of-war-puts-ukraine-budget-under-pressure.
22 Author's online interview with Solomiya Borshosh, consultant, Veterans Fund project designer, 31 July 2026.
23 It is worth stressing that this challenge is not unique to Ukraine. In 2025 the UK Office for Veterans' Affairs launched 'VALOUR', an initiative 'to improve how services are coordinated at national, regional and local levels' for veterans and their families, connecting local charities, councils and health services through a unified network to reduce access gaps and duplication. See UK Government (2025), 'VALOUR: corporate information', 23 May 2025, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/valour-corporate-information.
24 Ministry of Economy and Environment of Ukraine (2023), 'Government launches grant programs for veterans to start or develop their own businesses', 31 March 2023, https://www.me.gov.ua/News/Detail/b324f856-eb05-4842-97b0-97ad490e10af?lang=en-GB&title=GovernmentLaunchesGrantProgramsForVeteransToStartOrDevelopTheirOwnBusinesses.

While the central government sets national policies and statutory benefits, regional and local authorities are tasked with delivering many state-mandated benefits. A key issue is that national legislation sets uniform expectations but overlooks the uneven financial, technical and administrative capacities of different regional centres and hromadas (a Ukrainian term translating roughly as 'communities').[25] Larger urban hromadas often have robust budgets, specialized staff and active civil society partners, enabling these administrations to offer comprehensive veteran support. However, smaller, rural communities frequently lack sufficient resources. In addition, municipal budgets in front-line communities have contracted drastically as mass displacement and Russia's destruction of industrial assets have drained local tax bases. This pattern was also observed in a study by Ukraine's National Institute for Strategic Studies: despite veteran policy transitioning towards a more structured national framework, policy execution remains highly uneven across communities.[26]

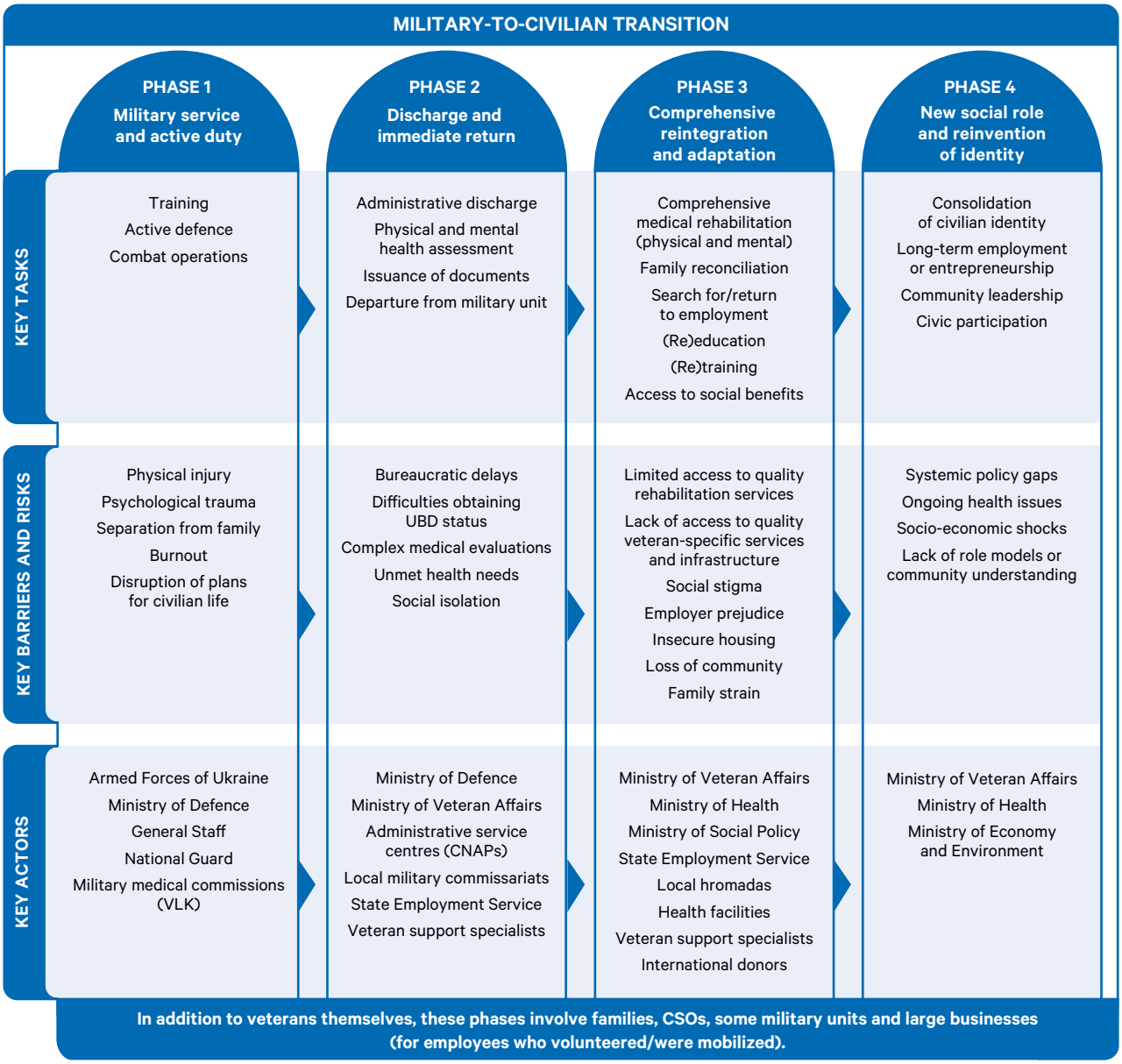
While non-state actors play a vital role in filling capacity gaps and driving service innovation, this loosely structured ecosystem can be confusing for beneficiaries, ultimately leaving successful reintegration to chance rather than institutional design.

Navigating this framework is additionally complicated by the proliferation of services and programmes independently offered by civil society and the private sector. Data collected in March 2026 for the Chatham House survey revealed that 58 per cent of veteran-focused CSOs provide mental health services, while 35 per cent are dedicated to veteran socialization and running community centres. While non-state actors play a vital role in filling capacity gaps and driving service innovation, this loosely structured ecosystem can be confusing for beneficiaries, ultimately leaving successful reintegration to chance rather than institutional design. In a 2025 survey by IREX, a US-based international non-profit organization, 41 per cent of veterans reported being unsure as to which benefits they are entitled to.[27] A further source of confusion is the fact that veterans' families are not typically categorized as service providers, even though they often assist with paperwork and fulfil care responsibilities.[28]

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25 Author's online interview with Mykhailo Onufer, veteran and CVO, Aurora Multimarket, 13 August 2026.
26 National Institute for Strategic Studies (2026), 'Overview of Veterans Policy in Territorial Communities (12.2025–01.2026)', 4 February 2026, https://niss.gov.ua/en/news/komentari-ekspertiv/overview-veterans-policy-territorial-communities-122025-012026.
27 IREX (2025), *Assessment of veteran reintegration experience after 2022*, p. 44, https://veteran-reintegration.in.ua/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/ver_2-assessment-of-veteran-reintegration-experience-after-2022.pdf.
28 Smahina, A. (2026), 'Invisible no more: How Ukrainian women caring for the wounded learn to take care of themselves', Rubryka, 13 July 2026, https://rubryka.com/en/article/zhinky-turbuyutsya-pro-poranenyh.

Figure 2. Indicative overview of the phases of a veteran's military-to-civilian transition



Notes: This is a simplified and amended figure based on Veteran Hub's 'Veteran's pathway' model. See Veteran Hub (undated), 'Шлях ветеранів і ветеранок' [Veterans' path], https://veteranhub.com.ua/veteran-way. It is also worth mentioning the 'Angels' service offering comprehensive veteran support for fighters from the Third Separate Assault Brigade and other units of the Azov movement. This unit-level model manages the entire cycle of soldier welfare, from coordinating specialized medical care, high-end prosthetics and mental health rehabilitation for the wounded to facilitating immediate physical, psychological and legal reintegration for returning prisoners of war. This service also relies on dedicated legal teams to secure state benefits, provide long-term financial and logistical support to families of deceased soldiers, and offer peer-to-peer support for disabled veterans. This model was introduced in 2014. In August 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted a resolution to establish military personnel support services in all military units, thereby scaling up the already successful 'Angels' model. See Third Separate Assault Brigade (undated), '"Янголи Трійки"– перша Патронатна служба в Україні' ["Angels of the Third" – the first Patronage Service in Ukraine], https://angels.ab3.army; Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (2024), 'В Україні створюється служба супроводу військовослужбовців – постанова Кабміну' [A service for supporting military personnel is being established in Ukraine – Cabinet of Ministers resolution], 20 August 2024, https://mod.gov.ua/news/v-ukraini-stvoryuetsya-sluzhba-suprovodu-vijskovosluzhbovcziv.

Frequent ministerial rotations at the MoVA have further impeded the effectiveness of veteran policy.[29] (There have been five leadership changes in total since the MoVA was established in November 2018.[30]) Projects started under one minister can lose momentum or get shelved when the political leadership changes. CSOs and international donors may spend months negotiating complex policy frameworks with a ministry team, only to have to start from scratch when new leadership steps in.[31] This breeds reform fatigue and delays delivery of critical technical aid.

Although every veteran's path is unique, Figure 2 provides an indicative outline of the standard phases of veterans' military-to-civilian transition. This schema highlights how veterans must typically navigate a fragmented landscape of service providers. The analysis in this paper concentrates primarily on 'phase 3' of the transition.

29 Chupak, O. (2025), 'Міністерство ветеранів: реальний чи символічний орган виконавчої влади' [Ministry of Veterans: Real or symbolic executive body], Tyzhden, 15 December 2025, https://tyzhden.ua/ministerstvo-veteraniv-realnyj-chy-symvolichnyj-orhan-vykonavchoi-vlady.
30 In August 2019 the MoVA was merged into the Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and IDPs. But the merger was short-lived and the decision was reversed in March 2020.
31 Author's online interview with Oksana Koliada, 23 July 2026. Koliada, a veteran, is the chairperson of the board of the NGO 'Human Capital Recovery Platform. RESTART' and head of the public union 'Coalition of Veteran Spaces'. She was also the minister of veterans' affairs, Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine in 2019–20.

03
Current veteran policy, ongoing reforms and critical gaps

Veteran care in Ukraine is being overhauled to address unprecedented demand resulting from the war. Reforms must deliver a more coherent legal and institutional framework, improve the quality and geographical coverage of rehabilitation services, help returning veterans to become economically active, and prevent community friction.

Ukraine has mobilized all sectors of society to an extraordinary degree to fight the war, fostering a multidimensional approach to resilience that now extends to veteran care. Grassroots organizations, local communities, businesses and government agencies have all stepped forward to support those who serve.

However, the country increasingly recognizes that it must design a more systematized and sustainable approach. With this context, this chapter maps the veteran policy landscape in Ukraine. It assesses the current state of policy as it relates to four key tasks: (1) modernizing the veteran support model and associated legislative framework; (2) improving rehabilitation services and widening their availability; (3) supporting veteran engagement in the economy; and (4) reducing the social stigma encountered by returning veterans. For each area, the chapter identifies where the most significant service gaps and challenges lie, and identifies existing initiatives that offer promise.

Modernizing the veteran support model

Ukraine's core law governing veterans – 'On the status of war veterans, guarantees of their social protection' – dates back to 1993.[32] There is widespread consensus in Ukraine that this legislative framework is inadequate in the context of a modern, large-scale war. The 1993 law was designed with Second World War and Soviet–Afghan war veterans in mind. It treated veterans primarily as passive recipients of state handouts (such as subsidies, free public transport, free land plots) rather than as active citizens to be reintegrated into the economy and wider society. Reintegration models that rely solely on passive social welfare at the expense of active career support not only fail to address the loss of community and purpose that can occur during the civilian transition, but also foster chronic underemployment among demobilized personnel.[33]

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Ukraine's legacy framework offered expansive guarantees that are, in some respects, irrelevant nowadays and that the public finances cannot sustain, especially given the ever-growing number of veterans.[34] Delivering on every statutory promise for veterans and their families would overwhelm the national budget during post-war recovery.

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32 Verkhovna Rada (1993), 'Закон про статус ветеранів війни, гарантії їх соціального захисту' [Law on the status of war veterans, guarantees of their social protection], No. 3552-XII, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12?lang=en.

33 Romaniuk, M. and Kidd, C. (2026), 'The psychological adjustment experience of reintegration following discharge from military service: A systematic review', *The Journal of Military and Veterans' Health (JMVH)*, Vol. 26, No. 2, https://jmvh.org/article/the-psychological-adjustment-experience-of-reintegration-following-discharge-from-military-service-a-systemic-review; Dolenec, D. (2017), 'A soldier's state? Veterans and the welfare regime in Croatia', *Anali*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 65–66, https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/289879; Galley, C., Flanagan, S. and Slapakova, L. (2026), *An analysis of Veterans' and Reservists' participation in the labour market*, RAND, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA4997-1.html; Davenport, K. et al. (2024), 'Underemployment, compensation dissatisfaction, job turnover, and salary change: How are post-9/11 veterans doing three years after leaving the US military?', *Journal of Veterans Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3, https://journal-veterans-studies.org/articles/10.21061/jvs.v10i3.542.

34 Author's interview with Maria Panchenko, expert, Veterans' Policy Department, Pryncyp NGO, Kyiv, 18 June 2026. A new bill proposed in July 2026 aims to stop state and local authorities from reducing or restricting war veterans' social benefits due to insufficient budget funding. See Verkhovna Rada (2026), 'Проєкт Закону про внесення змін до Закону України «Про статус ветеранів війни, гарантії їх соціального захисту» щодо гарантування реалізації права на пільги ветеранам війни та членам їх сімей' [Draft Law on Amendments to the Law of Ukraine "On the status of war veterans, guarantees of their social protection" regarding guaranteeing the realization of the right to benefits for war veterans and their family members], http://itd.rada.gov.ua/billinfo/Bills/Card/70423.

Ultimately, the government must make difficult choices to define which state-provided benefits are strictly essential. Where state provision is unfeasible or unaffordable, it will be necessary to identify which aspects of veteran care could be delivered by civil society, the private sector or international donors. Making these sorts of resourcing decisions will require systematic, data-driven research to establish priority needs and map Ukraine's ever-changing network of service providers.

It is worth noting that there is an ongoing debate as to whether altering or scaling back the current list of veteran entitlements could require amendment of the Ukrainian constitution. Such an amendment would entail a complex legal procedure, prohibited under the current conditions of martial law, although constitutional wrangling could potentially be avoided. To achieve a comprehensive reform of veteran policy without violating constitutional norms, the government would need to legally justify and implement an expanded, flexible social protection system that offered equivalent or superior support tailored to veterans' specific vulnerabilities.[35]

Box 1. Lessons for Ukraine from Croatia's experience of veteran care

Croatia's post-war transition offers critical lessons for Ukraine.[36] Following the 1991–95 Homeland War, Croatia faced the monumental task of reintegrating more than 500,000 veterans. Croatia established a dedicated Ministry of Croatian Veterans, which centralized oversight of veteran status, legal aid, psychological support, medical rehabilitation, housing priority lists and direct welfare rights for families under a single institutional umbrella. Croatia also established specialized 'regional centres for psychosocial help', which offered services tailored to people suffering from combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); the centres also provided family support, acknowledging that war trauma affects the entire household unit.[37] Grassroots veterans' associations played a crucial role in providing localized psychosocial support, trauma rehabilitation and peer-to-peer counselling. In turn, this facilitated former fighters' adjustment to life in the civilian community.

An early policy challenge was that the Croatian veteran-care system relied heavily on provision of generous, early-retirement military pensions, and lacked comprehensive, long-term psychosocial-care frameworks. This had the effect of removing hundreds of thousands of working-age individuals from the labour market, overburdening the

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35 Veteran benefits are protected under Article 22 of the Ukrainian constitution, which explicitly prohibits any reduction or narrowing of existing social rights and guarantees when new laws are passed or current legislation is amended. See Brus, S. and Pashkina, A. (2024), *Veterans Policy in Ukraine: Historical Development and Present Challenges*, Analytical Paper, Kyiv: Pryncyp, pp. 23–25, https://veteran-reintegration.in.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/go_prynczyp_veterans-policy_d.pdf.
36 Government of Croatia (2025), 'We want to help Ukraine deal with the consequences of war with our knowledge, solidarity and experience', 10 October 2025, https://vlada.gov.hr/we-want-to-help-ukraine-deal-with-the-consequences-of-war-with-our-knowledge-solidarity-and-experience/45185. See also: Brus, S., Bukhta, S. and Shmatko, I. (2023), *Системи соціальної підтримки ветеранів: Хорватія, Ізраїль, Велика Британія, Сербія та Данія* [Veterans' Social Support Systems: Croatia, Israel, Great Britain, Serbia and Denmark], Kyiv: Pryncyp, pp. 8–31, https://www.pryncyp.org/analytics/oczinka-potreb-pi-kluvalnykiv-maye-gruntuvatysya-na-da-nyh-a-same-chitkomu-rozuminni-togo.
37 Government of Croatia (undated), 'Croatian veterans', https://gov.hr/en/croatian-veterans-211/210; Government of Croatia (undated), 'Centres for psychosocial support and regional departments of the Ministry', https://gov.hr/en/centres-for-psychosocial-support-and-regional-departments-of-the-ministry/968.

pension system, and causing long-term social isolation and mental health struggles among veterans. This approach was criticized by the European Commission in its 2018 annual report on Croatia.[38]

In Ukraine, the government and the private sector have sought to learn from the mistakes of Croatia's initial post-war experience by investing early on in retraining and up-skilling programmes and providing entrepreneurship grants, with the aim of encouraging veterans to enter employment or start businesses.[39] This approach recognizes that Ukraine cannot afford to sideline its veteran workforce, especially given war-induced demographic changes.

In considering the policy challenges Ukraine faces, it is important to understand that the umbrella category of 'war veteran' encompasses three distinct groups: combatants (who have what is termed 'UBD' status); persons disabled as a result of war; and general war participants. UBD status applies to military personnel who have taken part directly in combat missions.[40] The second category covers those who have suffered injuries or illnesses leading to disability during the defence of Ukraine. Finally, general 'war participants' refers to citizens who have performed support tasks without taking direct part in combat operations.[41] This differentiation is significant, as state benefits and social guarantees are tied to an individual's category. For example, UBD status grants the holder a 75 per cent discount on utility bills, whereas persons disabled as a result of war receive a 100 per cent discount as well as major single-sum payouts.

Yet legacy issues arising from the original design of this system, and from repeated modifications to it, are an increasing impediment to effective veteran support. Over three decades, the 1993 law has been patched up with dozens of amendments and conflicting government decrees, leading to duplicative and inefficient services. Critically, the law mandated several statutory benefits without establishing a legally regulated mechanism for veterans' military-to-civilian transition.

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38 European Commission (2018), *Country Report Croatia 2018*, Commission Staff Working Document, p. 37, https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/circabc-ewpp/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/c91118f3-5404-4552-b526-c5979d8a8dec/download.
39 Author's interview with Oleg Shymanskyi, deputy minister, Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine, Kyiv, 12 June 2026.
40 Since January 2025, commanders have been required to log combat mission data directly into the Unified State Register of War Veterans within five days. This process triggers an automatic assignment of UBD status, removing the need for service members to file manual paperwork. The system was updated to eliminate the long bureaucratic delays that Ukrainian service members undergoing treatment had frequently faced when applying for UBD status. As of August 2026, 1 million Ukrainian defenders have already received the electronic veteran certificate in the Diia app. See Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (2025), 'Over 71,000 service members have already obtained combatant status under the new simplified system', press release, 28 August 2025, https://mod.gov.ua/en/news/over-71-000-service-members-have-already-obtained-combatant-status-under-the-new-simplified-system; Ukrainian National News (2026), '1 million Ukrainian defenders have received the electronic veteran certificate in Diia', 4 August 2026, https://unn.ua/en/news/1-million-ukrainian-defenders-have-received-the-electronic-veteran-certificate-in-diia.
41 *Sudovo-Yurydychna Gazeta* (2026), 'Яка різниця між ветераном війни та УБД – роз'яснення' [What is the difference between a war veteran and UBD status – clarification], 2 July 2026, https://sud.ua/uk/news/ukraine/365506-yaka-riznitsya-mizh-veteranom-viyni-ta-ubd-rozyasnennya.

To facilitate overhaul of this outdated system, a coalition of Ukrainian CSOs – including Pryncyp, Veteran Hub, Legal Hundred and Space of Opportunities – drafted a comprehensive 'concept' of state veteran policy,[42] alongside a dedicated 'concept' on addressing the needs of veterans' families.[43] This explicit recognition of the role of veterans' families addresses a historical blind spot in Ukraine's veteran support system, and aligns with recent empirical evidence. A 2025 IREX survey revealed that 55 per cent of Ukrainian veterans and 49 per cent of active service members view family reunification as crucial to successful transition.[44] The CSO coalition advocates treating families as separate beneficiaries of veteran policy, to reflect their own distinct experiences and needs. From prolonged separation from loved ones to coping with family members' injury, captivity, disappearance or death, the diverse experiences of families of Ukrainian veterans mean that such families require tailored social, psychological, legal and economic support.

Explicit recognition of the role of veterans' families addresses a historical blind spot in Ukraine's veteran support system. A 2025 survey revealed that 55 per cent of Ukrainian veterans and 49 per cent of active service members view family reunification as crucial to successful transition.

Central to the coalition's vision is the proposed adoption in law of a 'veterans' code' that would unify all scattered statutes into a single legal framework tailored to the realities of modern warfare.[45] The code would provide the legislative underpinnings for the replacement of the Soviet-era, status-based model with a modern, needs-based reintegration system. The CSO coalition is also calling for clearer and more stringent definitions of veteran status according to military service and combat experience. Under a centralized and expanded taxonomy, the proposed code would differentiate between combatants, service members with disabilities, civilian contributors to the country's defence, foreign volunteers and surviving families of fallen defenders.

By replacing a system of passive subsidies with targeted support, the proposed new framework seeks to prioritize long-term self-sufficiency through comprehensive physical and psychological rehabilitation, use of advanced prosthetics, and proactive economic reintegration tools. Furthermore, the code would require local hromadas and healthcare facilities to make available the services of dedicated case workers –

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42 Veterans Policy (2025), *Concept of the public veteran policy: Expert review and recommendations of the Coalition of Civil Society Organisations*, https://res2.weblium.site/res/6450fc10d877da000c1ae009/69a0550bc06eb135c5e88ac6.
43 Veterans Policy (2025), *Concept of the public policy on veterans' families: Expert review and recommendations of the Coalition of Civil Society Organisations*, https://res2.weblium.site/res/6450fc10d877da000c1ae009/69a058d7eb703bdfd2fb6edf.
44 IREX (2025), *Assessment of veteran reintegration experience after 2022*, p. 55.
45 Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine (2025), *Кодекс законів про захисників і захисниць державності та незалежності України* [Code of laws on the defenders of the statehood and independence of Ukraine], https://mva.gov.ua/media/1/1._%D0%9A%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%81_1.pdf.

'veteran support specialists' [*fakhivtsi suprovodu dlya veteraniv*] – who would provide continuous, personalized guidance to veterans and their families during the transition from military to civilian life.[46] Despite broad public support, the new code continues to face legislative delays in parliament.

Notwithstanding this impasse, veteran support specialists already operate on a limited scale in Ukraine (see below). They are trained to address the unique needs of veterans and their families, some of whom suffer from overlapping vulnerabilities: for instance, some veterans are also internally displaced persons (IDPs).[47] Veteran support specialists provide direct assistance with navigating state benefits, securing legal aid, finding employment or retraining, accessing medical care and obtaining psychological support.[48]

One of the most important roles of veteran support specialists is to provide services at healthcare facilities. Here they work with recovering service members before the latter's discharge from hospital after treatment, providing assistance in such areas as completing paperwork, accessing social benefits and choosing post-treatment plans.[49] Veteran support specialists are also embedded in so-called Centres for the Provision of Administrative Services (CNAPs), where they help veterans complete applications for housing assistance, disability status, short-term financial support, compensation for property damage caused by Russian airstrikes, and discounts on utility services, etc. Veteran support specialists also work in dedicated veteran hubs in hromadas, where they focus on broader reintegration, facilitating peer-to-peer support, providing legal and career guidance, and assisting with adaptive sports or community events. The administrative backbone for cross-agency coordination of this work is a specialized digital platform and customer relationship management (CRM) system, 'OSKAR', managed by the MoVA.[50]

As of the spring of 2026, more than 3,000 trained veteran support specialists were already active across the country.[51] Professional training initiatives are ongoing to expand their presence, with the plan ultimately being to employ up to 11,300 such specialists across Ukraine. An open call for applications is active on the e-Veteran online information system.[52] Ukrainian CSOs also regularly deliver training sessions to refine veteran support specialists' skills on the ground.[53]

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46 Ibid., pp. 65–66.
47 Author's interview with Olha Kucher, director of services, Veteran Hub, Kyiv, 17 June 2026.
48 Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine (2024), 'Фахівець із супроводу ветеранів та ветеранок: нові можливості' [Specialist in supporting veterans: new opportunities], https://mva.gov.ua/prescenter/category/86-novini/fahivets-iz-suprovodu-veteraniv-ta-veteranok-novi-mozhlivosti.
49 Come Back Alive (undated), 'Простір турботи про ветеранів' [Space for caring for veterans], https://savelife.in.ua/kabinet-veterana.
50 Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine (2026), 'Підтримка стане більш швидшою та ефективнішою: Фахівці із супроводу отримали сучасне цифрове середовище для роботи з ветеранською спільнотою' [Support will become faster and more effective: Support specialists received a modern digital environment for working with the veteran community], https://mva.gov.ua/prescenter/category/86-novini/pidtrimka-stane-bilsh-shvidshou-ta-efektivnishou-fahivtsi-iz-suprovodu-otrimali-suchasne-tsifrove-seredovische-dlya-roboti-z-veteranskou-spilnotou.
51 Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine (2026), 'Відповіді на ключові питання щодо впровадження у громадах фахівців із супроводу ветеранів війни та демобілізованих осіб' [Answers to key questions regarding the introduction of support specialists in communities for war veterans and demobilized persons].
52 e-Veteran (undated), 'Заява на участь у відборі на посаду фахівця із супроводу ветеранів війни та демобілізованих осіб' [Application for participation in the selection process for the position of specialist in support for war veterans and demobilized persons], https://eveteran.gov.ua/services/zaiava-na-uchast-u-vidbori-na-posadu-fakhivtsia-iz-suprovodu-veteraniv-viiny-ta-demobilizovanykh-osib.
53 Prohrama Reintehratsii Veteraniv (2026), 'Як пройшов кемп для фахівців супроводу ветеранів та ветеранок' [How the camp for veteran support specialists went], 28 July 2026, https://veteran-reintegration.in.ua/news/yak-projshov-kemp-dlya-fahivcziv-suprovodu-veteraniv-ta-veteranok.

Box 2. The Ukrainian and UK veteran support systems compared

There are interesting parallels between Ukraine's overhaul of its veteran support system and the UK's new VALOUR programme, launched in July 2026. Both frameworks draw heavily on the power of peer-to-peer trust and strive to integrate responsibilities across central government ministries, municipal authorities, healthcare facilities and civil society to create a more collaborative ecosystem of care. Similarly to veteran spaces in Ukraine, VALOUR-recognized support centres provide direct links to services associated with healthcare, housing, employment, finance, social welfare benefits and personal well-being.[54]

At the core of both models is the deployment of dedicated human case workers or 'navigators', though with some important differences. Ukraine's veteran support specialists are embedded directly inside hospitals (as well as in community veteran spaces) to manage polytrauma, prosthetics coverage and psychological care before a service member even fully returns home. Meanwhile, the UK uses specialized veteran pathways (e.g. *Op COURAGE* for mental health) within an established, peacetime public health infrastructure – primarily the National Health Service (NHS). Support in the UK is based on a system of regional field officers who connect councils, charities and service providers. Meanwhile, Ukraine's veteran support specialists work at the hromada level and are a more specialized profession.

A fundamental difference between the two systems is that the UK supports a stable, largely ageing population of military veterans, the majority of whom are of non-working age.[55] UK policy has developed in a peaceful context in which the ratio of military personnel to civilians is low. By contrast, Ukraine is having to manage an unprecedented, rapidly expanding wave of working-age veterans under wartime conditions. As mentioned earlier (see Chapter 1), Ukrainian veterans and their families are projected to make up roughly 15 per cent of the population once the war ends.[56]

Another key contrast is between the two countries' financial commitments to veteran support, highlighting the vast difference in the scale of the challenge each nation faces. Although the UK economy is roughly 20 times larger than Ukraine's – with nominal GDP of around $4.3 trillion compared to Ukraine's $229.4 billion[57] – Ukraine spends a vastly higher share of its state budget on veterans. The UK's Office for Veterans' Affairs committed roughly £37 million in 2025/26 (part of a three-year, £50 million rollout of the new VALOUR system) to support its veteran population.[58] In contrast, Ukraine's MoVA has allocated UAH 18.9 billion (roughly £315 million), eight times the UK's VALOUR budget, to veteran policy.[59] The fact that a nation with a fraction of the UK's wealth must dedicate such vast resources to veteran support underscores the critical importance of such support to Ukraine's economic and national survival.

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54 UK Government (undated), 'Veteran support centres', https://valour.campaign.gov.uk/valour-the-uk-wide-veteran-support-system/valour-veteran-support-centres.
55 UK Government (2020), 'Veterans News and Communications Hub', published 11 June 2020, last updated 21 September 2026, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/veterans-news-and-communications-hub.
56 World Bank (2026), *Ukraine: Fifth rapid damage and needs assessment*.
57 International Monetary Fund (2026), 'GDP, current prices', IMF Datamapper, https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/UKR/GBR (accessed 19 Oct. 2026).
58 UK Government (2026), 'Government spends record levels to support our veterans', 26 January 2026, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-spends-record-levels-to-support-our-veterans.
59 Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2025), 'State Budget for 2026 adopted: Yulia Svyrydenko'.

Simplifying veterans' access to services

A key barrier faced by veterans – a direct result of the current legislative and administrative fragmentation – is scattered information. While individual programmes show promise, systemic state support continues to fall short of veterans' expectations. In a 2025 survey by the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation, individual government programmes received relatively positive assessments, with 51 per cent of veteran respondents rating them completely effective or quite effective. At the same time, 55 per cent believed the state is failing to fulfil its obligations to veterans.[60]

To improve access to veteran-support information and veteran services, the MoVA has been developing the Veteran PRO digital ecosystem since the spring of 2025.

To improve access to veteran-support information and veteran services, the MoVA has been developing the Veteran PRO digital ecosystem since the spring of 2025. Different versions of Veteran PRO are available through Ukraine's national digital public infrastructure system, Diia, and through a standalone information portal.[61] Diia is an e-services system that allows citizens to access a range of online government services and perform various tasks (such as filing tax returns, registering vehicles, applying for and storing digital ID, or storing and accessing business documents). The MoVA has created a dedicated veterans' section within the Diia system, accessible exclusively to veterans following identity verification. As of October 2026, this space contains 10 services that users can access fully online (either via app or web portal) without having to interact with human service providers.[62]

In contrast to the Veteran PRO section in Diia, the standalone information portal – which was created in October 2025 – not only lists information on services and opportunities for veterans and their families at the national level but also includes listings of regional and local services (created at the initiative of local leadership). The platform features an AI-assisted support tool alongside a localized search engine that maps national and regional veteran support services, including relevant contact details of service providers. This tool is not a substitute for advice from a veteran support specialist, but it helps beneficiaries work out more quickly what steps to take and where to turn for help.[63]

A key limitation of the Veteran PRO platform, however, is that it provides information only on the *government's* services for veterans. Users cannot simultaneously search for services provided by CSOs or the private sector.

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60 Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (2025), *Портрет ветерана 2025* [Portrait of a veteran 2025], pp. 13–15.
61 Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (undated), 'Veteran PRO', https://veteranpro.gov.ua.
62 The services include compensation for workplace adaptations, provision of housing vouchers, an affordable housing loan programme, a function to search for veteran support specialists, etc.
63 Author's interview with Kateryna Anisova, international relations coordinator at Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine, Kyiv, 12 June 2026.

A number of civil society initiatives are seeking to fill this information gap. One is the Veteran Help portal, developed by Beehive Logic, a commercial digital agency, in collaboration with the Zaporizhzhia-based CSO 'Platform of Joint Actions'. Like the government's Veteran PRO platform, Veteran Help provides access according to the user's veteran status; the difference is that the portal provides information about civic and business veteran support initiatives as well as government programmes.[64]

Another such initiative is 'legal Navigator',[65] a digital self-help platform and mobile application designed to provide service personnel, veterans and their families with information on their legal rights.[66] Meanwhile, the NGO ReSTART has collaborated with IREX, a US-based non-profit, on a 'Hromada Readiness Index' to track the technical, infrastructural and administrative capacities of communities in relation to post-war rebuilding, urban planning and socio-economic stabilization, including the reintegration of IDPs and veterans.[67] This tool is designed to help assess and enhance the capacity of Ukrainian municipalities to navigate wartime and post-war recovery.

Together, these three examples show how Ukrainian civil society is consistently filling service gaps where the state may be unable on its own to provide support, and driving innovations in veteran services and care.

Addressing veterans' physical and mental rehabilitation needs

Mental health challenges and untreated psychological war trauma are increasingly viewed as a direct threat to Ukraine's future security and national economic recovery. Widespread PTSD, depression and anxiety directly diminish workforce participation, lower productivity and exacerbate the country's acute labour shortages.[68]

War injuries in Ukraine differ significantly from those seen in past conflicts like Afghanistan, Iraq and Vietnam. Injuries are almost always combined traumas,[69] and extended or inadequate tourniquet use has resulted in higher amputation rates. While tourniquets are essential for stopping severe bleeding, troops often apply them incorrectly or for minor wounds. Moreover, because Russian forces routinely target medics, evacuation delays can result in tourniquets being kept on well past a safe duration, causing irreversible tissue death. Military medical

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64 Beehive Logic (2026), 'Veteran Help – A digital support portal for Ukraine's veteran community', 17 April 2026, https://beehivelogic.com/articles/veteran-help-portal.
65 Pryncyp (undated), 'Pravovyi navihator', https://navigator.pryncyp.org.
66 Pryncyp via Facebook (2024), 'Правовий навігатор для військових, ветеранів та їхніх сімей – у вашій кишені' [A legal navigator for military personnel, veterans, and their families – right in your pocket], 19 February 2024, https://www.facebook.com/pryncypua/posts/pfbid0DFqDQN5BkRDxXqwjg57BU5gokWMCTcDFHSaX744Rg1PhcCRvcjmLXWvbSngNC7Yol.
67 ReSTART (2025), 'Індекс готовності громад. Презентуємо громадам' [Hromada Readiness Index. Presenting to hromadas], 11 October 2025, https://restartukraine.com.ua/news/indeks-gotovnosti-gromad-prezentuyemo-gromadam.
68 Tabeshadze, N. (2026), 'Psychological Trauma Is Not Only a Health Issue. For Ukraine, It Is a Reconstruction Risk', Vox Ukraine, 2 June 2026, https://voxukraine.org/en/psychological-trauma-is-not-only-a-health-issue-for-ukraine-it-is-a-reconstruction-risk.
69 Syvak, O. (2025), *Psychological Support for Ukrainians During the War: Future challenges in Ukraine in the field of Veterans' Mental Health*, Ukrainian Institute of Traumatherapy, p. 5, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/events/2025/12/webinar-ulkraine/ukraine-veterans-2025-OksanaSyvak.pdf.

experts have stressed the urgent need to retrain soldiers in combat first aid in order to prevent avoidable limb loss.[70] The Superhumans Center, a nationwide war trauma treatment unit, estimates that at least 100,000 people – both military personnel and civilians – in Ukraine have suffered amputations due to injuries from shelling, landmines or other types of blast.[71]

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Meeting the rehabilitation and adaptation needs of veterans is a continual challenge. In a survey by the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation, 47 per cent of participating veterans reported that public spaces in their place of residence are somewhat or totally lacking in accessibility for disabled visitors.[72] In the same survey, the primary concerns identified by veteran respondents about the transition to civilian life centred on psychological and social reintegration. Psycho-emotional instability topped the list of worries (84 per cent of respondents considered such problems to be moderately or highly likely to occur), closely followed by substance abuse (79 per cent), and physical health or medical access issues (75 per cent).[73] Another survey showed that deep mistrust of the healthcare system, limited access to war trauma specialists, and insufficient information prevent veterans from getting the psychological support they need.[74] Research shows the importance of combining physical and mental rehabilitation in restoring a person's independence and sense of identity.[75]

While flagship rehabilitation centres such as UNBROKEN and private facilities such as Superhumans Center – both of which operate in major cities such as Lviv – set high standards, regional and rural healthcare centres lack the specialized staff and modern equipment needed to maintain long-term care. As a result, veterans' access to services

70 Cullinan, M. (2025), "'Cult' of tourniquets causing thousands of unnecessary amputations and deaths in Ukraine, say surgeons', *Telegraph*, 4 August 2025, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/cult-of-tourniquets-causing-unnecessary-amputations-deaths.
71 O'Grady, S., Sholudko, L. and Shyvala, Y. (2026), 'They Lost Limbs at War, but It Was the Start of Something New', *New York Times*, 24 June 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/24/world/europe/ukraine-war-amputees-sports.html.
72 Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (2025), '*Портрет ветерана* 2025' [Portrait of a veteran 2025], p. 17.
73 Ibid., p. 11.
74 IREX (2025), *Assessment of veteran reintegration experience after 2022*, p. 22.
75 Syvak (2025), *Psychological Support for Ukrainians During the War*, p. 4.

has been uneven, and dependent on their community of residence; the problem is compounded by the current shortage of trained specialists in psychological support, physical rehabilitation and prosthetics.[76]

Again, civil society is showing its indispensable role in filling gaps in service provision. According to an IREX report, 66 per cent of Ukrainian CSOs provide psychosocial support and rehabilitation, while one-third provide medical services.[77] CSOs are also starting to set the wider agenda: one organization, Veteran Hub, has published a report defining the key requirements for veterans' well-being.[78]

Adaptive sports have emerged as a cornerstone of physical and psychological recovery for Ukrainian veterans. A ground-breaking report by Come Back Alive, an NGO, explains how physical activity serves as a crucial tool for regaining confidence in a changed body, restoring emotional balance and fostering psychological resilience. The report emphasizes how adaptive sports help counter post-service isolation by reconnecting service members to their community, while simultaneously bolstering the country's defence capacity by reintegrating future fighters.[79] By helping wounded defence personnel reject a victim mindset and re-establish structured camaraderie, adaptive sports are a vital instrument for veterans' physical and psychological healing. On an international level, major adaptive competitions such as the Invictus Games – in which Ukraine started competing in 2017 – also play a vital role in helping veterans heal wounds both visible and invisible; such events also amplify the message of Ukrainian dignity and resilience on the global stage.[80]

When adaptive sports are integrated directly into clinical rehabilitation programmes alongside standard care, veterans' recovery accelerates significantly. Research from the Centre for Strategic Communications has shown nearly 70 per cent of veterans reporting stronger social ties after completing sports-integrated rehabilitation.[81]

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76 Hovhannisyan, M. (2026), 'Мільйони ветеранів на 200 психологів. Чи готова держава до ментального фронту' [Millions of veterans for 200 psychologists. Is the state ready for the mental front?], Liga.net, 20 February 2026, https://www.liga.net/ua/politics/articles/milyony-veteraniv-na-200-psykholohiv-chy-hotova-derzhava-do-mentalnoho-frontu; Zmina (2025), 'В Україні не вистачає центрів довготривалої психологічної підтримки – Гусейнова' [Ukraine lacks centres for long-term psychological support for former POW – Huseynova], 19 August 2025, https://zmina.info/news/v-ukrayini-ne-vystachaye-czentriv-dovgotryvaloyi-psyhologichnoyi-pidtrymky-eksbranok-gusejnova; Ukhina, I. (2026), 'Що не так із протезуванням в Україні?' [What's wrong with prosthetics in Ukraine?], Deutsche Welle, 29 June 2026, https://www.dw.com/uk/protezuvanna-v-ukraini-comu-sistema-nedoskonala-i-ak-ce-zminiti-29062026/video-77676902; Holovin, O. (2026), 'Рулетка на мільйони: чому одні українці після протезування повертаються до повноцінного життя, а інші ні' [Roulette for millions: why some Ukrainians return to a full life after prosthetics, while others do not], lb.ua, 8 July 2026, https://lb.ua/health/2026/07/08/749054_ruletka_milyoni_chomu_ukrayintsi.html; Lawry, L. et al. (2025), 'A qualitative assessment of war-related rehabilitation needs and gaps in Ukraine', *Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition*, 44 (1), https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12124016.

77 IREX (2026), *Mapping of veteran organisations 2025*, p. 13, https://veteran-reintegration.in.ua/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/report-mapping-of-veteran-organizations-2025.pdf.

78 Kostyna, I., Skorokhod, K., Voronin, Y. and Bratus, Y. (2023), *Концепція добробуту ветеранів і ветеранок* [Concept of well-being for veterans], Veteran Hub, https://veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/dobrobut.pdf.

79 Bratus, Y. (2024), *Радість руху. Як адаптивний спорт допомагає ветеранам та ветеранкам відновитися* [The joy of movement: How adaptive sports help veterans recover], Come Back Alive, https://cbacenter.ngo/storage/documents/9e0971ef-3060-4f2e-8bf9-107f59c81f50/6fb6da74c19d973192799d819ff3887a3c24adfc.pdf.

80 Come Back Alive (2026), 'More than sport: How the CBA Initiatives Centre supports Ukraine at the Invictus Games', 19 February 2026, mhttps://cbacenter.ngo/en/page/more-than-sport-how-the-cba-initiatives-center-supports-ukraine-at-the-invictus-games.

81 Media Centre (2025), 'Study: Adaptive sports must accompany veterans' rehabilitation', 26 September 2025, https://mediacenter.org.ua/study-adaptive-sports-must-accompany-veterans-rehabilitation.

Supporting veterans' employment and entrepreneurship

Ukraine faces a severe demographic crisis. Nearly 5.8 million Ukrainian refugees are abroad, and an estimated 3.9 million people are internally displaced.[82] In a 2025 study, 75 per cent of Ukrainian businesses reported labour shortages.[83] Given these figures, keeping working-age veterans in active employment is an economic necessity. Civil society leaders insist that Ukraine's new veteran support system should be framed as a 'policy of opportunities rather than privileges',[84] one that rejects a paternalistic model in which veterans are treated as passive recipients of welfare; rather, the idea should be for policy to help veterans regain autonomy and develop a new civilian identity.[85]

Opportunities such as training programmes and business grants help veterans regain a sense of purpose and control after leaving the military. Such initiatives provide financial stability and empower veterans to manage their own futures. Professional development opportunities can also help to replace the peer networks which veterans may have lost since leaving active service, in turn supporting mental health rehabilitation.

The European Commission's *Ukraine 2025 Report* and a 2026 European Parliamentary Research Service briefing highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive support system to integrate veterans into the labour market, and to protect the workplace-related rights of those with disabilities caused by war injuries.[86] As with the approach outlined elsewhere in this paper (see, in particular, the section on 'Modernizing the veteran support model' above, as well as Chapter 1), these reports frame veterans not just as beneficiaries but as a vital resource for Ukraine's post-war recovery. The government's Ukraine Facility Plan – a technical document designed to guide implementation of the EU's programme of financial aid to Ukraine – also mentions how this reformed system will have a positive impact on economic growth 'by increasing the supply of labour'.[87]

A 2025 survey by the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation showed that 76 per cent of veterans believe lack of employment is likely once a soldier leaves service. Only about 27 per cent of respondents reported having experienced a smooth transition to civilian work, while nearly 25 per cent cited having encountered discrimination when applying for jobs.[88] A study by IREX has shown similar results, with over

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82 International Organization for Migration (2026), *Returning Home from Abroad: Reintegration Barriers, Outcomes and Implications for Ukraine's Recovery*, p. 2, https://dtm.iom.int/reports/iom-ukraine-returning-home-abroad-reintegration-barriers-outcomes-and-implications-ukraines.
83 European Business Association (2025), 'Дефіцит кадрів та зростання заробітних плат – тенденції ринку праці у 2026 році' [Staff shortage and wage growth – labour market trends in 2026], 21 November 2025, https://eba.com.ua/defitsyt-kadriv-ta-zrostannya-zarobitnyh-plat-tendentsiyi-rynku-pratsi-u-2026-rotsi.
84 Veterans Reintegration Programme (2025), 'Ukraine and Veterans. Shaping future policy – Challenges and solutions', 12 September 2025, https://veteran-reintegration.in.ua/en/news/ukraine-and-veterans-shaping-future-policy-challenges-and-solutions.
85 Ibid.
86 European Commission (2025), *Ukraine 2025 Report*, Commission Staff Working Document, pp. 9, 47, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/17115494-8122-4d10-8a06-2cf275eecde7_en?filename=ukraine-report-2025.pdf; European Parliament (2026), 'Ukraine's veterans policy', 9 April 2026, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2026)785703.
87 Ukraine Facility Plan (2024), *Ukraine Plan 2024–2027*, pp. 124–25, https://www.ukrainefacility.me.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ukraine-facility-plan.pdf.
88 Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (2025), *Портрет ветерана 2025* [Portrait of a veteran 2025], p. 11.

a third of respondents revealing that they had encountered obstacles in their employment search, mostly due to insufficient skills (28 per cent), physical limitations (30 per cent) and employer prejudice (29 per cent).[89] These data reveal a need for targeted and individualized career counselling, and underline the importance of businesses adapting physical premises to veterans' needs. Compared to the EU, Ukraine has a significantly lower employment rate for people with disabilities. While roughly one in two disabled people in the EU is in employment, in Ukraine the share is only about one in six.[90]

In another study led by the MoVA in collaboration with Robota.ua – one of Ukraine's top online job search platforms – 57 per cent of Ukrainian veterans reported significant barriers to civilian employment after military service.[91] It is noteworthy that the veterans self-reported having skills that are traditionally highly valued by businesses, such as adaptability (73 per cent), certified first-aid training (67 per cent), teamwork (67 per cent) and people management (65 per cent).[92] Despite this, veterans are routinely underestimated as candidates because employers struggle to recognize the value of military experience or understand how it can be applied to specific corporate roles.

Ukrainian companies have attempted to address this problem. The Nazustrich ('Toward') initiative created by Work.ua – the largest online job board in Ukraine – provides a centralized digital platform that connects returning Ukrainian veterans with prospective employers through a dedicated portal of veteran-friendly job openings and searchable candidate CVs.[93] In collaboration with the MoVA, Work.ua also created a handbook on how to translate military experience into skills applicable to civilian jobs.[94] The handbook helps veterans convert the skills and training acquired through their military service into recognizable corporate competencies on their CVs, while simultaneously equipping Ukrainian employers with guidance on properly assessing military backgrounds and building inclusive workplace cultures. The platform also provides businesses with an operational checklist to evaluate internal accessibility and inclusivity policies.[95]

Psychological assistance, private health insurance, professional career counselling and flexible work arrangements are all vital corporate tools for facilitating veterans' successful transition back to the workplace. But a lack of preparedness among businesses remains a major challenge. According to a 2025 survey, 48 per cent of companies employed people with disabilities, but more than half of Ukrainian

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89 IREX (2025), *Assessment of veteran reintegration experience after 2022*, p. 35.
90 *Sudovo-Yurydychna Gazeta* (2026), 'В Україні працює лише кожен шостий: чому 3 млн людей з інвалідністю залишаються поза ринком праці' [Only one in six works in Ukraine: Why 3 million people with disabilities remain outside the labour market], 28 July 2026, https://sud.ua/en/news/ukraine/367751-v-ukraini-pratsiuie-lyshe-kozhen-shostyi-chomu-3-mln-liudei-z-invalidnistiu-zalyshaiutsia-poza-rynkom-pratsi.
91 Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine (2025), 'Понад половина ветеранів й ветеранок стикаються з перешкодами при працевлаштуванні, – дослідження Українського ветеранського фонду' [More than half of veterans face obstacles in finding employment, according to a study by the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation], https://mva.gov.ua/prescenter/category/86-novini/ponad-polovina-veteraniv-y-veteranok-stikautsya-z-pereshkodami-pri-pratsevlashtuvanni--doslidzhennya-ukrainskogo-veteranskogo-fondu.
92 Ibid.
93 Work.ua (undated), 'Work.ua для ветеранів' [Work.ua for veterans], https://www.work.ua/en/veteran.
94 Work.ua (undated), *Від служби до роботи. Як інтегрувати військовий досвід у професійні компетенції* [From military service to a job. How to integrate military experience into professional competencies], https://drive.google.com/file/d/14_Mi4NbhTE4xk5kJADRS8M1c-3DezmJE/view.
95 Work.ua (undated), 'Наскільки ваша компанія готова брати на роботу ветеранів' [How ready is your company to hire veterans?], https://www.work.ua/en/guides/checklist/3214.

employers were not ready to adapt workplaces accordingly.[96] In another survey, by the European Business Association, 46 per cent of Ukrainian employers reported having no veteran support or adaptation programmes in place, while 44 per cent indicated they had not introduced a dedicated role overseeing internal veteran policies.[97] Due to their more limited resources, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) tend to establish a separate veteran-related role or department, typically embedded within the human resources (HR) function; bigger companies, in contrast, are increasingly introducing the new role of chief veterans' officer (CVO) to oversee internal veteran policy.[98]

Psychological assistance, private health insurance, professional career counselling and flexible work arrangements are all vital corporate tools for facilitating veterans' successful transition back to the workplace. But a lack of preparedness among businesses remains a major challenge.

Ukraine's largest businesses are leading the way in terms of re-evaluating how the corporate sector can assimilate veterans and address their needs. Major firms are rolling out comprehensive support packages both for mobilized staff and for newly hired veterans. For example, Ukraine's retail giant Aurora offers a comprehensive support package that includes full funding for psychological therapy, for legal consultations, for physical rehabilitation support, and for customized workplace schedule adjustments during medical recovery. The company has created remote positions for veterans with limited mobility, providing training and the necessary technical equipment.[99] It was also one of the first to introduce the position of CVO. The company provides peer mentorship, funds external retraining courses and is improving accessibility across all its offices. A separate focus is on the creation of inclusive workspaces and on educating the company's civilian teams, thereby helping to form a culture of mutual respect and understanding of veterans' experiences.[100] Partly because of the above initiatives, Aurora ranks among the country's most veteran-friendly employers.[101]

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96 Hrynevych, M. (2025), 'Ринок праці України: Підсумки 2025 року і прогноз 2026 року' [Ukrainian labour market: results of 2025 and forecast for 2026], Socportal, 24 December 2025, https://socportal.info/ua/news/rinok-pratci-ukraini-pidsumki-2025-i-prognoz-2026.
97 European Business Association (2025), *Ветерани в українському бізнесі* [Veterans in Ukrainian business], p. 9.
98 Ibid., p. 10.
99 Author's online interview with Mykhailo Onufer, veteran and CVO of Aurora Multimarket, 13 August 2026.
100 Aurora (2026), 'Аврора ділиться досвідом підтримки ветеранів на галузевому круглому столі' [Aurora shares its experience supporting veterans at an industry roundtable], 3 April 2026, https://robota.avrora.ua/avrora-dilitsia-dosvidom-pidtrimki-veteraniv-na-galuzevomu-kruglomu-stoli.
101 Aurora (2026), 'Aurora named among Ukraine's top 50 veteran-friendly employers by Delo.ua', 29 June 2026, http://robota.avrora.ua/en/avrora-uviisla-do-top-50-robotodavciv-dlia-veteraniv-za-versijeiu-deloua.

Another company with a prominent record in supporting veterans is DTEK, Ukraine's largest private energy operator. DTEK pioneered MOZHU ('I Can'), a digital tool designed to match veterans with disabilities to the company's industrial roles.[102] This enables HR teams to align a veteran's health profile and technical skills with specific, risk-free industrial tasks. DTEK's management has also requested extensive workplace accessibility audits[103] and has invested in re-skilling demobilized personnel for the energy sector.[104]

The government is also getting involved in helping veterans to find employment and adjust to the corporate world. In December 2024, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine launched the 'Education for Veterans' online platform, developed with the support of the Skills4Recovery programme funded by the German government.[105] The platform helps veterans transition to civilian jobs, and offers tools for job training and career growth.

In parallel, the MoVA established 'Veteran Career', a national initiative aimed at easing the transition of war veterans back into civilian life.[106] The primary goal of this online platform is to align veterans' skills with civilian career opportunities, which in turn should help to reduce unemployment and expand the tax base.[107] The platform allows veterans to access free vocational training, university degree courses and other certifications to help veterans match their skills and experience to current labour market needs. To help veterans acclimatize to corporate life, it assigns dedicated career advisors and workplace mentors to support veterans through their first six to 12 months in a new job. Just as significantly, the programme helps businesses to adjust to an influx of veterans – setting guidelines and offering financial incentives for employers to modify physical workplaces and foster inclusive company cultures. More than 3,000 veterans have signed up to use the service to build resumes and find matching jobs. Nearly 1,000 businesses use the Veteran Career platform to post job listings for returning service members.[108] Veteran Career also offers grants and business advisory services for veterans who want to start their own business.[109]

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102 DTEK (2026), 'DTEK unveils Ukraine's first job-matching tool for veterans with disabilities in industrial workplaces', 3 June 2026, https://dtek.com/en/media-center/news/dtek-unveils-ukraines-first-job-matching-tool-for-veterans-with-disabilities-in-industrial-workplace.
103 Online interview with Natalia Abramova, adviser to the CEO and manager of the 'Veterans' project, DTEK Energy, 18 August 2026.
104 DTEK (2026), 'Veterans Master New Profession in Solar Energy With Support From DTEK', press release, 27 January 2026, https://energo.dtek.com/en/media-center/press/veterani-za-pidtrimki-dtek-opanuvali-novu-profesiyu-u-sferi-sonyachnoi-energetiki.
105 Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (undated), 'Education for Veterans', https://osvitaveteraniv.gov.ua/en.
106 Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine (undated), 'Кар'єра ветерана' [Veteran career], https://work.veteranfund.com.ua.
107 Verkhovna Rada (2026), 'Державна цільова програма "Ветеран. Робота" на 2026-2027 роки' [State target programme "Veteran. Work" for 2026-2027], No. 154-р, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/154-2026-%D1%80#n9.
108 Chupak, O. (2026), 'Careers, business, digitalisation: Ukraine rethinks its veteran policy', *Ukrainian Week*, 27 April 2026, https://ukrainianweek.com/ukraine-veterans-policy.
109 Ukraine's 'On Veteran Entrepreneurship' law (passed in July 2025, effective February 2026) establishes a clear legal status for veteran entrepreneurs to access state assistance. The law lowers market barriers by reserving 10 per cent of state business funding for veterans, offering grants and interest rate rebates, and granting direct leases on public property alongside reduced IP registration fees. See Verkhovna Rada (2025), 'Закон про ветеранське підприємництво' [Law on veteran entrepreneurship], No. 4563-IX, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/4563-20#Text.

Box 3. How civil society and educational institutions support veterans with career placement, entrepreneurship and workplace inclusion

Ukrainian CSOs and educational institutions continue to play a prominent role in supporting veterans' efforts to find civilian employment or start businesses, and in helping employers to adapt their workplaces to the needs of veterans.

One example is the 'Praktyka' set of employer manuals developed by Veteran Hub in a partnership project with IREX. These free, practical guidelines have been published to help Ukrainian employers and HR professionals build veteran-inclusive workplaces.[110] Among other things, the handbooks show how recruiters can interpret job candidates' military specializations to determine how these might translate into corporate competencies; suggest workplace adjustments to accommodate veterans' rehabilitation and accessibility needs; and explain the need for trauma-informed onboarding protocols and the importance of workplace commemoration to honour veterans' service. The project also offers sector-specific manuals tailored to distinct working environments, such as the corporate sector, manufacturing and law enforcement. Additionally, it equips organizations with guidelines on communication etiquette, crisis-response protocols for combat stress triggers, and anti-stigma training modules for civilian colleagues.

Another example of similar engagement can be seen at the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU), whose Office for Veterans and Their Families delivers specialized offline training to corporate leaders and business associations. The programme is intended to equip HR professionals with practical communication tools and offers consultation services to leading Ukrainian enterprises.[111]

Beyond employment support, responding to the entrepreneurial aspirations of veterans is emerging as an increasingly important task. According to the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation, 63 per cent of Ukrainian veterans and service members want to start their own business.[112] This indicates a high level of entrepreneurial potential among veterans – a strategic asset that Ukrainian civil society is actively supporting.

Providing veterans with the skills they need to start and run businesses is a critical part of the transition. Here, educational institutions are playing an active role in training and up-skilling veterans. For example, through entrepreneurship programmes and partnerships with the MoEE, the Kyiv School of Economics provides business planning, financial modelling and grant-writing mentorship programmes to help veterans and their spouses secure start-up capital.[113] Similarly, the UCU Business School in Lviv

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110 Veteran Hub (undated), *Посібники "Практика"* ["Praktyka" Handbooks], https://praktyka.veteranhub.com.ua/guides-and-research.
111 Lviv Business School (2026), 'Воркшоп: "Корпоративні політики підтримки ветеранів та їх родин"' [Workshop: "Corporate policies to support veterans and their families"], 30 June 2026, https://lvbs.com.ua/en/news/vorkshop-korporatyvni-polityky-pidtrymky-veteraniv-ta-yih-rodyn.
112 Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (2024), *Актуальні проблеми та бачення можливостей для кар'єрного і професійного зростання ветеранів* [Current needs and views of opportunities for veterans' career and professional growth], p. 12, https://veteranfund.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/pracevlashtuvanna.pdf.
113 KSE Foundation (2023), 'The Kyiv School of Economics will help veterans start their own business together with the Ministry of Economy', 6 July 2023, https://foundation.kse.ua/en/the-kyiv-school-of-economics-will-help-veterans-start-their-own-business-together-with-the-ministry-of-economy.

has created a 'School of Resilience for Veteran-Owned Businesses', offering veterans individual mentoring and access to advisory boards so that those starting or seeking to start businesses can draw on the experience of business experts.[114]

Overall, these initiatives show how Ukrainian CSOs and higher education institutions should be seen as more than just service providers for veteran support. They are driving a cultural shift: equipping businesses with the expertise to eliminate reintegration barriers; empowering veterans to maintain economic agency; and reinforcing the long-term stability of Ukraine's civilian workforce.

Reducing social stigma and improving community cohesion

Ukrainian society exhibits a paradox: intense admiration for Ukrainian defenders alongside anxiety regarding demobilized personnel. Public trust in the Armed Forces of Ukraine consistently polls at over 90 per cent, making the military the most trusted institution in the country.[115] At the same time, veterans face persistent social stigma and perceive a lack of understanding from society, leading to feelings of isolation as they transition back into communities.

Ukrainian society exhibits a paradox: intense admiration for Ukrainian defenders alongside anxiety regarding demobilized personnel.

According to a 2025 survey by the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation, 76 per cent of veterans fear societal misunderstanding.[116] In another IREX survey, veterans were asked which characteristics they thought are most often attributed to veterans in society. Although one in two respondents believed civilians tend to associate veterans with attributes such as 'patriotism' and 'bravery', 22 per cent and 28 per cent of respondents respectively believed that veterans are predominantly seen as 'socially isolated' or 'mentally unstable'.[117] In a study by the International Organization for Migration, veterans reported a sharp deterioration in their perceived community belonging. The percentage of veterans feeling 'not at all' connected to their local community tripled in just one quarter, surging from 9 per cent in late 2025

114 UCU Business School (undated), 'Veteran-owned businesses: From local impact to global opportunities', https://lvbs.com.ua/en/news-en/from-intuition-to-system-how-veteran-owned-businesses-can-enter-international-markets.
115 KIIS (2026), 'Довіра суспільним інституціям' [Trust in public institutions], 13 January 2026, https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=1578&page=1; Razumkov Centre (2025), 'Оцінка ситуації в країні, довіра до соціальних інститутів, оцінка проблем, що існують в українському суспільстві (листопад 2025р.)' [Assessment of the situation in the country, trust in social institutions, assessment of problems existing in Ukrainian society (November 2025)], 16 December 2025, https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-sytuatsii-v-kraini-dovira-do-sotsialnykh-instytutiv-otsinka-problem-shcho-isnuiut-v-ukrainskomu-suspilstvi-lystopad-2025r.
116 Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (2025), *Портрет ветерана 2025* [Portrait of a veteran 2025], p. 11.
117 IREX (2025), *Assessment of veteran reintegration experience after 2022*, p. 11.

to 27 per cent in early 2026. Over the same period, the percentage of veterans who felt 'very easily' integrated into their community dropped from 23 per cent to just 8 per cent.[118]

A particular problem in societal attitudes towards Ukrainian veterans is the idea that all combat veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[119] While war inflicts severe psychological stress, studies show that most veterans do not develop clinical PTSD.[120] This persistent myth can create employment discrimination and stigma. When society labels all veterans as 'traumatized', it creates a social divide between civilians and former service members.

Sensing this judgment, many veterans self-isolate to avoid being judged or treated like a liability. Such withdrawal frequently worsens their psychological distress. This isolation is compounded by a military culture that equates seeking help for mental health problems with weakness. Rather than risking their standing or identity, many choose to suffer in silence. For those living in smaller, tight-knit communities, this reluctance is even stronger, as the intense fear of local gossip and social shame creates an added barrier to getting help.

Efforts to address this issue are ongoing both at corporate level and in government. In the corporate sector, energy operator DTEK has provided access to online therapy for its war veteran employees. The company has stressed the importance of increasing awareness of veterans' mental health challenges among the wider community.[121] At the same time, legislative reform has a role to play. Through a 2025 law Ukraine is attempting to transform its mental health framework by shifting from a centralized model of care to a community-based care system.[122] The idea is to expand access to localized psychological care and build long-term societal resilience against widespread war trauma.

Accurate and ethical public communications on veteran issues will be critical to improving reintegration and ensuring the smooth reassimilation of former combatants into civilian life. According to a monitoring report by the Institute of Mass Information (IMI), veterans remain largely invisible in the national information space. When attention is paid to this topic, media coverage often frames veterans as passive recipients of state aid and benefits; moreover,

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118 International Organization for Migration (2026), *Veterans reintegration in Ukraine: Compounding vulnerabilities and access to support among veterans*, May 2026, p. 2, https://dtm.iom.int/reports/ukraine-veterans-reintegration-ukraine-compounding-vulnerabilities-and-access-support-among.
119 Selyaninova, A. et al. (2025), *Стигматизація ветеранів і ветеранок: Ситуація в Україні та досвід США* [The stigmatization of veterans: The situation in Ukraine and the US experience], Ukrainian Veterans Foundation, https://veteranfund.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Styhmatyzatsiia-veteraniv-i-veteranok.pdf.
120 Osmolovska, I. et al. (2023), *Scars on their souls: PTSD and veterans of Ukraine*, Globsec, https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/GLOBSEC_PTSD%20Report.pdf. See also: Trachuk, O. (2026), '"Лише 15% ветеранів мають ПТСР": які стереотипи про психічне здоров'я військових є хибними' ["Only 15% of veterans have PTSD": common misconceptions about mental health among servicepeople], Radio Khartia, 8 September 2026, https://radiokhartia.com/news-and-comments/lyshe-15-veteraniv-maiut-ptsr-iaki-stereotypy-pro-psykhichne-zdorovia-viiskovykh-ie-khybnymy.
121 Author's online interview with Natalia Abramova, adviser to the CEO and manager of the 'Veterans' project, DTEK Energy, 18 August 2026.
122 Verkhovna Rada (2025), 'Закон про систему охорони психічного здоров'я в Україні' [Law on the mental health care system in Ukraine], https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/4223-20#Text.

representation is starkly imbalanced regarding gender. This highlights the failure of mainstream media to understand veterans as active professionals and members of civilian society.[123]

Recognizing such risks, the Ukrainian government has published guidelines on breaking harmful social stereotypes, respecting the personal dignity of veterans, and accurately depicting their experiences and needs.[124] In particular, the guidelines stipulate that coverage must abandon extreme, outdated narratives (such as over-heroizing service members or, conversely, reducing them to charity cases) and instead emphasize their agency, resilience and civic contributions. These guidelines also explain how media outlets need to adopt respectful, trauma-informed interview practices that prioritize informed consent, eliminate gender-biased or sexualized coverage of women veterans, and put veterans' voices front and centre.

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Here it is worth mentioning the work of Veteranka, the first and largest community of female combat veterans and active-duty servicewomen in Ukraine. Launched in 2018, the organization advocates for gender equality in the security and defence sector, provides support with psychological and medical rehabilitation to returning female veterans, and delivers military gear to women serving on the front lines.[125] As part of its public advocacy, Veteranka launched an awareness campaign entitled 'Women can do anything!', aimed at shattering social stereotypes about female service members.[126] The organization's advocacy also played an important role in getting Ukraine's parliament to amend the official name of the 'Day of Defenders' state holiday: in July 2021, the previous wording, which used the masculine-only

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123 Barkar, D. (2026), 'Майже невидимі. Який образ ветеранів створюють українські медіа' [Almost invisible. What image of veterans is created by Ukrainian media?], Institute of Mass Information, https://imi.org.ua/monitorings/majzhe-nevydymi-yakyj-obraz-veteraniv-stvoryuyut-ukrayinski-media.
124 Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (2023), *Як писати про ветеранів. Рекомендації для журналістів від Українського Ветеранського Фонду* [How to write about veterans. Recommendations for journalists from the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation], https://veteranfund.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/how_to_write_about_veterans.pdf.
125 Rukh Veteranka (2026), 'Хто такі рух VETERANKA, що ми робимо і для кого існуємо' [Who is the VETERANKA movement, what do we do and who do we exist for?], Facebook, 28 July 2026, https://www.facebook.com/VeterankaMovement/posts/хто-такі-рух-veteranka-що-ми-робимо-і-для-кого-існуєморух-veteranka-перша-та-єди/1510835941064929.
126 Detektor Media (2025), '"Жінки можуть!": Рух VETERANKA запускає масштабну інформаційну кампанію, присвячену захисницям України у війську' ["Women Can!" The VETERANKA Movement launches a large-scale information campaign dedicated to the defenders of Ukraine in the army], 30 September 2025, https://detector.media/infospace/article/244543/2025-09-30-zhinky-mozhut-rukh-veteranka-zapuskaie-masshtabnu-informatsiynu-kampaniyu-prysvyachenu-zakhysnytsyam-ukrainy-u-viysku. The promotional video can be viewed here: https://www.instagram.com/p/DPQRzLmiAnI.

noun form *zakhysnykiv* ('defenders'), was replaced with wording that included both masculine and feminine (*zakhysnyts*) forms to explicitly recognize the contribution of women serving in the armed forces.[127]

How civil society bridges the gap between veterans and civilians

Through community-led initiatives, mentorship programmes and local cultural projects, Ukrainian CSOs and educational institutions offer returning service members a supportive environment to transition smoothly back into civilian life and leverage skills developed in the military for new leadership roles. At the same time, these ongoing interactions help civilians gain a deeper, more empathetic understanding of veterans' experiences, combating stigma and strengthening community cohesion.

One example of this in practice is the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Centre at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. The centre is Ukraine's first university-based facility specifically designed to help military veterans develop their leadership capabilities for post-war public roles. Its objective is to empower the next generation of civic, political and business leaders among veterans. The centre offers free-of-charge courses on topics such as 'leadership and resilience', as well as programmes tailored to help veterans translate their military experience into public policy and community roles.[128] It also runs the 'Community of Action', an alumni network linking veterans with top academic faculty, business executives, policymakers and civic leaders. The centre develops, tests and scales up examples of best practice in veteran support so that other higher education institutions across Ukraine can replicate them.

As mentioned above, local hromadas – especially in rural areas – often lack sufficient resources to deliver adequate support services to veterans and their families. The first step in addressing this problem is often to understand veterans' needs and determine which critical services are lacking, so that policy can be adapted accordingly. Organizations such as the above-mentioned Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Centre have been instrumental in this respect, conducting needs assessment audits and training workshops for hromada representatives to identify and address the main knowledge and capacity gaps affecting veterans' return to local communities.[129] Civil society has also been behind initiatives such as the 'coffee with a veteran' programme, which attempts to facilitate dialogue between returning service members and the wider community.[130]

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127 In the Ukrainian language, the previous title used only the masculine plural form, *zakhysnykiv*. The addition of the feminine noun form – *zakhysnyts* – officially enshrined female soldiers, combat medics and volunteers into the national holiday's official title [*Den zakhysnykiv i zakhysnyts Ukrayiny*]. Author's online interview with Kateryna Pryimak, combat medic, veteran and co-founder of NGO Veteranka (Ukrainian Women Veterans Movement), 22 July 2026.
128 Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Centre (2025), *Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Centre: Report 2024-2025*, https://www.ukma.edu.ua/eng/images/pics/centers/defenders/Report_UDLC_2024-2025-s.pdf.
129 Ibid.
130 Vita TV (2025), '"Кава з ветераном": простір довіри, де говорять про війну, втрати й повернення до життя' ["Coffee with a Veteran": a space of trust where people talk about war, loss, and returning to life], 6 November 2025, https://vitatv.com.ua/programs/tok-shou-na-chasi/kava-z-veteranom-prostir; Rayon (2025), 'Волинь започаткувала традицію "кави з ветераном" як простору довіри і вдячності' [Volyn started the tradition of "coffee with a veteran" as a space of trust and gratitude], 1 October 2025, https://rayon.in.ua/news/839053-volin-zapochatkuvala-traditsiyu-kavi-z-veteranom-yak-prostoru-doviri-i-vdyachnosti.

Another component of veteran support has been the establishment of dedicated 'veteran spaces' [*veteranski prostory*] – physical community hubs designed to serve as one-stop centres for former service members, active military personnel and their families. The term applies both to spaces provided by the state and to those run by CSOs. At the state level, some veteran spaces are operated directly by the MoVA, municipal governments or CNAPs; these hubs offer comprehensive psychological support, legal aid, social assistance and physical rehabilitation; they feature fully equipped gyms, offer dedicated spaces for specialist consultations and provide comfortable recreation areas. Veteran spaces run by charitable foundations and CSO coalitions (such as the Coalition of Veteran Spaces) tend to emphasize peer-to-peer connection, community-building, trauma-informed therapy and entrepreneurship training.

Box 4. Mobile care units – how civil society delivers veteran care where the state does not reach

Mobile civil society groups operating under the umbrella of the Coalition of Veteran Spaces – a network of veteran-led CSOs across Ukraine – travel into communities to deliver critical, localized support directly to veterans and their families, including families of deceased service members. Operating from eight regional hubs (Lviv, Rivne, Odesa, Vinnytsia, Sumy, Khmelnytskyi, Dnipro and Mykolaiv) as well as surrounding rural hromadas, these mobile groups bring services directly to areas where veteran support infrastructure is otherwise scarce.

The mobile teams provide a variety of services, including on-site legal aid (such as for navigating disability status registration and social benefit applications), individual and group psychological support, and personalized case management. Through their work, they prevent veterans' isolation, lower the administrative burden on defenders and their families, and ensure that a defender's quality of care and economic recovery prospects are not merely a function of geographic chance.

The mobile groups are supported by IREX and the International Renaissance Foundation, as well as by Ukrnafta, Ukraine's largest oil and natural gas extracting company, which provides the vehicles used.[131]

131 ReSTART (2025), 'Як працюють мобільні групи при ветеранських просторах? (ВІДЕО)' [How do mobile groups work at veterans' spaces? (VIDEO)], 12 March 2025, https://restartukraine.com.ua/news/yak-pratsyuyut-mobilni-grupy-pry-veteranskyh-prostorah-video.

04 Implications of veteran policy for domestic and European resilience and stability

How successfully Ukraine supports its veterans not only is important for the country's own economic recovery, social cohesion and future defence readiness, but also has relevance for European security and resilience to Russian threats.

Reintegrating Ukraine's rising numbers of veterans and supporting their families present an enormous domestic challenge. As Ukraine continues its EU accession negotiations, the success or failure of its veteran policy will serve as a critical indicator of state capacity and democratic health. More broadly, whether Ukraine meets this challenge will have consequences for European security, economic resilience and geopolitical stability.

Ukrainian veterans, if successfully integrated into civilian life, will be available to form the core of a highly experienced reserve force that can benefit not only Ukraine's defences but those of other European countries. As such, an effective veterans' policy stands to strengthen NATO's eastern flank, providing a deterrent against future Russian aggression. Ukrainian veterans also bring rare skills in complex logistics, crisis management, IT and engineering. By re-entering

the civilian workforce, they can become valuable contributors to Ukraine's tax base and innovation drive. This will accelerate Ukraine's recovery, thereby reducing the country's reliance on Europe to meet its financing needs in the longer term.

The presence of veterans in Ukrainian society also stands to strengthen democratic and institutional accountability. Given their immense sacrifices, Ukrainian veterans possess low tolerance for corruption and show high levels of civic responsibility.[132] According to unpublished data from the 2026 Chatham House survey of Ukrainian civil society, 74 per cent of CSOs working with veterans and their families identified embezzlement of state funds as a top risk for the country's recovery. Giving Ukrainian veterans the opportunity to become political and community leaders will strengthen Ukraine's democratic governance, which would have the added benefit of directly aligning with EU accession mandates.

An effective veterans' policy stands to strengthen NATO's eastern flank, providing a deterrent against future Russian aggression. Ukrainian veterans also bring rare skills in complex logistics, crisis management, IT and engineering.

Finally, a functioning Ukrainian veteran support system would represent an international gold-standard model for combat trauma protocols, prosthetics innovation and demobilization frameworks; Europe can learn much from Ukraine's wartime experience, resilience and resourcefulness as both EU and non-EU European states commit to increasing their *own* preparedness against possible Russian attack.[133]

The other side of this coin is that a failure to meet Ukrainian veterans' rehabilitation and socio-economic needs would have wide-ranging negative impacts. It would breed disillusionment among veterans. Economic marginalization and fractured support structures would risk fuelling societal polarization and increasing the vulnerability of veterans to recruitment by extremist or illicit networks – pressures that would reverberate far beyond Ukraine's western borders into the rest of Europe. Unaddressed grievances would create fertile ground for the spread of populist political narratives, while Russia would actively exploit public discontent to destabilize Ukraine from within.

If Ukrainian veterans do not see adequate opportunities in the country post-war, many will choose to leave to join their families abroad once demobilized; they are especially likely to go to EU member states already hosting large numbers

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132 Machlouzarides, M., Kharchenko, V. and Sereda, P. (2025), *Adapting to civilian life: Entry points to strengthen veterans' reintegration in Ukraine*, EU Neighbours East, pp. 50–52, https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/publications/adapting-to-civilian-life-entry-points-to-strengthen-veterans-reintegration-in-ukraine.
133 Seligman, L. and Kubota, Y. (2026), 'U.S. Intel Finds Putin Could Test NATO's Resolve With Limited Incursion', *Wall Street Journal*, 6 August 2026, https://www.wsj.com/world/europe/u-s-intel-finds-putin-could-test-natos-resolve-with-limited-incursion-e3b02e2c; Rothwell, J., Kwiecien, P. and Sabur, R. (2026), 'How Britain fell behind Europe in race to prepare civilians for war', *Telegraph*, 1 June 2026, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2026/06/01/europe-civilians-train-war-russia-ukraine-poland-nordic.

of Ukrainian refugees.[134] This would exacerbate Ukraine's demographic crisis, undermine its recovery, and place additional strains on European healthcare, asylum and social security systems. In turn, this would open opportunities for populist political movements in Europe and elsewhere. Moreover, highly skilled Ukrainian veterans may be lured by private foreign defence and security firms, deepening the domestic labour crisis.[135]

Russia can be expected to maintain hybrid operations long after formal hostilities end. Such operations risk undermining veterans' military-to-civilian transition in Ukraine, as Russia will seek to preserve the psychological, social and economic conditions of active conflict. Continuous Russian cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns and border provocations will keep Ukrainian society in a perpetual state of ambiguity, depriving returning service members of the definitive sense of security needed to heal from combat trauma. Moreover, instability will deter the foreign investment required for economic regeneration. Finally, hostile grey-zone tactics by Russia will seek to exploit veterans' grievances and fuel societal divides with the goal of fracturing Ukraine's social cohesion and undermining post-war recovery.

134 These concerns have been informally raised in closed-door consultations.
135 Author's online interview with Oksana Koliada, 23 July 2026. Koliada is chairperson of the board of the NGO 'Human Capital Recovery Platform. RESTART' and head of the public union 'Coalition of Veteran Spaces'. She was also the minister of veterans' affairs, Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine in 2019–20.

05 Recommendations

Veteran policy touches on so many aspects of Ukrainian life that the list of urgently needed reforms is an unavoidably long one. But if a single theme unites the recommendations presented below, it is that veteran support needs to be institutionally robust and more coordinated.

In light of the reintegration imperatives, practical constraints and risks outlined in the preceding chapters, this chapter proposes a set of policy recommendations intended to strengthen veteran care in Ukraine, preserve and scale up interventions that have proven effective, and fill gaps in policy where appropriate service provision remains insufficient or lacking. The recommendations are divided into four categories, aimed respectively at the key sets of actors most relevant to Ukrainian veteran policy: the Ukrainian government (both the central authorities and regional or hromada-level administrations); private sector enterprises; CSOs, NGOs and related civil society actors; and international donors.

Ukrainian government (at all levels)

Relevant Ukrainian government entities, aided by policymakers, legislators and other officials, need to:

- **Finalize and enforce the draft veterans' code.** The aim should be to replace a passive system of social handouts and unsustainable Soviet-era statutory promises with actionable tools to restore human capital. (Such tools would include targeted entrepreneurship grants, subsidized retraining and veteran access to case managers in local communities.) This new approach will prevent severe post-demobilization economic shocks and strengthen social cohesion. Integrating all existing pieces of legislation into one code will help future veterans and their families navigate the new system more easily.
- **Elevate the position of minister of veterans' affairs to the level of deputy prime minister.** Veteran care is currently siloed across multiple ministries, creating confusing overlaps for veterans and their families. Making the minister

of veterans' affairs a more senior position would give the office-holder the authority to break administrative bottlenecks, and would help to institutionalize veteran policy as a cross-governmental priority. The minister could set up an interministerial taskforce with the mandate to harmonize policies, align cross-departmental budgets and resolve data-sharing challenges, for example between the MoD (discharge logs), the MoH (medical data) and the MoSP (disability pensions). Such a taskforce should also be responsible for addressing the current 'vertical' disconnects between the central government and local hromadas, and for government coordination with civil society and the business sector.

— **Continue synchronizing data across ministries to streamline veteran support services.** A single status update in the Unified State Register of War Veterans should automatically notify health and employment systems to prepare local support without requiring veterans to resubmit documentation to multiple agencies or offices.

— **Expand networks of veteran spaces and widen access to local veteran support specialists.** Local communities are the primary sites where housing, social care and local services are delivered. Central policy directives frequently stall at the local level, especially in hromadas that lack specialized staff, financial resources or clear guidance on how to execute national mandates. Training certified case managers who can navigate state systems, and employing these managers at designated veteran spaces or municipal administrative centres, will immensely benefit veterans and their families, and help the country's support services to manage case numbers more efficiently.

— **Improve and expand local social service capacity in communities.** When a veteran support specialist refers a veteran to a medical professional or other service provider, the referral is only as effective as the community's capacity to deliver targeted care. In many cases, developing this capacity will require communities to expedite training and credentialling of mental health professionals so that those tasked with looking after veterans have recognized competency related to military culture. Investing directly in local provider infrastructure will ensure that veterans receive immediate, high-quality support within their communities.

— **Establish an international research hub, collaborating with academic bodies and international partners to maintain a longitudinal database on research around veteran reintegration and support for veterans' families.**[136] There is an ever-growing body of research on veterans' needs and views, although these efforts tend to be fragmented and project-based. A centralized, international research hub could develop standardized survey questions and run regular interviews and focus groups to track indicators over time, such as on employee retention rates and community belonging. In turn, such data could help international donors to allocate funding more efficiently. Policies often treat veterans as a monolithic group, ignoring crucial demographic variations and differences in combat experience and post-combat

136 The MoVA is already exploring this possibility.

needs. Currently, there are no reliable comparable data on different veteran cohorts, or on geographical differences in veterans' needs and access to support services. Research collaborations created through this hub could focus on disaggregating data by gender (e.g. addressing specific health and career needs of women veterans), displacement status (e.g. tracking internally displaced veterans who have lost their housing), disability category (e.g. differentiating care needs for those requiring long-term specialized prosthetics) and geography (e.g. identifying service coverage gaps between major metropolitan areas and rural hromadas).

— **Create a separate section on the Veteran PRO website that integrates information on key services provided by prominent CSOs.** This could be a collaborative project to emphasize the fact that government and civil society can contribute jointly to the ever-growing marketplace of social services available to veterans and their families. One potential model for such a project is the UK government's directory of support services for veterans and their families; the directory lists, under thematic sections, the services provided by the government as well as those provided by charities, thereby enabling veterans to avoid having to look up services in two or more places.[137]

— **Promote state procurement of veteran-focused services from CSOs, including by establishing a formal quality assurance and certification framework for such entities and their services.** Specific procurement mechanisms already exist, but they remain limited in scale and fragmented. For example, the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation runs grant programmes that directly allocate state funds to CSOs to deliver veteran reintegration, psychological support and business assistance. Local authorities can also contract private non-profits. Standardizing CSO services through a certification scheme, potentially led by the MoVA, would enforce adherence to clinical and ethical benchmarks for trauma care. It would enable transparent allocation of public funds directly to the most impactful CSOs committed to veteran support.

— **Partner with Ukrainian CSOs, education programmes, media organizations and businesses to promote national awareness campaigns on trauma-informed communication, and mandate comprehensive sensitivity training across all sectors.** Public interactions with veterans can often inadvertently trigger retraumatization and social misunderstanding – for example, if civilians are unsure how to discuss sensitive subjects with veterans. To establish a supportive environment, the government should deploy nationwide multimedia campaigns to combat harmful stereotypes and normalize mental healthcare. Simultaneously, this effort must be backed by compulsory trauma-informed communication training modules for civil servants, healthcare workers, administrative service centre (CNAP) personnel, law enforcement officers and public transport operators. Employer awareness of existing policy

137 UK Government, Office for Veterans' Affairs (undated), 'Find organisations that support veterans and their families', https://www.gov.uk/veteran-support-organisations.

guidance on fostering inclusive workplaces should be increased. Ultimately, the media must frame veterans as valued citizens to whom society owes an inclusive environment and dignity-preserving help with their return to civilian life.

— **Institutionalize mandatory veteran representation within local government by establishing formal veteran advisory councils or offices directly attached to local mayoral bodies and hromada councils.** By granting these councils the right to review local development plans, budget allocations and social service policies, Ukraine can ensure municipal policies reflect the real needs of its defenders and empower veterans to actively shape their home communities.

— **Establish a compulsory, national peer-to-peer residency and exchange programme for local government representatives, to accelerate the spread of high-quality veteran policies across hromadas.** An exchange system of sorts already exists, but only on a voluntary basis. For example, Lviv, widely recognized as a leading hromada on comprehensive veteran integration models, has put in place a residency scheme to share its experience with other cities.[138] This approach could be institutionalized and scaled up through the MoVA in partnership with local communities. Municipal officers could travel to other hromadas to observe local support programmes in action, attend workshops and return with concrete operational blueprints tailored to their home communities. Introducing structured peer exchanges would resolve a major implementation gap across Ukraine, wherein regional disparities leave many hromadas struggling to offer more than basic, ad hoc veteran programmes while the use of innovative, highly effective local solutions remains isolated in a few pioneering municipalities. By creating a formalized mechanism for cross-community sharing of best practice, Ukraine can rapidly scale up proven reintegration methods, maximize the impact of municipal budgets and establish a consistently high standard of veteran care across every hromada in the country.

Ukrainian private sector

Private enterprises represent one of the major potential sources of employment for returning veterans. To ensure a smooth transition, provide appropriate support and make best use of veterans' talents and skills, private sector firms should be encouraged to do the following:

— **Create the executive role of chief veterans' officer (CVO) to lead corporate reintegration strategies.** An explicit requirement should be that the role itself be taken by a qualified veteran.[139] CVOs could help companies implement internal inclusivity frameworks, based on toolkits such as Praktyka (see Chapter 3), and could assist HR departments in implementing trauma-informed onboarding protocols and adaptation policies. Because veterans returning to the civilian

138 Lviv City Council (2026), 'Як працювати з ветеранами: Львів поділився своїм досвідом з 15 містами України (фото/відео)' [How to work with veterans: Lviv shared its experience with 15 cities in Ukraine (photo/video)], 5 March 2026, https://city-adm.lviv.ua/news/society/social-sphere/yak-pratsiuvaty-z-veteranamy-lviv-podilyvsia-svoim-dosvidom-z-16-mistamy-ukrainy-foto-video.
139 This is already being recommended by existing CVOs in Ukraine. See Onufer, M. (2025), 'Ветеранська політика: з чого почати' [Veterans' policy: Where to start], *Ekonomichna Pravda*, 13 October 2025, https://epravda.com.ua/biznes/veteranska-politika-z-chogo-pochati-812788.

workforce must navigate unique shifts in culture and identity, a CVO who is themselves a veteran is more likely to be able to establish instant trust and serve as a bridge between corporate culture and military veterans. A CVO who has served in the military can also more accurately evaluate a candidate or employee's military experience, so that veterans can be placed in roles where their skills deliver maximum business value.

- **Establish structured peer-to-peer mentorship programmes that pair returning service members with colleagues who have already navigated the transition from the military to the civilian workforce.** Veterans who share combat experience can provide psychological safety, career guidance and empathy in a way that non-veteran staff cannot replicate. Peer-to-peer and psychological support services of this nature would facilitate veteran onboarding and smooth the cultural transition from military to civilian life, thereby potentially increasing long-term retention rates of veterans by companies.
- **Implement trauma-informed care and physical accommodations in the workplace.** Employers should provide training for HR managers and middle management on military culture, trauma triggers and mental health awareness. These programmes will help establish an inclusive corporate culture by combating stigma among civilian employees, setting realistic performance expectations during onboarding, and recognizing the unique leadership skills veterans bring to Ukrainian businesses. Companies should conduct audits of their facilities so that physical workspaces can be adapted for wounded or disabled service members; employers should also offer flexible work hours for veterans managing ongoing physical rehabilitation, mental health treatments or family care responsibilities. Such adjustments would make veterans feel valued as employees, potentially encouraging them in turn to become 'ambassadors' assisting in the transition and onboarding of future returnees.
- **Maintain continuous communication and offer support-related resources (such as legal, psychological and financial assistance) to existing employees who are currently away from the workplace on active military duty,** well before their official discharge and return to their civilian roles. This will smooth veterans' return to the workplace and strengthen their sense that their service to the country is valued.
- **Establish corporate remembrance practices, which may include observing daily rituals (e.g. the national minute of silence) or providing quiet spaces for reflection.** This approach signals genuine appreciation for employees' military service while preserving psychological boundaries and fostering a supportive workplace environment.
- **Co-create personalized professional roadmaps** that offer tailored retraining, flexible working conditions and meaningful work opportunities, allowing veterans to direct their own professional growth. This also means avoiding generic, one-size-fits-all reintegration packages. Giving veterans agency over their career trajectory is not only empowering for the employees in question, but will help them to contribute more effectively to the businesses in which they work.

Ukrainian CSOs and other non-profits

Researchers at Chatham House have long advocated a more prominent and structured role for civil society in supporting Ukraine's recovery.[140] CSOs already do a huge amount for veterans and are part of the backbone of critical support services, but more coordination of their efforts would be beneficial. To this end, this paper recommends that Ukrainian civil society actors take the following steps:

- **Establish a coalition of CSOs that can collaborate to create and maintain a live, interactive map cataloguing the veteran support available from CSOs.** This would operate in a similar way to how Veteran PRO aggregates and systematizes information, including contact details, on government services for veterans and their families. Another good model is the 'Nashi Tut' platform, which has an interactive map showing the location of rehabilitation centres, sports clubs and veteran hubs.[141] A tool of this type should be used as an open-access, digital platform that the national government could potentially integrate into its own Veteran PRO ecosystem. Systematic tracking of available services would enable governmental and non-governmental actors alike to optimize resource allocation, identify service gaps and foster cross-sector partnerships, ensuring that every veteran is efficiently guided towards available resources.
- **Implement a robust, decentralized monitoring framework in collaboration with the MoVA to evaluate how national mandates are being executed at the hromada level.** Systematic tracking would highlight where local delivery is falling short, and would improve administrative accountability by providing government officials and CSOs alike with real-time data to target interventions and funding more effectively. CSOs often have on-the-ground relationships and information that would leave them best placed to implement such a framework.
- **Launch nationwide public awareness campaigns, paired with community-level dialogue projects, to bridge the cultural and psychological divide between civilians and returning combatants.** CSOs should partner with local government, cultural centres, educational institutions and media organizations to deliver training on trauma-informed communication, and to facilitate meetings between veterans and local communities. Veterans frequently report feelings of alienation due to civilian misunderstandings of combat trauma. Educating communities would reduce social friction and promote public perceptions of veterans as active members of Ukrainian society.
- **Collaborate with journalists and media experts to refine and disseminate guidelines on how veterans should be portrayed in national and local media.** CSOs could consider issuing quarterly reviews monitoring media compliance with ethical guidelines. Other helpful instruments could include running workshops on how to implement trauma-informed interview protocols.

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140 Lutsevych and Barbieri (2026), *Why a 'whole-of-society' model is essential for Ukraine's recovery*; Lutsevych, O. (2025), *Mobilizing 'Team Ukraine' for a successful recovery: How the state, communities and citizens can rebuild the country together*, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, https://doi.org/10.55317/9781784136567.
141 CBA initiatives Center (undated), 'Інтерактивна мапа місць для відновлення ветеранів/ок' [Interactive map of veteran recovery sites], https://nashi.cbacenter.ngo/map.

— **Coordinate with Ukrainian diaspora networks to establish veteran hubs and communal spaces abroad tasked with providing comprehensive assistance to current veterans and their families and to future arrivals.** Providing assistance with access to specialized medical care, pro bono legal guidance, peer support, mentorship programmes and language courses, diaspora organizations can facilitate the rehabilitation and social integration of veterans and their families in host countries. Overall, these spaces will provide crucial practical and emotional support, reduce financial and administrative burdens on host nations' public infrastructure, and safeguard Ukraine's human capital for post-war recovery.

International donors

International support and investment have a role to play not only in Ukraine's immediate war effort but in recovery and veteran care. To help Ukraine develop, roll out and maintain improved veteran services, international donors should:

— **Set up a permanent civil society council within the Ukraine Donor Platform (UDP), and mandate that at least 15 per cent of the new council's seats be designated for veteran-led organizations and veteran reintegration experts nominated by CSO networks.** This new council would in effect mirror the UDP's existing Business Advisory Council, which helps the Ukrainian government to improve its regulatory and business environment and guides international investors on mobilizing private capital for Ukraine's recovery. However, unlike the existing situation in which UDP engagement with CSOs relies on ad hoc, informal consultative roundtables,[142] the new council would give CSOs more formalized policy influence. For international partners investing in Ukraine's recovery, achieving an adequate return on investment depends on long-term social stability, security and economic resilience, all of which require successful veteran reintegration. By incorporating veteran and civil society voices at the strategic level, international partners can ensure that financial assistance is directed towards the real needs and priorities of veterans and their families.

— **Move away from short-term project grants towards provision of core operating funds on a three- to five-year timeline, with funds allocated directly to Ukrainian CSOs and local municipal hubs.** Veteran support, from lifelong prosthetic care to long-term economic integration, requires multi-year institutional funding. However, many international donors fund project-based initiatives with much shorter grant cycles. Extending grant cycles will provide financial stability for veteran-care projects, allowing these initiatives to retain professional expertise and ensure continuity of care.

142 Ukraine Donor Platform (2025), *The Ukraine Donor Platform – Civil Society Roundtable' – 25 March 2026*, Summary Report, https://ukrainedonorplatform.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/25.03.26-CSO-event-report-FINAL-260528.pdf.

- **Invest in training local Ukrainian professionals, such as up-skilling municipal social workers, expanding the pool of Ukrainian mental health professionals and building local prosthetic maintenance labs.** This will ensure that expertise stays inside Ukraine long after international aid organizations eventually scale back operations, and that veterans and their families can continue to access high-quality services in their host communities and regions.
- **Support CSOs committed to expanding coverage of veteran services to rural hromadas and other communities lacking adequate capacity.** For example, this can be done by co-funding mobile veteran support vehicles to allow specialists to reach rural or remote areas. A critical vulnerability in Ukraine's veteran support infrastructure is the severe geographic disparity in care, as physical CNAPs are concentrated in major urban centres.
- **Track the effectiveness of veteran initiatives alongside indicators of veterans' satisfaction and long-term socio-economic integration over time.** There is insufficient data tracking the effectiveness of veteran policies. This leaves policymakers blind to whether any particular initiative boosts long-term societal integration or merely offers short-term relief. Establishing independent evidence loops would ensure state resources and international funding are allocated to known high-impact programmes while holding service providers accountable for measurable integration outcomes.
- **Co-finance micro-grant schemes (e.g. by expanding initiatives like the state eRobota platform) to pool public and donor capital directly into veteran-owned businesses.** Among other features, these schemes should provide tailored business incubation services, financial literacy training, and grants to incentivize entrepreneurs who are war veterans to hire fellow veterans. Directing capital into veteran-led ventures will also bolster local tax receipts and accelerate national recovery.

06 Conclusion

From economic recovery to continental security, there is too much at stake for Ukrainian veteran policy to fail. Even though active hostilities with Russia will inevitably consume policy attention and resources, considering the social and economic challenges Ukrainian society will face when fighting stops must be a priority for both Ukraine and its international supporters.

Ukraine is shifting from a status-based to a more individualized, needs-based veteran support system. This paper has argued that this shift, if successful, stands to yield far-reaching economic, social, political and security dividends – both for Ukraine and for Europe more broadly.

Economically, reintegrating a massive, highly skilled cohort of working-age adults through targeted re-skilling programmes, entrepreneurial grants and inclusive workplace adaptations can be a powerful engine for post-war recovery. Politically, leveraging veterans' skills more effectively could catalyse political renewal in Ukraine, elevating demobilized service members into local and national leadership roles and providing a clear career pathway for those who wish to continue serving their country in a civilian capacity.

A successful transition for Ukrainian veterans would ensure that a battle-tested, highly motivated potential reserve force remains anchored on NATO's eastern flank.

Moreover, holistic physical and psychological care, combined with robust community-level support, will be essential to prevent veterans' social alienation and to bridge the civilian–military divide. From a geopolitical perspective, a successful transition for Ukrainian veterans would ensure that a battle-tested, highly motivated potential reserve force remains anchored on NATO's eastern flank.

In contrast, flawed interventions would undermine Ukraine's recovery, exacerbate the existing demographic crisis, and create new social and security pressures. Unaddressed physical disabilities and psychological trauma would lead to significant human capital loss, chronic welfare dependency and reduced productivity. Should veterans feel disenfranchised and abandoned by the state they fought to defend, many may emigrate, thus accelerating Ukraine's demographic crisis. Any perceived neglect of veterans would deepen societal rifts that hostile actors, particularly Russia, could readily exploit through disinformation and political destabilization. Furthermore, marginalized veterans may become increasingly vulnerable to substance abuse and recruitment by criminal networks and radical political factions. If unaddressed, these factors could transform Ukraine's greatest defensive asset into an internal security liability, with spillover consequences for broader European security.

Ukraine's international partners must actively support comprehensive veteran policy initiatives and help unify collaboration among key Ukrainian stakeholders, including government ministries, local municipalities, CSOs, healthcare and educational institutions, and private sector employers. Ultimately, safeguarding the dignity, rehabilitation and long-term prospects of those who sacrificed the most is vital not only for Ukraine's democratic and economic future but also for European security.

About the author

Dr Jaroslava Barbieri is a research fellow with the Ukraine Forum at Chatham House, supported by the Robert Bosch Stiftung. Her research interests include Ukrainian politics and society, Russian foreign policy, European security and cognitive warfare. Her commentary and analysis have appeared in British and international media, including the BBC, CNN, France 24, Deutsche Welle, Sky News and the *Telegraph*. She is also a researcher for the Ukrainian History Global Initiative, and has co-authored multiple research publications on Ukraine in collaboration with the Kyiv-based Public Interest Journalism Lab.

Between March 2022 and May 2025, before joining Chatham House, Jaroslava was a project manager and strategist at Zinc Network, an international development and strategic communications agency. Previously, she was a researcher for the Arena programme of the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University, and a teaching associate at the University of Birmingham. Over the years, she has contributed to research projects on Ukraine supported by the UK government, USAID and the European Commission. She has a master's degree in European politics from the University of Oxford and a PhD in Russian and East European studies from the University of Birmingham.

Acknowledgments

This paper is dedicated to the bravery and sacrifice of Ukrainian soldiers and veterans who have defended their nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity since 2014. Their fortitude and endurance continue to safeguard peace across Europe.

The author is deeply grateful to the interviewees who shared invaluable insights into the innovation and challenges shaping Ukraine's evolving veteran reintegration framework.

At Chatham House, special thanks go to Anna Morgan for helping coordinate the research trip to Ukraine and ensuring the project remained on schedule. I am also grateful to my editor, Jake Statham, whose meticulous work significantly enhanced the quality and flow of the text, and to Orysia Lutsevych, Bronwen Maddox, Amanda Moss and Andrew Payne for constructive feedback on early drafts. Additionally, I extend my sincere appreciation to the two anonymous peer reviewers whose rigorous feedback sharpened the paper's analytical focus. Any remaining errors are the sole responsibility of the author.

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This publication was funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development as part of the EMPOWER programme by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

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ISBN 978 1 78413 693 2
DOI 10.55317/9781784136932

Cite this paper: Barbieri, J. (2026), *Ukraine's war veteran challenge: How a reformed veteran support system can strengthen Ukraine's recovery and European security*, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, https://doi.org/10.55317/9781784136932.

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Charity Registration Number: 208223