

Project Report

# Between Frontline and Home Front

Reintegration, Resilience  
and Participation Strategies  
for Ukraine's Veterans

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**CORIOLI INSTITUTE**  
Research. Reintegrate. Rebuild.

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this report solely reflect

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>AFU</b>	Armed Forces of Ukraine
<b>ATC</b>	Amalgamated Territorial Community
<b>ATO</b>	Anti-Terrorist Operation
<b>BZP</b>	Brattia Z Prykarpattia (Ukrainian NGO)
<b>CBT</b>	Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
<b>CI</b>	Corioli Institute
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>DPR</b>	Donetsk People's Republic
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>EBRD</b>	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
<b>EMBR</b>	Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FARC</b>	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
<b>HR</b>	Human Resources
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally Displaced Persons
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>IRF</b>	International Renaissance Foundation
<b>IREX</b>	International Research & Exchanges Board
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>JFO</b>	Joint Forces Operation
<b>KGB</b>	Committee for State Security (Soviet Union)
<b>LGBTQIA+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual (Plus those whose sexual/gender identity is not reflected by the term)
<b>LPR</b>	Luhansk People's Republic
<b>MGP</b>	Medical Guarantees Program
<b>MHPSS</b>	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
<b>MoD</b>	Ministry of Defense
<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MoSP</b>	Ministry of Social Policy
<b>MoVA</b>	Ministry of Veterans Affairs
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NBU</b>	National Bank of Ukraine
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization

<b>OMAC</b>	Office of Military Affiliated Communities (University of Chicago)
<b>POW</b>	Prisoner of War
<b>PS</b>	Pislya Sluzhby (“After Service”) Charity Fund
<b>PTSD</b>	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
<b>SSR</b>	Soviet Socialist Republic
<b>TDF</b>	Territorial Defense Forces
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
<b>U.S.</b>	United States of America
<b>USRWV</b>	Unified State Register of War Veterans
<b>UUAV</b>	Ukrainian Union of Afghanistan Veterans
<b>UVF</b>	Ukrainian Veterans Foundation
<b>UWVM</b>	Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement
<b>VRJP</b>	Veterans Restorative Justice Project
<b>VRS</b>	Veterans’ Reintegration Survey
<b>WPS</b>	Women, Peace and Security (UN Agenda)
<b>WWII</b>	World War II

## Glossary of Terms

### Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO)

A military and security operation conducted by Ukrainian forces from April 2014 to April 2018 in response to the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, particularly in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (collectively known as Donbas).

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### Civil Society Organization (CSO)

“Non-state, not-for-profit, voluntary organizations formed by people in that social sphere...a wide range of organizations, networks, associations, groups and movements that are independent from government and that sometimes come together to advance their common interests through collective action” (ESCWA, 2022).

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### Civil-Military Transition

This describes the change from military-to-civilian status. It is the move from active duty to ex-combatant or to retired life but, for many it can be a challenging experience and for this reason many armed forces now have specific policies and programs to support this process (UNDP, 2023, p. 5).

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### Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

A common type of talk therapy (psychotherapy) in which the individual works with a mental health counselor (psychotherapist or therapist) in a structured way. It is intended to increase awareness of inaccurate or negative thinking in order to view challenging situations more clearly and respond to them more effectively.

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### Community-Based Reintegration (CBR)

“...an approach that empowers people within communities to identify, plan and implement programmes with support from governments and DDR practitioners....CBR takes place at the community level and is community-owned, includes full community participation in decision-making processes, and focuses on the community as a whole rather than only pre-defined groups, which allows for a conflict-sensitive and inclusive approach to project identification...Ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups do not receive targeted individual support, but benefit from the same support provided to other community members” (IDDRS, 2023a).

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### Council of Veterans

The Council of Veterans in Ukraine is a representative body advocating for the rights and needs of veterans of the Armed Forces and other eligible groups. Collaborating with the Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA) and other institutions, the council works to ensure veterans' access to healthcare, employment, education, and housing. It also addresses reintegration challenges and promotes recognition of veterans' contributions to national security, aiming to influence policies that enhance their well-being and opportunities. Although designed as an advisory body with representatives from every region to guide the MoVA, the Council's influence has waned following a ministerial turnover and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, limiting its effectiveness in advocating for veterans at the national level. In a similar vein, there is a national **Council of Families of the Fallen**. (Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, 2024)



**Demobilization**

“Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilization may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilization encompasses the support package provided to the demobilized, which is called reinsertion” (Secretary- General, note to the General Assembly, A/C.5/59/31, May 2005).

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**Disarmament**

“Disarmament is the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programmes” (Secretary-General, note to the General Assembly, A/C.5/59/31, May 2005).

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**Discharge**

In a military context, "discharge" refers to the formal process by which a military service member is released from their obligation to serve. This may be due to the completion of their agreed-upon term of service, or other circumstances such as medical conditions, personal issues, or disciplinary actions. Discharge can occur under various classifications, such as honorable, general, or other-than-honorable, each reflecting the nature of the service member's performance and conduct during their time in the military. For many, discharge represents the transition back to civilian life, while for others, it may lead to further involvement in the reserve force. (The Military Wallet, 2024)

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**Eye Movement  
Desensitization and  
Reprocessing  
(EMDR)**

A structured psychotherapy that primarily focuses on treating individuals who have experienced distressing, traumatic events. The idea behind EMDR is those traumatic memories, when unprocessed, can become “stuck” in the brain, leading to a wide array of emotional and psychological difficulties. EMDR addresses the ongoing PTSD patients experience by relying on the brain’s natural capacity to heal and process traumatic experiences (Rogers & Silver, 2001).

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**Internally Displaced  
Person (IDP)**

“[P]ersons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border” (OHCHR, 1998).

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**Joint Forces  
Operation (JFO)**

The JFO replaced the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) on April 30, 2018. It represented a significant shift in Ukraine's approach to the conflict, with “the main practical difference between the two operations being that the control over the implementation of Ukrainian policy in the war zone switched from the security service (SBU) to Ukraine’s armed forces” (Sasse, 2018).

<b>Moral Injury</b>	“The distressing psychological, behavioral, social, and sometimes spiritual aftermath of exposure to events that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations” (Litz et al., 2009)
<b>Participatory Approach</b>	A method of engagement in which everyone who has a stake in an intervention, project, or research process has a voice and is actively involved in decision-making and implementation. This approach values the perspectives, knowledge, and experiences of all participants, particularly those who are most affected by the issue at hand.
<b>Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS)</b>	PTS is a common, temporary response to trauma with mild symptoms that typically resolve on their own and don't disrupt daily life. While PTS generally has no long-term impact, PTSD can have lasting effects on mental health and well-being.
<b>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)</b>	Experiencing, witnessing, or learning of a severe traumatic event, such as death, serious injury, or violence, can lead to lasting psychological effects. These may include distressing memories, flashbacks, intense emotional or physical reactions to reminders, avoidance of related thoughts and places, and persistent negative beliefs and feelings. This can result in heightened alertness, irritability, disrupted sleep, and impaired social or occupational functioning. PTSD is a clinically diagnosed mental health disorder marked by persistent, severe symptoms lasting over a month, often impairing daily functioning and requiring professional treatment (Friedman et al., 2021).
<b>Public Councils</b>	A Public Council in Ukraine is an advisory and consultative body formed under government institutions to facilitate public participation in governance and decision-making processes. These councils are typically composed of representatives from civil society organizations, activists, and community stakeholders. Their main functions include monitoring government activities, providing recommendations on policies, and ensuring transparency and accountability in public administration. Public Councils serve as a bridge between the government and the public, allowing for dialogue and collaboration on pressing societal issues. (USAID, 2023)
<b>Reintegration</b>	“Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income” (Secretary-General, note to the General Assembly, A/C.5/59/31, May 2005). It is “...a long-term process that takes place at the individual, family and community levels and has social, psychosocial, economic, political and security dimensions” (IDDRS, 2023b).
<b>Territorial Defense Forces (TDF)</b>	A distinct branch of Ukraine's Armed Forces that combines military personnel and civilian volunteers to protect local territories, populations, and infrastructure. Established under the 2021 "On Fundamentals of National Resistance" law, it operates through a central command, with regional headquarters and battalions organized by region and district (Presidential Office of Ukraine, 2021).

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# 1. Overview



## 1.1 Executive Summary

Veteran reintegration in Ukraine is an urgent national and international priority, necessitated by the expected surge in the veteran population from 800,000 to an estimated 2 million. This dramatic increase raises significant concerns about a looming crisis in support services. Without immediate and comprehensive action, the country risks failing to provide adequate care and integration opportunities for those who have served. Communities, particularly in rural areas, are ill-equipped with inclusive infrastructure, making it difficult for veterans with disabilities to participate fully in civil life. The gaps in economic, psychosocial, and community support are stark, and there is a pressing need to enhance state sector services and public facilities to accommodate the diverse needs of returning veterans. Addressing these challenges is a matter of social justice and crucial for maintaining societal cohesion and stability in a nation strained by prolonged conflict.

A vibrant community of grassroots, NGO, and multi-sector initiatives is already leading the way in securing the support Ukraine's veterans need to reintegrate successfully. This project is intended to learn from, showcase, and extend the efforts underway to strengthen the fabric of Ukrainian society and honor the sacrifices made by those who defended the country. This report offers a nuanced analysis of the myriad challenges faced by these men and women, as well as their families and receiving communities. It highlights the diverse identities, generational differences, and unique needs of veterans, alongside the significant gaps in mental health services, medical care, and economic opportunities. By synthesizing these insights, the report aims to inform policymakers, practitioners, and researchers about effective strategies and recommendations for supporting veterans' reintegration and enhancing their well-being.

The data collection process for this study was multifaceted, abductive, and participatory, encompassing both extensive fieldwork and a comprehensive literature review. Corioli Institute researchers conducted 41 in-depth interviews with diverse stakeholders, including veterans, reintegration program directors, caseworkers, civil society professionals, volunteers, and policymakers. These interviews were conducted in key locations such as Kyiv, Kalush, and Kostiantynivka between August and September 2023. This data informed the design of the "Out of War" conference held at the London School of Economics in October 2023, where international and multi-sectoral participants shared their experiences and comparative insights with Ukrainian counterparts, enriching the understanding of key areas of concern. This mixed-methods, iterative, and engaged approach ensured a robust and comprehensive understanding of the current state and challenges of veteran reintegration in Ukraine.

The desk review included in this project report provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge on veteran reintegration in Ukraine, highlighting key demographic characteristics, service profiles, legal frameworks, and the constellation of actors involved in the process. It details existing legal protections and benefits, the roles of state and civil society in supporting veterans, and the significant gaps and obstacles in current reintegration efforts. By presenting these elements, the report underscores the complexity of veteran reintegration and the need for tailored, multi-faceted approaches to address the unique needs of Ukraine's veterans.



## 1.2 Summary of Key Findings

Based on exploratory and participatory engagement with Ukraine's veterans and the organizations, institutions, and individuals who work to support their transitions, the following key areas of concern emerged along with several key findings in each.

### Identity-based and sociocultural cleavages

- 1. Ukraine's veterans lead multifaceted lives related to their service and as civilians.** Interviews with veterans and stakeholders reveal that Ukraine's veterans adopt diverse identities, including military volunteers, service members, religious leaders, civilian supporters, public officials, and bureaucrats. These roles, which coexist with civilian identities, raise important questions about veterans' self-image, expectations, political alignments, and how their war and reintegration experiences influence their life paths.
- 2. Social and class tensions inform service and transition experiences.** Diverse backgrounds and experiences lead to tensions within the armed forces. Mandatory mobilizations expose social and class disparities, as affluent individuals are more able to evade service by leaving the country, while less-resourced citizens cannot. This inequality deepens socioeconomic divides and impacts veterans' willingness to return to the front lines due to exhaustion and stress.
- 3. Training and recruitment demands outpace current capabilities.** Under-trained medical personnel and misrepresented military experiences are significant concerns. The pressing need for personnel can contribute to relaxed recruitment standards, resulting in veterans suspecting many peers lack adequate military training and undermining solidarity and trust.

### Generational differences

- 1. Generational differences exist among veterans, their families, and the families of the fallen, with significant implications for service and support profiles.** Data reveal that older veterans who joined the military after establishing careers and families tended to seek to return to pre-war stability, valuing familiar places and routines. In contrast, younger veterans, conscripted before higher education or family life, must rebuild their lives from scratch.
- 2. Younger veterans face unique challenges due to conscription, including a sense of diminished autonomy and betrayal.** They are particularly vulnerable to frustration, mistrust in government, and substance abuse, especially if they struggle with education and economic stability. Many young veterans aspire to start their own businesses, but few succeed.

### Women's evolving roles in the war

- 1. Women have played important roles in wartime efforts ranging from frontline combat to organizational and political leadership.** Women play crucial roles in military operations, as exemplified by a woman who served in an assault group, became pregnant, returned post-pregnancy, and advanced to join the Special Operations Force. However, women face practical challenges such as obtaining proper uniforms and body armor and struggle with career advancement and official recognition.
- 2. Harmful stereotypes and challenges persist.** Women often face harmful stereotypes, such as joining the military to find husbands or preferring desk roles. These stereotypes



undermine their contributions, necessitating a system that acknowledges and promotes their skills. Concerns about protecting women's human rights within the military include a lack of specialized healthcare practitioners and psychologists trained to handle issues like gender-based stereotypes and sexual assault.

3. **A lack of gender-sensitive policies and programs exacerbates distress and harm.** Female prisoners of war have tended to receive insufficient support from families and medical professionals upon return, complicating their recovery and reintegration. Given the role of spouses in facilitating readiness for mental health care, both wives and husbands require consideration in reintegration policies and programs.
4. **The UN's Gender, Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda requires more robust development and integration into institutional and organizational policies and practices.** A broader perspective on women's roles in peacebuilding and security is needed. Comprehensive and inclusive veteran reintegration approaches should support women both within and outside the military. Civilian women contribute to the war effort in various ways, including business management, childcare, advocacy, and community leadership, as well as in organizational and grassroots roles.

### Mental health and psychological care

1. **Veterans are confronting significant psychosocial challenges, including PTSD and Moral Injury.** The study highlights significant mental health issues among veterans, including PTSD and moral injury, exacerbated by extended service periods with infrequent breaks. Veterans returning to civilian life may face hyper-vigilance, paranoia, loneliness, and unemployment. Moral injury is prevalent among veterans, stemming from both combat actions and feelings of impotence or guilt related to fellow soldiers' injuries and military setbacks.
2. **Ukraine's mental health services infrastructure is not equipped to meet the current and anticipated needs of veterans and their families.** There is a critical shortage of psychologists and mental health specialists, especially in hospitals. Mental health services are not included in veteran benefits. In the absence of accessible support, some veterans resort to paying for their own care, turn to religion, or seek alternative treatments like psychedelic-assisted therapy, though legal challenges relating to those persist.
3. **Readiness for mental health support is low.** Social stigma, personal reservations, and conservative military leadership contribute to veterans' reluctance to seek mental health support. Peer-to-peer strategies and success stories can help destigmatize mental health care and encourage its utilization.
4. **The risk of radicalization and behavioral challenges are present, but more data are required.** Substance abuse, crime, domestic violence, and suicides are prevalent among veterans and their families. However, data collection on these issues is challenging due to limited and imprecise data. Nevertheless, holistic reintegration and mental health programs are necessary to mitigate the risk of radicalization.
5. **Civilians are facing mental health sequelae of the war.** The war has also severely impacted civilians' mental health, with increased trauma and suicides. This exacerbates veterans' mental health struggles, emphasizing the need for integrated therapy involving veterans, families, communities, and civil institutions sensitive to different veteran profiles and local contexts.





## Physical injuries and medical needs

- 1. Complex challenges in medical care for wounded soldiers persist.** The study reveals significant challenges in providing medical care to wounded soldiers, marked by widespread distrust in the Ukrainian healthcare system, particularly in military hospitals. The shortage of civilian doctors, many of whom have mobilized or fled, exacerbates the issue, forcing soldiers to seek treatment abroad.
- 2. Frontline medical care is inadequate and risky.** There are insufficient medical kits for combat medics and inadequate training for paramedics. Pain management drugs pose serious addiction risks, prompting calls for the Ministry of Defense to reevaluate permissible medications.
- 3. Bureaucratic hurdles block access to disability benefits.** Veterans face bureaucratic obstacles in securing disability status and benefits. The process is mired in corruption, inefficiency, and dehumanizing practices.
- 4. Non-Ukrainian soldiers face additional challenges.** They are ineligible for compensation for war-related injuries, which leads many to leave the Foreign Legion to seek care elsewhere.

## Kinship and family needs

- 1. Veterans and their families experience an erosion of familial bonds during service.** Deployment strains families, with limited opportunities for active fighters to maintain contact with their loved ones. This lack of contact deprives soldiers of emotional support and detaches them from family roles, while families at home suffer from anxiety and uncertainty about their well-being.
- 2. Reunification and re-establishing those bonds can be a fraught process.** Upon reunification, veterans and their families face additional challenges. Prolonged exposure to conflict often results in significant changes in veterans' attitudes, behaviors, and moods, which their families may not be prepared for. Nevertheless, stable family relationships are crucial, particularly in the context of ongoing remobilization cycles central to Ukraine's defense.
- 3. Dedicated spaces away from daily responsibilities can help veterans and their families reconnect.** These activities help rebuild familial connections, improve communication, and realign veterans with their family lives.

## Economic reintegration

- 1. The private sector requires more preparation and accountability for compliance with accessibility standards.** Key barriers to veteran employment include the lack of accommodations for disabled veterans and limited job opportunities.
- 2. Peer-to-peer support networks may be useful assets for some veterans but require sufficient psychosocial support for those facilitating them to avoid retraumatization.** As case managers, veterans can build from a basis of shared experience and mutual support, which can be a useful asset especially in the recruitment and career transition stages. However, communication challenges and existing efforts have evidenced a need for addressing veterans' trauma before they can engage in such work.



- 3. Veterans possess valuable skills from military service, but translating these into civilian applications is a challenge.** Training programs that facilitate skill transfer and provide additional education, such as language and business training, need to be expanded.
- 4. Structured business education and mentorship programs can help veterans start and manage businesses.** Despite resource constraints, organizations have already made significant advances in training veterans in entrepreneurship and offering integrated professional development and psychological support.
- 5. Agriculture is identified as a key sector for veteran investment and entrepreneurship.** Competitions and funding for veteran-led agricultural projects are highlighted as effective ways to support veterans, provide therapeutic benefits, and contribute to community growth.

### Community-based reintegration

- 1. Veterans express a range of desires for reintegration trajectories with differential implications for communities.** Some desire normalcy and a return to pre-war lives, while others seek to leverage their military leadership in community affairs. Communities must prepare for the anticipated influx of veterans to avoid potential challenges and misunderstandings.
- 2. The civilian-military gap presents challenges for successful, sustainable reintegration.** Key challenges to bridging this divide include addressing civilians' lack of understanding of veteran experiences and preparing for the "veteran tsunami." Veterans must also be prepared to adapt to changes in their communities, which have evolved during their absence.
- 3. Approaches must be contextually informed and adapted to specific population needs.** Examples include rural vs. urban conditions, combining social and economic needs, creating dedicated spaces, enhancing communication capabilities between veterans and civilians, including employers and counterparts, providing recreational and therapeutic activities, increasing visibility of veterans' contributions through memorials and memory projects, and providing integrated legal and social support.

### Lack of trust and institutional challenges

- 1. Bureaucratic obstacles create barriers to accessing benefits and services.** Soviet-era bureaucratic legacies, such as complex administrative procedures, lack of data sharing, and unpredictable legislative changes, lead to inefficiencies and frustrations among veterans.
- 2. Some veterans express a deep mistrust towards the government.** This stems from perceived corruption, ineffective handling of military affairs, and insufficient representation in Parliament. Corruption scandals and alleged collaboration with Russian forces further erode confidence in the military and government institutions.
- 3. Ineffective institutions contribute to skepticism about their ability to effectively support veterans.** Under-resourced institutions perceived to lack real influence, combined with bureaucratic hurdles such as excessive documentation and delays, further complicate veterans' access to support.



4. **The politicization of veterans' issues increases distrust.** Instances where local authorities exploit veterans for political gain rather than involving them meaningfully have fueled distrust. Short-term political focus and conflicts rooted in political differences exacerbate the situation.
5. **Corruption and data transparency issues frustrate attempts to access benefits and coordinate responses.** Corruption affects veterans' access to benefits and medical facilities, especially in urban areas. Lack of data transparency and compartmentalization hinder targeted support and efficient resource allocation.
6. **Cross-sector coordination requires strengthening.** Poor communication between NGOs, Public Councils, and government institutions, coupled with a lack of planning for the transition from military to civilian life overall, further hampers reintegration efforts.
7. **Mistrust towards veterans' organizations limits fundraising support.** Stereotypes of veteran organizations as militarized or radicalized impact their ability to secure financial support and effectively implement reintegration programs. Despite recent improvements, increasing engagement and addressing these stereotypes with the help of other civil society remains a challenge.

### Stakeholder collaboration and participatory programs

1. **Funding and implementation constraints challenge program sustainability.** Service delivery initiatives often suffer from limited funding, convoluted legal processes, and bureaucratic roadblocks, impacting their effectiveness and reach. Despite these limitations, there is a notable expansion of tailored social services driven by increased cross-sector collaboration and legislative changes enabling state procurement of services from non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
2. **Successful initiatives to date have built bridges across multiple domains of veterans' needs.** For example, the Ukrainian Women Veterans Network and the Zahyst ("Protection") NGO advance through unified action and multi-sector collaboration. Initiatives such as sports tournaments, psychosocial rehabilitation, and employment support highlight innovative approaches to addressing veterans' physical and psychological challenges.
3. **Participatory approaches result in tailored programs that are locally designed and context-specific.** The "nothing about us without us" principle highlights the importance of direct engagement with veterans, fostering adaptive and responsive policies.



## 1.3 Summary of Recommendations

The following are the recommendations resulting from this study:

### 1. Integrate diverse veteran identities, personal backgrounds, and perspectives into support structures and public awareness campaigns.

Recognizing veterans' diverse identities and experiences is crucial for understanding how combat impacts their reintegration pathways. Institutions and communities must cultivate awareness and inclusion to help all veterans feel accommodated and develop a sense of belonging. Awareness campaigns and media portrayals should integrate diverse narratives, highlighting often overlooked identities to foster a more inclusive and cohesive Ukrainian society.

### 2. Tailor reintegration support offers to veterans' lifecycles.

Adjust reintegration policies to address the differing needs of older and younger veterans in Ukraine. Younger veterans, often conscripted and lacking prior education or careers, face unique post-service challenges requiring tailored education, training opportunities, and proactive outreach. Older veterans need support focused on enhancing family relationships and flexible employment arrangements. Families also have differing needs and perspectives based on their war generation – i.e., those of veterans of Donbas versus those who are newly exposed to the challenges of holistic reintegration through the current war. Taken together, this underscores the necessity for updated and disaggregated research to understand the evolving needs of veterans and their families across different age groups.

### 3. Strengthen holistic support systems for families of veterans and families of the fallen.

Families of veterans and the fallen face profound challenges, including emotional strain, financial instability, and insufficient institutional support. Veterans' service often disrupts familial bonds, and reintegration into family life is marked by emotional distance and behavioral changes, exacerbating these issues. Families frequently lack access to tailored support services, such as psychological counseling, legal aid, business support plans and employment assistance. Addressing these challenges requires a dedicated focus alongside veteran-centric initiatives, with recommendations including establishing centralized family support hubs, emotional support programs, and direct financial aid. These measures should be implemented through bureaucratically streamlined cross-sector collaboration to ensure families receive the comprehensive, accessible support they need to navigate post-war life.

### 4. Create a gender-sensitive reintegration policy at all stages and levels.

Ensuring a sufficient supply of specialized healthcare tailored to women's unique needs, including mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), is crucial. Future investments must enhance coverage of specialized physical health services for female veterans, including reproductive and maternal healthcare, while public awareness campaigns are necessary to dispel stereotypes about female service members. Gender-sensitive healthcare should also address men's specific issues, such as certain aspects of reproductive health. Truly inclusive policies should also include gender-sensitive reintegration measures, support for women's roles beyond frontline duties, and collaboration with women's veteran organizations to address gender-specific challenges and promote female leadership and resilience building, aligned with the objectives of Ukraine's National Action Plan (NAP) on the WPS agenda.



## **5. Build well-prepared and trusted mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services.**

Enhancing veterans' readiness to seek help is crucial to addressing the complex mental health challenges they face. Peer-to-peer structures and comprehensive mental health professional training for veterans who are ready to engage in such work can normalize MHPSS and provide valuable pathways for economic reintegration, reducing the strain on the mental healthcare system and increasing veterans' trust. Additionally, MHPSS must be tailored to diverse veteran profiles and local circumstances, incorporating various therapies such as art-based approaches. More research and advocacy are needed on the value of innovative treatments like psychedelic-assisted therapy and medical cannabis to address veterans' complex mental health needs.

## **6. Enact comprehensive reform of veteran medical care.**

Comprehensive reform of veteran medical care and support systems in Ukraine is essential to address the multifaceted challenges faced by wounded soldiers. This includes modernizing military hospitals, enhancing training programs, and improving frontline medical care while also streamlining bureaucratic processes for securing disability status and benefits. Additionally, expanding civilian healthcare capacity and providing targeted support for both Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian veterans are crucial steps, all requiring cross-sector collaboration and continuous monitoring to ensure effective implementation.

## **7. Implement a strengths-based approach to social and economic reintegration.**

To optimize veterans' socioeconomic reintegration, a strengths-based approach should be adopted that leverages their intrinsic capabilities and potential rather than framing them as problems or risks to be fixed alone. This strategy should recognize veterans' diverse skills and encourage their participation in economic and civic life by providing tailored retraining opportunities and integrating them into community and local as well as national decision-making processes. By fostering veterans' leadership and civic engagement, policies can transform societal perceptions, enhance community trust, and ensure veterans contribute substantively to Ukraine's political and social landscape.

## **8. Offer concrete, time-efficient, and streamlined training and education opportunities aligned with Ukraine's labor demand.**

To effectively support veterans' transition into civilian roles, offer streamlined, time-efficient training and education opportunities closely aligned with current labor market demands, including (though not exclusively) comprehensive entrepreneurship courses. Programs like those at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, which include short certificate courses and master's degrees tailored for veterans, set a strong example by leveraging their military skills for critical areas such as infrastructure development and cybersecurity. Additionally, a government-financed model where veterans commit to public service roles in exchange for training costs can address labor shortages and facilitate their sustainable transition to private-sector employment.

## **9. Coordinate “combat to commerce” approaches that seamlessly integrate reconstruction, rehabilitation, reintegration, and income generation as a part of broader societal rebuilding.**

This multi-sector strategy should include technical education, on-the-job skills training, community-beneficial initiatives, psychosocial and disability supports, and the development



of transferable skill sets. Key components include leveraging war-relevant sectors such as reconstruction, demining, weapon and defense system development, while providing adequate transitions into rehabilitation and psychosocial support, long-term reintegration and income generation, and ensuring disability access. Coordinating with the private sector will ensure training programs are relevant to local labor markets and improve logistical support and market access for the products and services developed. Implementing this approach requires a comprehensive needs assessment, strategic planning, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and securing diverse funding sources. Phased implementation starts with immediate needs and integrates longer-term initiatives, with continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure sustainability. Expected outcomes include enhanced safety and infrastructure, improved health and well-being, economic empowerment, social cohesion, inclusive development, and market relevance, ultimately creating a holistic and sustainable pathway for the economic reintegration of veterans and contributing to broader societal rebuilding and long-term stability.

#### **10. Design and implement reintegration policies and programs in a participatory, grassroots-led, and community-based fashion.**

Combine top-down approaches with reintegration policies designed and implemented in a participatory, grassroots-led, and community-based manner, involving veterans, their families, and communities directly in the development process. This participatory approach can help to ensure that programs are localized and context-specific, fostering better reintegration outcomes and mutual understanding within communities. Continuous engagement and feedback loops enhance the effectiveness and adaptability of policies while ensuring transparency and accountability in using external funding.

#### **11. Develop and implement comprehensive trust-building initiatives.**

The Ukrainian government, along with multi-sector partners, should develop and implement comprehensive trust-building initiatives to bridge the gap between veteran populations and civilian communities, including the establishment of veteran-civilian advisory councils at local and regional levels to facilitate open dialogue and collaborative grievance resolution. To address mistrust in institutions, organizations, healthcare providers, and the state, transparency and accountability initiatives should be established, such as regular public forums for veterans to voice concerns, independent oversight bodies for veteran services, and enhanced communication strategies, along with ensuring the adeptness of the newly established military ombudsman office to handle grievances. It is crucial that the government and its partners manage expectations and fulfill promises to veterans to rebuild trust and prevent long-term insecurity and instability. Training street-level bureaucrats on professional behavior, trauma-informed, conflict-sensitive approaches, and corruption controls will improve service delivery and enhance trust in public institutions. Additionally, research should accompany these initiatives to establish baseline assessments and measure improvements in trust, security, and social cohesion.

#### **12. Develop a comprehensive framework for the legal and justice system to be better trained and equipped to address the unique needs of veterans, ensuring their effective reintegration into society and the protection of their rights.**

Develop a comprehensive framework that includes specialized training for legal personnel, enhanced resources, and veteran-focused legal services. This involves mandatory training programs covering military culture, legal issues faced by veterans, mental health awareness, and trauma-informed approaches, with support from veteran organizations and mental health



professionals. Strengthen dedicated legal aid clinics and outreach programs, networks of pro bono lawyers, and case management systems that coordinate legal, psychological, and social services. Simplify legal processes, reduce documentation burdens, and establish veteran-friendly court procedures to enhance access to justice. Continuous data collection, research, public awareness campaigns, and advocacy for policy changes are vital for understanding veterans' legal challenges and ensuring effective and inclusive policies.

### **13. Improve and expand the existing empirical basis for program and policy development to ensure relevant, cost-efficient, and coordinated action.**

Engage in comprehensive data collection, continuous research, and systematic evaluation to inform policy decisions, enhance inter-institutional data sharing, and foster a culture of information sharing among stakeholders. Establish a centralized, regularly updated data repository from government, NGO, and academic sources, ensuring accuracy and accessibility. Conduct regular surveys and studies on veterans' health, employment, education, and legal issues, using qualitative methods for deeper insights. Ensure research efforts with Ukrainian veterans are efficient, coordinated, and avoid duplication to mitigate research fatigue, while focusing on genuine engagement and expectation management to build trust. Address gaps in rural areas, where veterans' needs are often under-identified, by conducting targeted local-level studies. Invest in advanced analytical tools and train researchers and policymakers to use these effectively. Develop robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks with clear indicators, timelines, and feedback mechanisms. Promote collaboration between government bodies, academic institutions, and veteran organizations for interdisciplinary research and leverage international partnerships for knowledge exchange. Ensure transparency and public dissemination of research findings to support informed decision-making and track progress.

Having outlined the critical need for robust veteran reintegration strategies in Ukraine and the multifaceted challenges returning veterans face, this report now delves deeper into the specifics. The following sections provide a detailed analysis of the current state of veteran reintegration, encompassing demographic characteristics, service profiles, and the roles of various actors involved. Through comprehensive fieldwork and an extensive literature review, we explore the diverse identities, generational differences, and unique needs of veterans. By examining existing legal frameworks, support mechanisms, and the significant gaps in mental health, medical care, and economic opportunities, this report aims to present a holistic understanding of the issue. The insights and recommendations presented are intended to inform and inspire effective, multi-faceted approaches to veteran reintegration, ultimately contributing to the well-being of veterans and the stability of Ukrainian society.



# 2. Introduction





## 2.1 Rationale

At the time of this report's writing, more than two years have passed since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. An estimated 1.5-2 million military personnel are currently engaged in Ukraine's defense forces, with increasing numbers conscripted as the age of service lowers in the face of continuing Russian aggression. Before the full-scale invasion, Ukraine's veteran population numbered 670,458 individuals, with approximately 440,000 being veterans of the war in Donbas since 2014. This total is estimated to have increased to at least 1.2 million between February 2022 and November 2023.<sup>2</sup> By 2024, about 200,000 service members are expected to have been discharged and returned to civilian life.<sup>3</sup> According to the Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA) forecasts, the number of citizens covered by veterans' support legislation, mainly combatants, their family members, and families of fallen soldiers, may surpass five million, or 10% of the population, by the war's end.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, a March 2024 survey of 1,000 Ukrainian civilians found that 63% believe the government is failing to meet its obligations to veterans. This concern is exacerbated by looming funding cuts; despite Western aid, Kyiv faces the need to reduce social spending in 2025 due to trade deficits and the financial strain of the current defense efforts.<sup>5</sup>

This policy paper emerges from our recognition that providing appropriate care for veterans and their families is an urgent and existential national policy priority for Ukraine. Meetings between the Corioli Institute (CI) and its Ukrainian partner organizations have highlighted the profound moral obligation of the state and society to support and provide dignified livelihoods for those who sacrificed to defend their homeland, as well as for their families. The current system is overwhelmed and insufficiently equipped to fulfill this obligation. Furthermore, inadequate policy responses risk neglecting, marginalizing, and alienating the rapidly growing veteran population, leading to substantial social, demographic, economic, political, and public security issues. The proliferation of synthetic drugs and weapons in wartime Ukraine, coupled with the demand for military skills in illicit activities – even if involving only a very small fraction of veterans – could intensify the repercussions of this policy failure in the future.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, the country's defense capabilities depend on the effectiveness of physical and mental rehabilitation, as well as overall veteran satisfaction and well-being. This can be achieved through comprehensive and well-calibrated reintegration policies that support veterans between remobilization cycles. Before delving into the research, analysis, and recommendations constituting this policy paper, the following section provides a brief background of reintegration in Ukraine since 2014.

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<sup>2</sup> Folke Bernadotte Academy, "Ukraine's Critical Journey: Effective Veteran Reintegration."

<sup>3</sup> Segura, "A New Battle for Ukrainian Soldiers: Reintegrating into Civilian Life."

<sup>4</sup> Kudimov, "'This Is a Category of Powerful People.' The Minister of Veteran Affairs Spoke about Assistance to Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>5</sup> Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF) and Sociological Group "Rating," "27th National Poll: The Image of Veterans in Ukrainian Society. March 2-5, 2024"; European Parliament, "Two Years of War: The State of the Ukrainian Economy in 10 Charts."

<sup>6</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "The Hard Return: Mitigating Organized Crime Risks Among Veterans in Ukraine."



## 2.2 A Recent History of Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine

The history of veterans' reintegration in Ukraine from the early-20<sup>th</sup> century to the present reflects a complex and evolving relationship between the state and its veterans.

From 1922-1991, Ukraine, as one of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union, adopted Soviet policies towards its veterans. Following World War II, returning soldiers received a distinct social status as "Heroic Combat Veterans." The Soviet regime instituted fundamental privileges, including the right to retain and utilize their military uniforms, employment commensurate with their rank, and receipt of awards. However, these benefits were only provided from 1945 until 1948, when demobilization was completed. Subsequently, only veterans with disabilities received pension payments, with higher rates for veterans residing in urban centers compared to those in rural areas. By the 1950s, the majority of veterans in Ukraine faced financial hardship. Their struggles were compounded by the Stalin-era social cleansing of beggars, many of whom were disabled veterans without family support.<sup>7</sup>

From the end of World War II through 1978, the Soviet Union legally recognized and supported only those veterans who had been disabled in combat. Under Khrushchev, pension payments for these veterans increased, and by 1975, their benefits included free public transportation, healthcare, housing assistance, utility bill payments, and opportunities to acquire specially equipped vehicles. During this period, many veterans – both those who were recognized by the Soviet Union and those who were not – formed grassroots associations. Most of these associations were persecuted and banned by the Soviet regime for their opposition to its limited definition of veteran citizens and other policies affecting veterans. The Soviet Union sanctioned only the Veterans Union, a pro-government association that had no local branches.<sup>8</sup>

In the lead-up to the invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989), the Soviet regime, now led by Brezhnev, expanded the range of soldiers legally recognized as veterans. In doing so, the government increased its financial and social support for veterans, but to encourage loyalty it presented these benefits as gifts rather than obligations of the state. These new benefits were not easily accessed; veterans were forced to endure lengthy waits to acquire essential certificates and documents. Meanwhile, state-led awareness campaigns emphasized familial support over government assistance, promoting the idea that returning veterans seamlessly reintegrate into society with family support while neglecting those without familial care. Notably, veterans deemed disloyal to the regime continued to face pressure, particularly through excessive bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining state guarantees.<sup>9</sup>

Upon gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine faced the task of formulating its own state policies for veterans, primarily individuals who participated in WWII and the war in Afghanistan. The community of around 150,000 Ukrainian Afghanistan war veterans at the time, represented by the Ukrainian Union of Afghanistan Veterans (UUAV), became the core of the veteran movement and played a key role in post-independence policy development. On October 22, 1993, after consultations with the first governmental veterans' committee appointed by the president, Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, passed a law titled "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection," which established the legal and institutional basis for veterans' policies in independent Ukraine. The

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<sup>7</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>8</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>9</sup> Veteran Hub.



law created a range of basic social benefits, and subsequent amendments have expanded the scope of who qualifies as a veteran and incorporated additional benefits. However, the structure of the law has remained unchanged since its inception in 1993.

In the two decades preceding Russia's initial attack on its territorial integrity, Ukraine maintained a standing representative committee for veterans. It initially operated under the purview of the Cabinet of Ministers and later the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. Meanwhile, the UUAV played a significant role during this period by building an extensive network across 27 regions, providing employment and housing to veterans, advocating for their interests locally, and conducting research on veterans' psychological rehabilitation – a kind of veteran-led civil society support structure that would become instrumental after 2014.<sup>10</sup>

Over the last decade, the involvement of Ukrainian security forces in the nation's defense against Russia has fundamentally redefined both the subjects and focus of its veterans policy and the societal connotations associated with the term "veteran". The Russian-Ukrainian war began when Russian Armed Forces illegally seized the Crimean Peninsula in February 2014 in response to the pro-Western Euromaidan protests known as the "Revolution of Dignity" and the ousting of Russia-aligned President Viktor Yanukovich. Following the annexation of Crimea, Ukraine's acting president, Olexander Turchynov declared the start of the "Anti-Terrorist Operation" (ATO) against pro-Russian separatist militias backed up by Russian forces in the country's east. In May, however, separatists initiated fraudulent independence referendums in several Ukrainian cities, leading to the proclaimed self-rule of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) in the Donbas region. By the end of 2014, Russia de-facto controlled 7.2% of Ukrainian territory.

In the following years, Ukraine continued to fight against Russia's hybrid war efforts, albeit with decreasing intensity. Two ceasefire agreements were negotiated in Minsk, but both failed to stop the fighting in eastern Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> In the meantime, Ukraine deepened its alliances with the EU and NATO, while Russia began massing troops along the Ukrainian border in early 2021.<sup>12</sup> On the morning of 24 February 2023, Putin declared the launching of a "special military operation" to protect people, who "pinned their hopes on Russia" in line with an aim to "demilitarize and denazify Ukraine."<sup>13</sup> This speech marked the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine.

Between 2014 and 2021, approximately 14,000 people died in the Russian-Ukrainian War, 1.5 million became internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 440,000 returned home as veterans.<sup>14</sup> During this period, Ukrainian law adjusted its 1993 law regulating the status of war veterans to extend veteran status to all people involved in the ATO, renamed in 2018 to the "Joint Forces Operation" (JFO).<sup>15</sup> The main governmental body from 2014 to 2018 was the State Service of Ukraine for War Veterans and Participants in the Anti-Terrorist Operation, which was under the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine.<sup>16</sup> The State Service comprised two departments: the Department of Social Protection and Financial Security and the Department

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<sup>10</sup> Brus and Pashkina, "Veterans Policy in Ukraine: Historical Development and Present Challenges."

<sup>11</sup> Reuters, "Timeline: The Events Leading up to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine"; Kuzio, "Euromaidan Revolution, Crimea and Russia-Ukraine War."

<sup>12</sup> Reuters, "Timeline: The Events Leading up to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine."

<sup>13</sup> President of Russia, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation."

<sup>14</sup> Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI), "The Long Shadow of Donbas."

<sup>15</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, "About the status of war veterans and guarantees of their social protection."

<sup>16</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, "Про Утворення Державної Служби України у Справах Ветеранів Війни Та Учасників Антитерористичної Операції [On the Creation of the State Service of Ukraine for War Veterans and Participants in Anti-Terrorist Operations]."



for Work with War Veterans and ATO Participants, along with seven interregional territorial offices referred to as "sectors" and five centers for social and psychological rehabilitation. The State Service was responsible for the veterans' social protection, including support for discharged servicemen, military personnel transitioning to civilian life, and those involved in anti-terrorist operations. While the Service's staff increased from 67 in 2014 to 115 in 2018, its capacity to fulfill its responsibilities was limited, possibly by tight budgeting and the low political prioritization of veterans' affairs.<sup>17</sup> This, combined with insufficient ministerial capability and collaboration within the government (an unaddressed risk of political isolation and radicalization), and growing societal rifts that contributed to the estrangement of veterans as a distinct social group, have created significant challenges for the successful reintegration of veterans in Ukraine.<sup>18</sup> Major changes in the sphere began in 2018 with the conversion of the State Service into the Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), which became the main authority for dealing with the issues of war veterans and their families.<sup>19</sup> By centralizing the Service's powers in a single body, MoVA aimed to implement veterans' policy more efficiently. Moreover, the creation of MoVA established a unified platform where, akin to existing international counterparts, veterans and their family members could access information about available benefits and receive support. Iryna Friz became the first Minister of Veterans Affairs and during her tenure, launched an exchange of experience between the United States and Ukraine on veterans' policy development.

In 2019, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs briefly merged with the Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons. However, recognizing the extensive responsibilities of the restructured Ministry, its leadership advocated for the reversal of the merger, which was ultimately achieved in March 2020. A particularly well-received reform championed by the MoVA was the creation of the Unified State Register of War Veterans in 2019. This initiative was designed for the collection, registration, accumulation, storage, protection, and depersonalization of information on "participants in hostilities," "individuals with special merits for the Fatherland," injured participants of the Revolution of Dignity and family members of the aforementioned categories as well as the deceased.<sup>20</sup> Prior to the full-scale invasion of 2022, the Unified State Register of War Veterans had registered more than 800,000 people; however, it has since been suspended due to security concerns.<sup>21</sup>

Since 2022, the growing number of people mobilized in the Russian-Ukrainian War has significantly increased public attention to veterans' affairs in Ukraine. The nation's hybrid defense efforts have been comprised of numerous groups, including traditional active and retired military personnel, foreign fighters, reservists with varying levels of experience and training, and irregular elements.<sup>22</sup> While the majority of future veterans are currently serving on the front lines, the processes of discharge and reintegration are unfolding amidst ongoing hostilities.<sup>23</sup>

Major institutional efforts are still necessary to adequately address the needs of these diverse veteran profiles in this strenuous context. As will be illustrated in Chapters 3.5.7 and 3.6.4,

<sup>17</sup> Brus and Pashkina, "Veterans Policy in Ukraine: Historical Development and Present Challenges."

<sup>18</sup> Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI), "The Long Shadow of Donbas."

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, "Положення про Міністерство у справах ветеранів України [Regulations on the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine]."

<sup>20</sup> Parliament of Ukraine, "On the Unified State Register of War Veterans."

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, "Юлія Лапутіна розповіла, як держава допомагає ветеранам та їхнім рідним [Yulia Laputina told how the state helps veterans and their relatives]."

<sup>22</sup> Ioanes, "Ukraine's Resistance Is Built on the Backs of Volunteers."

<sup>23</sup> EU Neighbours East, "EU4DigitalUA"; International Organization for Migration (IOM), "IOM and Germany Will Support Veterans' Reintegration in Ukraine"; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Seeking Solutions to Support the Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."



there is a critical need for the state to effectively coordinate the veteran policies within the Ministry and other departments, collect and use data on veterans so that all activities related to them are relevant and effective, and redesign the procedure for acquiring veteran status, among other issues.<sup>24</sup> However, Ukraine has exhibited considerable progress in its veterans' policies in the decades since it established its independence from the Soviet Union. Its creation of a new national framework for veterans affairs and more recent accommodation of a new generation of veterans demonstrates its capacity to reform and adapt to changing circumstances. Today, those who defend Ukraine are widely recognized for their merits by the government and the public. This broad political and societal consensus will facilitate the refinement of the nation's approach to veteran support – a goal pursued by a vast coalition of national and international actors.

### 2.3 Corioli Institute Support for Ukraine's Veterans and their Families

In the past year, the Corioli Institute (CI) has made supporting suitable and dignified pathways for Ukraine's frontline returnees and their families one of its core lines of action. Grounded in its dedication to intellectual rigor, the Institute embarks on comprehensive ethnographic fieldwork and research in close collaboration with local partners. This approach ensures that initiatives, such as the development of this policy paper, are informed in a manner that is both relevant to the populations it aims to serve and impactful to the audiences it seeks to engage.

So far, four researchers from the Institute have traveled to Ukraine for the purpose of cultivating institutional expertise and establishing a grounded connection to the issues affecting veterans, their loved ones, and those supporting them. The researchers conducted stakeholder and life history interviews with government officials, civil society representatives, and service members, including those stationed at the frontline, and initiated dialogues with partner organizations throughout central and western Ukraine to broaden CI's empirical coverage and enhance its understanding of a variety of local contexts within the country.

These efforts enabled CI to gather firsthand insights into the individual experiences and stakeholders making up the current veteran reintegration landscape and address this intricate field of action accordingly. Backed by firm and lasting partnerships with Ukrainian civil society, CI is identifying additional opportunities to implement research and action projects with veterans along various axes of reintegration. CI will leverage this collective expertise and resources to plan program interventions that engage with veterans and their families in an ethical and participatory manner.

CI's work in and about Ukraine benefits from its extensive experience in global research and action on the reintegration of formerly armed actors (FAAs) and conflict-affected communities. Drawing from its work in over a dozen countries spanning four continents, CI adopts a holistic, participatory, and inclusive approach to its projects, engaging diverse relevant stakeholders in the design, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives that foster trust and social cohesion. It aims to develop effective, contextually relevant interventions by involving target populations in decision-making from the outset. The Institute aligns its practices with local needs, facilitating international donor support to bridge funding and impact and promoting professionalization and sustainability among grassroots initiatives. Its global perspective on peacebuilding and reintegration informs CI's advocacy for revising Ukraine's veteran policies and supporting locally led solutions for veterans and their families to lead fulfilling post-service lives.

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<sup>24</sup> Galan, "Три найкритичніші проблеми ветеранського руху."



## 2.4 Study Objectives and Methodology

This report presents and synthesizes the most crucial insights regarding the reintegration challenges faced by Ukrainian frontline returnees and how to address them. It aims to serve as a reference for academics, practitioners, and policymakers engaged in research or activities concerning Ukrainian veterans and their families and thereby facilitate a more comprehensive, multi-sectoral, and needs-focused approach to addressing challenges and advancing work in this area going forward.

The report's contribution in this regard is two-fold. First, it aims to provide a holistic overview of the state of veteran's reintegration and related empirical trends in Ukraine, showcasing the demographic characteristics (Chapter 3.1), service profiles (3.2), existing legal frameworks (3.3), and the constellation of actors involved in reintegration (3.4) while presenting the most salient challenges (3.5) and recommendations (3.6) found in the existing literature of the field. Second, it analyzes fieldwork data collected by CI researchers in Ukraine and data generated by participants during a related conference organized by CI (Chapter 4), and building on this analysis, provides recommendations that complement the existing landscape of support efforts.

CI's fieldwork data consists of 41 interviews with veterans, reintegration program directors, caseworkers, civil society professionals, volunteers, and policymakers, among other stakeholders, conducted in Kyiv, Kalush, and Kostiantynivka between August 7<sup>th</sup> and September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (For a list, see **Appendix A**). The overarching experiences, perspectives, and focal points revealed after systematically coding the data directly inform the structure and content of the analysis in Chapter 5. They also served as the conceptual basis for the breakout room discussions held during the first "Out of War" conference, "Global Insights to Support Strategies for the Reintegration of Ukraine's Frontline Returnees", held at the London School of Economics and Political Science on October 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (more details in **Appendices B and C**). The notes from these breakout room sessions, attended by an international and multi-sectoral audience – including Ukrainian veterans and professionals working on reintegration in Ukraine – were thematically coded and incorporated into this policy paper's analysis. During these sessions, participants shared their experiences and generated comparative ideas for the Ukrainian context.

The design of the "Out of War" conference and the multiple-round reviewing process of this study alike were done in close coordination with veteran and practitioner representatives of the Ukrainian partner organizations that have been guiding CI's work on the topic since the fieldwork stage: The Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF) of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), the Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement (UWVM), Pislya Sluzhby ("After Service"), and the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), among others. CI's Research and Action approach adheres to the paradigm that research should not be conducted merely "on" individuals. Instead, CI engages with local stakeholders in a collaborative group to define the issues to be investigated, to plan and execute the subsequent processes, and to stakeholder approval on all outcomes.<sup>25</sup> This meant putting the agency of Ukrainian veterans and those working with them at the heart of this publication. This study describes the challenges facing veterans and issues recommendations on provisions immediately concerning them, following the principle of "nothing about us without us."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Schafft and Greenwood, "Promises and Dilemmas of Participation."

<sup>26</sup> Kilroy, *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants After Conflict*.



The following desk review section of the study features an in-depth state of the field: a summary of the statistics, identified issues, and existing recommendations in recent literature published by national and international state and civil society actors active in Ukraine. Key documents in this desk review include the following:

- “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families” (2023) by Veteran Hub, Pryntsyv Human Rights Center for the Military, Space of Opportunities and Legal Hundred.
- A series of 2021 Analytic Reports on the Veterans’ Reintegration Survey (**Referred to throughout this report as “the VRS”**) and other materials released by the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX).
- The International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) publications “Veterans’ Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey” (2022), conducted jointly with the EU and MoVA, and “Final Analytical Report: The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine with a Special Focus on the Inclusivity of Particularly Vulnerable Veterans and the Role That Veterans’ Organizations Can Play in Building Inclusivity” (2023) (**Referred to throughout this report as “the 2022 and 2023 IOM surveys”**).
- “Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context” (2023) by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).
- “Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere” (2023) by USAID and other stakeholders.
- Several surveys conducted by the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation since 2014, including “Portrait of a Veteran in the Russian-Ukrainian War” (2022) and “Needs and obstacles of Veterans in Employment” (2023).
- “The Hard Return: Mitigating Organized Crime Risks Among Veterans in Ukraine” (2024) by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.



A woman in military uniform, wearing a camouflage cap and jacket, is shown in profile, looking towards the right. The background is blurred, showing other people in similar attire. A large, stylized green leaf graphic is positioned in the lower right foreground, partially overlapping the woman's uniform.

**3.**

**State of the Field:  
Veterans Reintegration  
in Ukraine**



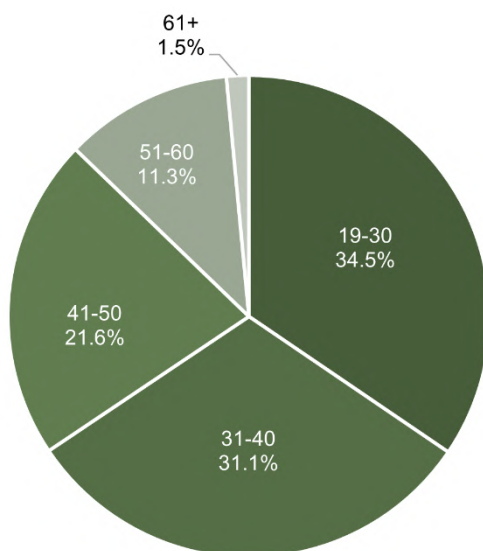
### 3.1 Demographic Characteristics

As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA) of Ukraine registered 851,068 individuals as veterans under the "Law of Ukraine on the Status of War Veterans and Their Social Protection." This figure includes 493,550 "participants in hostilities", among them 438,834 combatants from the ATO/JFO conflicts across AFU, Volunteer Battalions, National Guard, National Police, Security Service and other security and law enforcement bodies. Additionally, the MoVA has identified 176,908 "war participants" from all time periods (see **Chapter 3.3 for the legal definition**), 111,530 family members of deceased war veterans, and 68,290 persons with war-related disabilities, which includes both civilians and members of the military or security forces.

Due to the sensitive nature of the data, the MoVA has not updated the official statistics relating to veterans and their demographic characteristics since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, aside from a few sporadic insights.<sup>27</sup>

#### 3.1.1 Age, Civil Status and Household Size

Statistics published by the MoVA suggests that, prior to February 2022<sup>28</sup>, the majority of ATO/JTO veterans were aged in their 30s and 40s (**Figure 1**). The highest proportion of ATO/JTO veterans were aged 31-40 (34.5%), followed closely by the 41-50 age group (31.1%). The smallest representation was among those aged 61 and older – only 1.5%. Approximately 22% of these veterans were between 19 and 30 years old. Most individuals who served in active combat were aged 25-44 years (over 73%), with less than 5% aged 18-25.<sup>29</sup>



**The highest proportion of ATO/JTO veterans were in the 31-40 and 41-50 age groups.**

Figure 1: Age distribution among ATO/JFO veterans.  
Source: Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (2022).

Other armed forces tend to have younger fighters. In the United Kingdom, active duty personnel aged 25 or under made up 25.7% of active duty military personnel (as of April 2022); in the U.S., this same age group made up 51.6% of active duty military personnel (in 2020). The comparatively small number of younger fighters in Ukraine's armed forces can be explained by Ukraine's reluctance to deploy younger individuals to front-line positions.

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, "Analytical Information According to the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine"; Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF), "Portrait of a Veteran in Russian-Ukrainian War."

<sup>28</sup> Demographic statistics for after the full-scale invasion are not made available due to security reasons.

<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, "Analytical Information According to the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine."

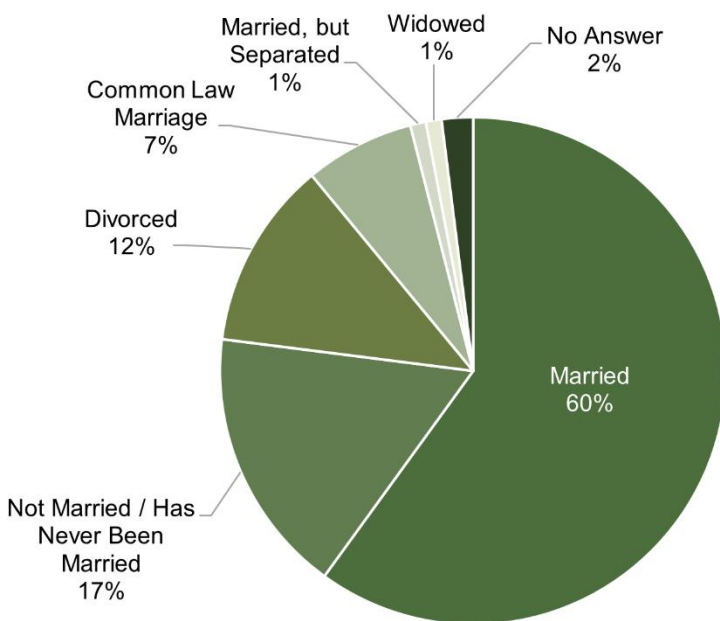


However, the Russian invasion in 2022 changed Ukraine’s deployment strategies, and this has likely affected the age composition of the veteran population.<sup>30</sup> Some organizations, including Veteran Hub, have observed a decrease in the average age of Ukrainian veterans.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, the average age of Ukrainian soldiers is reported to have increased from 30-35 to 43 since February 2022.<sup>32</sup> This increase has been attributed to the country’s aging male population and the disproportionate mobilization of older men with military experience. Recognizing this trend, the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) are increasingly trying to attract younger volunteers while the government lowered the conscription age from 27 to 25.<sup>33</sup>

Regardless of the projected demographic trends, existing data makes clear that most Ukrainian veterans are of working age, with opportunities to pursue education, undergo retraining, start or support families, and engage in entrepreneurial endeavors.<sup>34</sup>

Data regarding the civil status of veterans suggests that the majority are married. In the 2022 IOM survey, 60% reported that they were married, 17% had never been married and 12% were divorced.<sup>35</sup> The IOM reported similar marriage statistics in 2023: 52% of respondents were officially married, while 19.2% were in a civil marriage without official registration.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, according to an IREX analysis of the Veterans’ Reintegration Survey (VRS) results, 47% of female and 58% of male veterans are married, with 21% and 13% respectively being divorced or separated (**Figure 2**).<sup>37</sup>



**Surveys suggest that around 60% of veterans are married.**

Figure 2: Marital status of veterans. Source: IOM (2023).

<sup>30</sup> UNDP, “Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context.”

<sup>31</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

<sup>32</sup> Saradzhyan, “Average Age of Ukrainian Soldiers Is Past 40 and That Could Be a Problem.”

<sup>33</sup> Olearchyk, “Manpower Becomes Ukraine’s Latest Challenge as It Digs in for a Long War”; Hall, “Army Conscription Becomes Toxic Issue for Ukraine’s Leaders.”

<sup>34</sup> Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF), “Portrait of a Veteran in Russian-Ukrainian War.”

<sup>35</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Kinsella and Aras, “The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine.”

<sup>37</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Female Veterans in Ukraine.”

This same set of surveys has also shown that most veterans live with family members. The 2022 IOM survey reported the average veteran household size to be 2.72 people, slightly above the general population average of 2.58.<sup>38</sup> In the IOM's 2023 survey, 25.4% of veterans reported that they lived with just one other person, 30.3% lived with two other people, 18.4% with three, 6.9% with four, and 1.4% with five. Only 17.4% of veterans reported that they lived alone (Figure 3).<sup>39</sup>

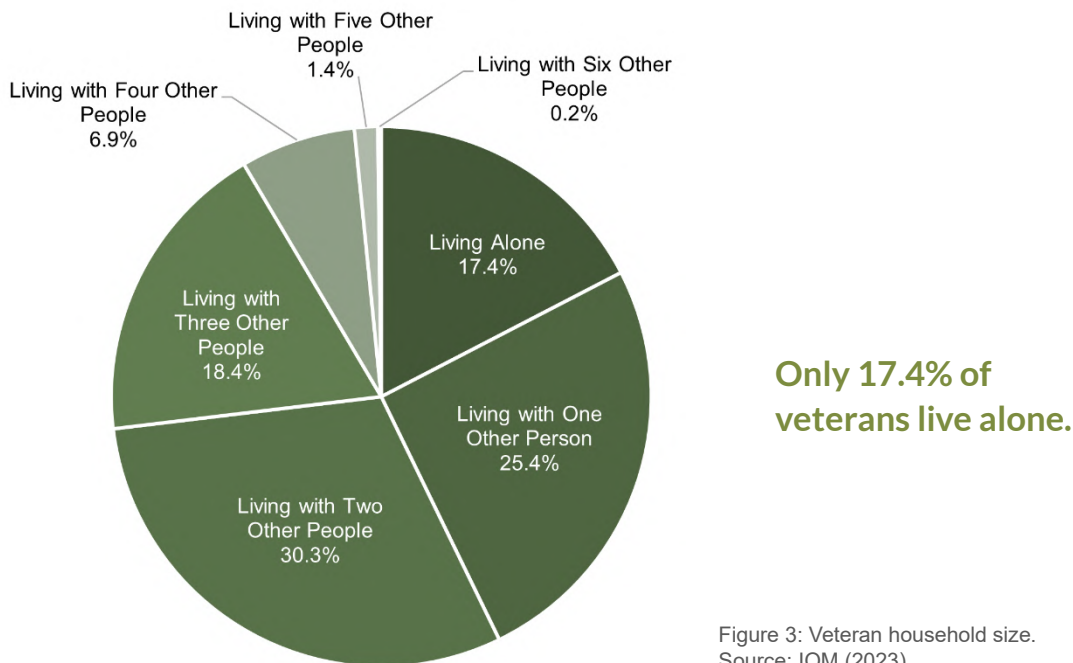


Figure 3: Veteran household size.  
Source: IOM (2023).

Data on home ownership among veterans shows a slight gender disparity: 43% of female veterans own a house or apartment compared to 53% of male veterans. Additionally, a higher percentage of veteran women (32%) rents their living spaces, compared to 20% of veteran men.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.1.2 Gender

Although the exact number or share of women among individuals with veteran status is unclear, current data on their service in the AFU and several fragmented statistics on previous awards of combatant status offer a rough estimate.

According to government sources, in July 2024, female service members made up approximately 8% of the AFU, or 67,000 individuals. Among them are around 19,000 civilian employees and 48,000 military personnel, with over 7,000 female officers, nearly 12,000 non-commissioned officers and 5,000 women in senior rank positions. The proportion of women in military roles within the AFU has tripled since 2014, when only 16,000 out of 50,000 female service members held such positions.

Furthermore, more than 10,000 women are serving directly on the frontlines – double the number from the first year of the full-scale invasion.<sup>41</sup> Out of all *current* military personnel in

<sup>38</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), "Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey," February 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>40</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Female Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>41</sup> Basmat, "Ukraine Sees Surge in Female Soldiers with over 10,000 Women Serving on Front Lines, Deputy PM Says"; Hrysiuk, "How Many Women Are Defending Ukraine against Russia's Invasion?"; Ukrinform, "Ukraine's Defense Ministry Initiates Creation of Military Ombudsman, New Institution for Protection of Rights of Military Personnel."



January 2024, 13,487 women had been granted the legal status of a “participant in hostilities”, i.e. became officially combat veterans.<sup>42</sup>

Women have only legally been able to serve in combat roles since 2018, though unofficially they did so earlier. From 2014 to 2019, the proportion of women taking on combat roles within security forces or volunteer battalions increased from 6% to over 10%.<sup>43</sup> By April 2020, over 13,000 women had received the status of “participant in hostilities” in eastern Ukraine, and by the end of 2021, about 16,700 had attained it, accounting for roughly 4% of the total veteran population at the time – likely an underestimation considering this figure doesn’t include women with a disability-related veteran status.<sup>44</sup>

Notably, all female service members and reservists have enlisted voluntarily, because there is currently no mandatory conscription for women in Ukraine.<sup>45</sup> The number of women in the AFU, Territorial Defense Forces (TDF) and other security forces has significantly increased after the full-scale invasion and is expected to continue growing as the war progresses.<sup>46</sup> A spokesperson for the TDF stated that at least 11,000 women have joined Ukraine’s regular army since February 2022.<sup>47</sup>

### 3.1.3 Geographic Distribution

According to official MoVA data, prior to the full-scale invasion, the approximately 440,000 ATO/JFO veterans were most heavily concentrated in oblasts of Ukraine’s northern, eastern, and western macro-regions (**Figure 5**).

26% of veterans lived in the eastern macro-region, which includes Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia, with Zaporizhzhia oblast having the highest concentration of all oblasts in the country. The western macro-region, comprising Lviv, Zakarpattia, Volyn, Rivne, Khmelnytskyi, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Chernivtsi, accounted for 24.3% of veterans, with the largest concentration in Lviv.

The northern macro-region, which includes Zhytomyr, Sumy, Chernihiv, Kyiv, and the city of Kyiv, hosted 23.7% of veterans, with Kyiv and Kyiv Oblast accommodating the largest share. Smaller concentrations were reported in the central macro-region (Vinnytsia, Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, and Poltava) at 15.6%, and the southern macro-region (Mykolaiv, Kherson, and Odesa; excluding occupied Crimea) at 10%.<sup>48</sup>

While there is no precise data on the present-day geographical concentration of veterans, evidence suggests that the full-scale invasion will have shifted Ukrainian service members and veterans westward to the central and western macro-regions. The Russian occupation of Ukrainian territories has displaced approximately 5.3 million Ukrainians, 70% of whom originated in the eastern macro-region.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Barsukova, “The Ministry of Defense Reveals How Many Women Serve in the Armed Forces as of 2024.”

<sup>43</sup> Palikot, “Women At War: Ukraine’s Female Soldiers Dream Of Freedom, Fight For Survival”; Schlegel, “Mitigating the Gendered Effects of Ukraine’s Refugee Crisis.”

<sup>44</sup> ArmyInform, “How Many Female Military Personnel Serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine - New Data from the Personnel Center”; ArmyInform, “More than 31,000 Women Serve in Our Army.”

<sup>45</sup> Shulzhenko, “‘She Needs Armor.’ Female Ukrainian Soldiers Call for Equality.”

<sup>46</sup> Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF), “Portrait of a Veteran in Russian-Ukrainian War.”

<sup>47</sup> Kelly, “Ukraine’s Fighting Women.”

<sup>48</sup> Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, “Analytical Information According to the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine.”

<sup>49</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), “Ukraine Internal Displacement Report: General Population Survey.”



Figure 4: Political map of Ukraine. Courtesy of the European Union [ECJ – JRC](#)



Figure 5: Choropleth map showing the concentration of veterans by oblast. Source: Ministry of Veterans Affairs (2022).



The percentage of veterans currently living in urban and rural areas also remains uncertain. Research data from January 2022, however, shows that about 70% of veterans then resided in the administrative centers of their respective oblast, i.e. urban areas, reflecting the urban-rural distribution of Ukraine’s general population.<sup>50</sup> Another January 2022 survey – the Veterans’ Reintegration in Ukraine National Survey – found that 85% of veterans then lived

<sup>50</sup> Balyuk, Klauning, and Chetvertukhina, “The Role of the Veteran Community in the Development of a Democratic Society.”

in a city, 6% in a town, and only 9% in a village; it should be noted, however, that the study's sample overrepresented respondents from Kyiv.<sup>51</sup>

Notably, according to the 2023 IOM survey, only a minority of veterans reported having experienced displacement. Most veterans (62.9%) were residing in their usual place of residence when the survey was conducted. A small percentage (8.9%) had been forced to leave their usual homes and only 2.4% had officially registered as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) with social services. Meanwhile, a much larger April 2024 UVF survey reported that 9.2% of respondents held IDP status.<sup>52</sup>

The fact that 36% of respondents were living in locations other than their habitual places of residence at the time of the 2023 IOM survey indicates that a significant number of veterans might have relocated voluntarily. For instance, many veterans reportedly have moved to Kyiv for better employment opportunities given the broader economic disruptions across Ukraine.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.1.4 Employment

In the 2023 IOM survey, 76% of veteran respondents considered “regular income” and 69% “employment” to be important for their integration into a community, making them the top two priorities.<sup>54</sup> Most surveys estimate the unemployment rate among veterans to be no higher than 30%. Among VRS respondents, 72% of veterans were employed<sup>55</sup>, with most working full-time. Of these, 42% had jobs different from their pre-service employment, while 23% remained in the same job or lost their pre-service job, and another 7% found employment after being unemployed prior to their service.<sup>56</sup>

Predictably, unemployed veterans were more likely to express dissatisfaction with their economic situation than their employed counterparts, but notably, both employed and unemployed veterans expressed dissatisfaction with their current economic situation. Employment certainty and regularity as well as steadiness of income are key factors associated with economic satisfaction. Of those surveyed, 24% reported being “very dissatisfied” and 32% “somewhat dissatisfied” with their economic situations.<sup>57</sup>

Over a third of veterans who retained their pre-service jobs reported no change in their economic situation and 32% who found jobs post-conflict experienced some improvement. However, many faced difficult transitions, with over 20% of respondents experiencing job loss after completing their military service – more than double the national unemployment rate of 9.5%.<sup>58</sup> The percentage of veterans facing periods of unemployment upon returning to civilian life was higher among residents of villages (49%) and among young individuals aged 18-24 (61%).<sup>59</sup> Of those who lost jobs post-service, 21% were temporarily unemployed and 39% remained unemployed. More than half of those who lost their jobs and 43% who remained

<sup>51</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

<sup>52</sup> Kinsella and Aras, “The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine”; Velychko-Trifonyuk et al., “Current Needs and Vision for Opportunities in Career and Professional Growth for Veterans.”

<sup>53</sup> Kinsella and Aras, “The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine.”

<sup>54</sup> Kinsella and Aras.

<sup>55</sup> The high percentage of employed veterans in this and other surveys may be attributed to the researchers' snowball sampling method, which may have skewed the data toward veterans connected to NGOs.

<sup>56</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions”; Sereda et al., “Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022.”

<sup>57</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions.”

<sup>58</sup> IREX.

<sup>59</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.



unemployed felt that their conditions worsened since their service. Among veterans who were jobless both before and after service, 37% remained unemployed and 23% retired.

Importantly for thinking about economic and social reintegration, 10% of veterans stopped working due to permanent disability, and 81% of veterans who lost jobs post-service had suffered physical injuries or illnesses related to the conflict.<sup>60</sup>

Employment trends differ between veteran and non-veteran populations in Ukraine. For veterans, the largest share of employers (31%) are from the military, followed by security and law enforcement (about 15%), and then the construction, manufacturing, and transportation sectors. In contrast, the general population's top sectors are manufacturing, mining, quarrying, construction and repairs, wholesale and retail trade, and agriculture. For veterans, the typical pathways to finding employment include leveraging assistance from friends and fellow soldiers within the military (41%), as well as from nonmilitary friends or professional acquaintances (31%). Only 8% found successful opportunities through government services.<sup>61</sup>

In a UVF veteran employment study, a significant portion of the respondents highlighted first aid (48.7%) and people management (42.7%) as key skills they acquired during their military service. Additionally, 31.5% of respondents reported developing proficiency in document management. Other frequently mentioned skills included driving and equipment operation (25.6%), quadcopter/drone operation (21.2%), computer systems and software (16.9%), and logistics (16.8%). Another 13.7% reported mastering communication system management, and 11.8% noted that they had acquired engineering and construction skills.<sup>62</sup>

According to a UVF survey from summer 2022, most veterans involved in the ongoing hostilities since the full-scale invasion intended to return to their pre-war workplaces upon leaving service. The sectors that most appealed to these veterans included information technology, self-employment, military service, and service-oriented fields. Most veterans previously employed in the IT sector planned to rejoin it (74%), with only 5% not considering a return and 21% remaining undecided.

Similarly, 74% of business-owning and self-employed veterans intended to resume their careers; 10% planned not to do so, and 16% were undecided. A slightly lower percentage of veterans planned to return to careers in the service industry (66%), with only 5% intending to seek employment elsewhere, and 28% remaining undecided. Among those with military careers, 69% planned to continue serving in the AFU, and 50% expressed interest in joining other security forces.<sup>63</sup>

As noted above, a small number of employed veterans reported being self-employed (7%) or private registered entrepreneurs (3%).<sup>64</sup> In 2022, the MoVA registered 12,789 individual entrepreneurs or self-employed individuals among veterans and their family members. Of these entrepreneurs, 50.4% were engaged in retail, 30.2% in wholesale trade, and 20.9% in real estate transactions. Many self-employed veterans worked in the field of information

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<sup>60</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions."

<sup>61</sup> IREX.

<sup>62</sup> Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska, "Needs and Obstacles of Veterans in Employment," July 2023.

<sup>63</sup> Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF), "Portrait of a Veteran in Russian-Ukrainian War."

<sup>64</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), "Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey," February 2022.



technologies, with 18.9% contributing to information services and 16.9% engaged in computer programming, consulting, and related activities.<sup>65</sup>

In an April 2024 UVF survey, 62.9% of active-duty veterans expressed a desire to start their own business, with 11% already owning one. Among non-active-duty veterans, 50.14% indicated a desire to start a business, while 12% already owned one.<sup>66</sup>

### 3.1.5 Education

According to the January 2022 Veterans' Reintegration in Ukraine National Survey conducted by the IOM, EU and MoVA, 38% of veterans had a higher education degree 7% of veterans reported having completed general secondary education and 37% technical/vocational education while 17% reported an incomplete one. Notably, female veterans (5% of this 4,286 individual sample) were more university-educated than men: 44% reported having a degree with just 38% of men, while vocational education was more typical among male than female veterans (37% and 26% respectively).<sup>67</sup>

It is worth mentioning, however, that the survey relied on non-random snowball sampling and was biased towards urban areas, which affects its representativeness. In a smaller representative survey of 1,000 veterans, 45.1% of respondents report having a higher education degree (specialist diploma, bachelor's, master's), 9.2% incomplete or ongoing higher education, 37% technical/vocational education, 7.3% general secondary education and 0.5% incomplete secondary education (9<sup>th</sup> grade and below).<sup>68</sup>

Additionally, among the 407 veteran family members surveyed by the IOM in 2023, 41% had completed higher education, earning bachelor's, master's, or academic degrees. About 29.5% reported some higher education without completion, typically from technical schools, obtaining qualifications such as junior specialist or junior bachelor's degrees. Technical-vocational education was completed by 24% of the respondents, with qualifications from vocational schools. Additionally, 5% had completed upper secondary education (10-11 years of schooling), and a small fraction, 0.5%, had lower secondary education or less, equivalent to 9 years of schooling.<sup>69</sup>

Relative to the total number of veterans, uptake of state support for obtaining vocational, technical, and higher education in the academic year 2021/2022 was low, with 10,470 enrollments – 10,219 of them for bachelor's degrees. Simultaneously, 3,463 children of war veterans received support for a "professional junior bachelor's" education, 7,257 people for a regular bachelor's and 305 for a master's. Moreover, in 2021, only 3,328 used the state program for professional course training, the majority of which took driving lessons (2,820), followed by learning foreign languages (198), and IT training (86). While the explicit demand for education is reportedly lower compared to that for job opportunities, veterans and their families lack information regarding educational offers (**further discussed in Chapter 3.5.7.2**).<sup>70</sup> Additionally, female veterans expressed a higher interest (70%) in professional development services than their male counterparts (59%).<sup>71</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF), "Portrait of a Veteran in Russian-Ukrainian War."

<sup>66</sup> Velychko-Trifonyuk et al., "Current Needs and Vision for Opportunities in Career and Professional Growth for Veterans."

<sup>67</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), "Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey," February 2022.

<sup>68</sup> Balyuk, Klauning, and Chetvertukhina, "The Role of the Veteran Community in the Development of a Democratic Society."

<sup>69</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>70</sup> Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF), "Portrait of a Veteran in Russian-Ukrainian War."

<sup>71</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions."





It is worth highlighting that, among unemployed veterans looking for employment, the main difficulty mentioned was “Unsuitable or insufficient skills/education” (34%) before “No vacancies” (31%).<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, as a growing cohort of younger and less professionalized demographics engages on the frontlines since the full-scale invasion, particularly those who enlist before or during their early studies and occupational careers, the demand for educational opportunities for veterans at all levels is expected to become more pronounced in the future.

### 3.1.6 Holistic Health

After returning from war, veterans commonly experience a range of health issues falling into different categories. First, there are physical injuries resulting from service or combat operations, such as amputations, traumatic brain injuries, and musculoskeletal diseases. These injuries can also lead to other health risks, including an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia, vision and hearing impairment.

Secondly, there are mental health implications, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), generalized anxiety disorder, and a heightened suicide risk. These psychological consequences may also be compounded by physical trauma or amputation. Additionally, there is a risk of substance abuse, including alcohol, tobacco, and narcotic pain medications used to treat severe injuries.

Third, veterans may also face infectious diseases such as hepatitis, tuberculosis, and genitourinary system infections, including reproductive health issues, such as reduced fertility or infertility, are also prevalent among veterans. Chronic diseases, including endocrine, oncological, and cardiological disorders, may be exacerbated by combat-related injuries or occur more frequently in veterans compared to civilians.

Finally, exposure to harmful environmental factors like noise, radiation, and toxic substances can have lasting consequences on veterans' health.<sup>73</sup>

According to U.S. estimates, approximately 120,000 Ukrainian soldiers sustained some kind of service-related injury in 2023 alone, while Ukrainian Health Minister Viktor Lyashko previously stated that around 230,000 individuals received rehabilitation services in the same year.<sup>74</sup> Government sources confirmed that, by February 2024, the number of Ukrainians with at least one amputated limb stands around 40,000, most of whom are veterans.<sup>75</sup>

Before February 2022, 14% of veterans reported someone in their household having a war-related disability, compared to 7% in the general population. The ongoing conflict is expected to significantly increase disability rates among both veterans and civilians. Meanwhile, a 2024 UVF survey of 1,043 veterans revealed that 15.9% of respondents hold the status of a person with a disability as a result of the war. Notably, however, many veterans may live with a disability without officially holding a recognized disability status.<sup>76</sup> In the 2023 IOM survey,

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<sup>72</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

<sup>73</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

<sup>74</sup> The New Voice of Ukraine, “Ukrainian Veteran Advocates for National-Level Rehabilitation and Patronage Service Similar to SSFB's.”

<sup>75</sup> Ourdam, “Superhumans, the Center That Repairs Ukraine's Most Gravely War-Wounded.”

<sup>76</sup> UNDP, “Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context”; Velychko-Trifonyuk et al., “Current Needs and Vision for Opportunities in Career and Professional Growth for Veterans.”



73% of respondents reported injuries or illnesses directly linked to their military duties while 31% were diagnosed with disabilities.

In a 2022 iteration of the survey only 10% of respondents had received disability certificates, whereas in 2020, the figure stood at 6%. Although caution is warranted when comparing these figures, they do suggest a significant surge in the disability rate among veterans. Among those reporting a disability in 2023, 6.6% fell into Disability Group I, i.e. individuals who have entirely lost their ability to work and require constant care, 45.6% into Disability Group II, representing those capable of self-care but unable to work under regular conditions, and 47.8% into Disability Group III, which consists of individuals capable of working under facilitated conditions despite their disabilities.<sup>77</sup>

In terms of mental health care, it has been found that veterans primarily seek such support due to family relationship issues, PTSD effects, and substance use, but many providers observe that veterans are a closed group with low trust in mental health services and limited motivation to seek help.<sup>78</sup> This is reflected in the fact that, according to the Veterans' Reintegration Survey (VRS), only 32% of veterans sought mental health care while 72% utilized physical health care. This gap is more pronounced among men (30% vs. 72%) than among women (47% vs. 70%).<sup>79</sup> Among female veterans, instances of sexual- and gender-based violence significantly contribute to the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and various other mental health challenges.<sup>80</sup>

Mental health specialists report that working with veterans demands enhanced personal qualities and skills, including honesty, emotionality, sincerity, and genuine involvement in problem-solving, due to veterans' acute sensitivity to falsehoods and a strong sense of justice. Establishing contact and building a trusting relationship with veterans is particularly challenging in this context. Additionally, providers recognized that addressing veterans' mental health needs involves broader factors, including employment, benefits, and self-fulfillment. As identified by the study, the top five factors contributing to successful therapeutic work with veterans are adaptation and re-socialization to civilian life, improvement of well-being and emotional state, enhancing relationships with family, friends, and colleagues, fostering understanding and self-sufficiency in dealing with problems, and resolving the specific issues addressed in therapy.<sup>81</sup>

The IREX report "Healthcare Utilization Among Veterans", a statistical analysis of the VRS results, highlights some significant variances in the pursuit of both physical and mental health care among veterans. Veterans who experienced actual combat are 58% more likely to seek physical healthcare, while those with higher levels of education exhibit a 12% increase. Additionally, each one-year increment in age is associated with an estimated 2% effect on seeking physical healthcare. For mental health care, assignment to combat positions is associated with 69% higher odds of utilization while having witnessed actual combat with 64%. The odds for female veterans to seek mental health care are 166% higher than for male veterans. Furthermore, veterans residing in urban areas exhibit a 37% higher likelihood to pursue this treatment compared to those living in rural settlements.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>78</sup> IREX, "Survey of Mental Health Providers."

<sup>79</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Design Focused on Healthcare Utilization Among Veterans," July 2021.

<sup>80</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Female Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>81</sup> IREX, "Survey of Mental Health Providers."

<sup>82</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Design Focused on Healthcare Utilization Among Veterans," July 2021.



## 3.2 Service Profiles

### 3.2.1 Exposure to Combat

Among the professional soldiers, volunteers, and others who make up the AFU, the impacts of military service on future welfare vary depending on one's exposure to combat. Under the "On Defense of Ukraine" law, combat experience includes direct participation in military operations, specifically meaning the use of military formations and units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, other Defense Forces components, and/or the Special Operations Police Unit to engage in combat, repel armed aggression against Ukraine, or neutralize armed conflict.<sup>83</sup> Combat exposure significantly impacts mental and physical health outcomes, requiring tailored support for reintegration into civilian life. Veterans with direct combat experience are 58% more likely to seek physical healthcare and 64% more likely to seek mental healthcare compared to those without combat experience.<sup>84</sup>

Gender disparities exist in the duration of military service and the degree of combat exposure among Ukrainian military personnel. Female veterans served an average of 787 days in military service compared to 753 days for their male counterparts. The majority of male veterans (81%) served in combat roles, while less than half of female veterans (37%) did so. The relative proportions of veterans with combat experience were similar: 79% of male veterans had combat experience, versus 40% of female veterans.<sup>85</sup> Combat exposure has a significant impact on mental and physical health outcomes amongst veterans. Research shows that veterans who have been directly exposed to combat are 58% more likely to seek physical healthcare compared to veterans without combat experience. Similarly, veterans with combat experience are 64% more likely to seek mental healthcare compared to veterans who have not directly been exposed to combat.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.2.2 Active Duty, Non-Active Duty and Reserve Force

Contrary to common usage, the term "veteran" does not imply a permanent exit from military service or involvement in hostilities but instead denotes a legal status. Many Ukrainian soldiers with veteran status in the current conflict remain on active duty, interacting with civilian life only during periods of vacation or temporary leave. Others, upon *discharge*, for instance, on less severe medical grounds or after the completion of a service term, transition into the operational reserve force of the TDF. Only a small number permanently and fully reintegrate into civilian life, usually due to age, family circumstances (e.g. urgent care work), or severe health issues, an issue that will be discussed further in Chapter 3.5.3.

Ukrainian law distinguishes between the general mobilization reserve, which includes all mobilized citizens fit or partially fit for military service, and the operational reserve, consisting of those with military experience who voluntarily agree to serve in the active or standby reserve, depending on their readiness for immediate deployment.

During the full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian army attracted an unprecedented influx of military personnel through mobilization. Many of these veterans are expected to continue their military service during and after the state of emergency. Research into the experiences of Donbas veterans shows that up to 30% have continued their military service. If this trend persists post-

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<sup>83</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, "About the Défense of Ukraine."

<sup>84</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Design Focused on Healthcare Utilization Among Veterans," July 2021.

<sup>85</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Female Veterans in Ukraine," Analytic Report, Veteran Reintegration Program, July 2021.

<sup>86</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Design Focused on Healthcare Utilization Among Veterans," July 2021.



demobilization by decree, a significant proportion of veterans are likely to remain in military service.

Before the full-scale invasion in 2022, Donbas veterans were the core of the active and standby reserves, quickly assuming positions and forming the foundation of Ukraine's armed resistance. Today, a much larger number of TDF members have combat experience, potentially expanding the operational reserve pool to over a million individuals in the future who will remain in this capacity beyond the current hostilities and mobilization efforts.<sup>87</sup>

### 3.2.3 Donbas Veterans, New Soldiers, Foreign Fighters and Civilian Volunteers

The Donbas war, the first armed conflict on Ukrainian soil since the mid-20th century, mobilized about 350,000 Ukrainians, or roughly 1% of the population. This included professional soldiers, conscripts, and volunteers, some of whom were later integrated into the AFU and National Guard after joining the Volunteer Battalions. Estimates suggest that over 7,000 AFU servicewomen served in Donbas, and 30-45% of the 40,000 volunteers were women.<sup>88</sup> At the start of the war, the Ukrainian military faced significant setbacks, stemming from defections to Pro-Russia separatist forces and outdated equipment. In response, many ordinary citizens, most lacking military experience and equipment, abandoned their civilian jobs to join the frontlines as volunteer soldiers.<sup>89</sup>

The Ukrainian parliament authorized the formation of volunteer armed groups to defend the country, many of which were funded by churches, civil society groups, and community leaders. By October 2014, more than forty-four territorial defense battalions, thirty-two special police battalions, three volunteer national guard battalions, and at least three pro-Ukrainian unregulated battalions had been established. Initially, the Ukrainian public viewed volunteer fighters as heroes. However, despite their sacrifices, volunteer fighters faced declining popularity due to Russian disinformation, criticism of oligarch sponsorship, and strained relations with the government and formal military and police structures.<sup>90</sup>

Donbas war veterans join a lineage of Ukrainian veterans that spans multiple generations, including those from the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, Soviet proxy wars, and World War II. Each group of veterans has unique interests and needs, which are supported by satellite groups and affiliated organizations. For example, several civil society groups honor the small number of remaining World War II veterans through ceremonies and civic initiatives. Veterans of both Afghanistan and Donbas wars maintain connections with compatriots in former Soviet Union countries. Donbas veterans have diverse needs: irregular volunteers seek to maintain unit ties, while formal army veterans focus on post-service transitions like employment and education. The MoVA faces the challenge of addressing these differing needs with limited funding and a lack of strategic direction to establish clear priorities.<sup>91</sup>

Following the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022, there has been a massive mobilization of individuals from around the world joining the military to defend Ukraine. While exact statistics on the number of people involved in combat or supporting roles are not available, estimates suggest that between 1.5 to 2 million Ukrainians have been engaged in

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<sup>87</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>88</sup> International Alert, "What's next for Veterans in Ukraine? Promoting Inclusion to Improve the Reintegration Architecture for Former Combatants.," Policy Brief, March 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Burgess, "The Lost Veterans of Donbas."

<sup>90</sup> Burgess.

<sup>91</sup> Lauren Van Metre and John Boerstler, "The Trip From Donbas: Ukraine's Pressing Need to Defend Its Veterans" (Atlantic Council, September 21, 2020), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/ukraines-veterans/>.



military operations during this invasion.<sup>92 93</sup> Additionally, around 20,000 foreign fighters from 55 countries are currently serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces' International Legion, a significant increase from the estimated 3,000 who joined volunteer battalions to fight on Ukraine's side in the Donbas conflict since 2014.<sup>94</sup>

In addition to military forces and volunteer battalions, many Ukrainian citizens have supported the military in indirect ways. When the Donbas war began in spring 2014, civilians contributed resources, energy, and time to help combatants and those in need. Volunteer networks quickly formed to support soldiers, veterans, and internally displaced people. These networks, often made up of family members of combatants, provided aid, helped with recovery from trauma, and advocated for their rights. Known as a "volunteer movement," these efforts strengthened Ukraine's military and alleviated the humanitarian impact of the war.<sup>95</sup> The mobilization following the 2022 full-scale invasion built on this volunteer movement.

According to 2014 UN estimates, about 750 volunteer groups in Ukraine had 75,000 volunteers aiding both the military and internally displaced people. Survey data shows that 2.5% of Ukrainians participated in military support, and 0.7% assisted internally displaced persons (IDPs), totaling approximately 105,000 and 60,000 individuals, respectively. Many others contributed financially. Kyiv and Western regions had the highest volunteer engagement, though Southern and Eastern Ukraine also saw rapid volunteer network growth.<sup>96</sup>

Data indicates a strong presence of entrepreneurs and business owners in these networks. Women are particularly active in volunteering, often leading initiatives like cooking battalions, camouflage knitting squads, hospital groups, and groups for the care of IDPs; men contribute more occasionally, and their contributions are often financial. Volunteer groups directly supporting the military and battalions are mixed gender, with both men and women involved in a range of roles.<sup>97</sup>

### 3.3 Legal Frameworks

The framework piece of legislation of all veterans' policy in Ukraine is titled "Law of Ukraine on the Status of War Veterans and Their Social Protection".

According to Article 4 of this legislation, war veterans are "persons who participated in the defense of the Motherland or in hostilities on the territory of other states," which includes "participants in hostilities, persons with disabilities due to war, and war participants."<sup>98</sup> With this legal definition, the state recognizes the broad set of people who participate in military efforts during wartime, either directly in combat or through other means, and provides them with social protections. Article 4 also defines the overarching objectives of veterans' policy, outlines the process for obtaining veteran status, and determines the nature and scope of the social protection benefits provided to veterans, their families, and family members of deceased veterans.

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<sup>92</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>93</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."

<sup>94</sup> Melkozerova, "Zelenskyy Allows Foreigners to Serve in Ukraine's National Guard."

<sup>95</sup> Stepaniuk, "Wartime Civilian Mobilization."

<sup>96</sup> Stepaniuk.

<sup>97</sup> Stepaniuk.

<sup>98</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, "About the status of war veterans and guarantees of their social protection."



Article 6 of the law defines “participants in hostilities” – the most common status among the veterans discussed in this study – as “persons who took part in military tasks for the defense of the Motherland as part of military units, formations, associations of all types and branches of the Armed Forces (...), in partisan units and underground and other formations such as in wartime as well as in peacetime.”<sup>99</sup> The article outlines 25 categories of participants, including: military and other security forces; state personnel; civilians and members of irregular/partisan units engaged in World War II combat operations, service members dispatched to participate in conflicts abroad (mainly the Soviet war in Afghanistan and UN Peacekeeping deployments); and those individuals – whether civilians, members of security forces, or members of volunteer/irregular armed formations – who took direct part in combat missions during the ATO/JFO and since the full-scale invasion.

Under martial law, any service member can be directly eligible for the “participant in hostilities” status if they are receiving service-related inpatient medical care in healthcare facilities, whether within or outside Ukraine, or are on medical leave following an injury incurred while carrying out combat duties during hostilities.

The status “participant in hostilities” is also applied to several niche categories of individuals. These include specific demographics affected by historical events, such as residents of Leningrad during World War II and minors active in the Red Army and Navy ranks. The status also is applied to those with specific civilian occupations in different war-related scenarios – including state personnel involved in transport, tax collection and anti-corruption investigations – for their work defending the “independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.”<sup>100</sup>

Article 7 specifies the criteria for classifying veterans with disabilities due to war-related activities. To qualify, individuals must have incurred disabilities from injuries or diseases sustained while defending the country or participating in hostilities abroad, and they must have belonged to one of sixteen identified groups, including military personnel, intelligence agents, first responders, public servants, and members of partisan, volunteer, and underground groups. Notably, Chernobyl liquidators and civilians disabled during the Revolution of Dignity qualify as veterans with disabilities. Those injured but not disabled during the Revolution of Dignity are nevertheless eligible for “Benefits for participants in hostilities and persons equated to them,” as outlined in Article 12.<sup>101</sup>

Article 9 defines the remaining category falling under “war veteran”: “war participants” who did not participate in combat activities. These include those who completed service in the Soviet Armed Forces, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the KGB or in the armies of Soviet allies during World War II, as well as those who attended military schools or courses during this period. This category of war veteran also includes civilian workers and volunteers who, through their professional duties and labor, played a role in protecting Ukraine’s sovereignty across different historical periods, such as: employees of enterprises, institutions, or organizations engaged in supporting the ATO/JFO; people who provided voluntary logistical, financial, or material aid to the military; members of underground resistance movements; home front workers; and employees contracted to states where military operations occurred.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

<sup>100</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

<sup>101</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

<sup>102</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine; Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”



Article 10 outlines the family members of deceased war veterans who are eligible for veteran benefits: parents, surviving spouses, unmarried children without families, children who became disabled before adulthood, children orphaned by both parents, and other dependents receiving pensions due to the veteran's death. The specific benefit entitlements of these family members are listed in Article 15. Notably, the law does not recognize family members of living veterans as a specific category entitled to veteran benefits; however, their eligibility for veteran benefits is described in the articles that identify specific categories of war veterans (Articles 12, 13, and 14).<sup>103</sup>

Although many benefits for “participants in hostilities,” “persons with disabilities due to war,” and “war participants” and their families overlap (e.g., free public transport), some benefits are specific to each group. For example, disabled veterans receive a 100% discount on utility services, housing, and fuel, while participants in hostilities get a 75% discount, and war participants (and families of the deceased) receive a 50% discount. Educational support is available for veterans and their children but not for war participants. Disabled veterans also receive special benefits like up to five months of incapacity payments per year. Article 13 differentiates between three disability groups, providing lifelong pensions at 50%, 40%, and 30% of the subsistence minimum respectively.<sup>104</sup>

Additionally, the law outlines arrangements, tax exemptions, and responsibilities for its implementation. It specifies that expenses for executing the law are covered by state and local budgets. Enterprises and organizations that provide charitable funds for war veterans' social welfare are exempt from taxes on production activities equivalent to the assistance provided. The law also acknowledges the role of civil society, assigning public organizations and war veterans' associations the responsibility to influence legislative decisions, represent their members' interests, and perform other duties as defined by Ukrainian legislation on citizen associations. To support these organizations, central and local governing bodies are responsible for providing financial aid, loans, housing, equipment, and other necessary resources. Veteran organizations are exempt from utility service fees and telephone charges within specified consumption limits for their premises. Additionally, enterprises owned by war veterans, where at least 60% of employees are combatants or war participants, are exempt from income tax.<sup>105</sup>

While "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection" is the primary regulatory document for veterans' policy in Ukraine, other laws also define "veteran" and outline related provisions, including: "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicemen and Members of Their Families"; "On the Legal Status and Honoring the Memory of Fighters for Ukrainian Independence in the 20th Century"; "On the Basic Principles of Social Protection of Labor Veterans"; and "On the Status of Veterans of Military Service, Law Enforcement Agencies, National Police, and Certain Other Persons and Their Social Protection."<sup>106</sup>

### 3.4 Holistic Reintegration: A Constellation of Actors

Ukraine's veterans do not reintegrate in isolation. Instead, they reintegrate into society through daily interactions with their families, communities, employers, and the organizations and institutions they engage in. Further, veterans' family members have often experienced

<sup>103</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, “About the status of war veterans and guarantees of their social protection”; Brus and Pashkina, “Veterans Policy in Ukraine: Historical Development and Present Challenges.”

<sup>104</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, “About the status of war veterans and guarantees of their social protection.”

<sup>105</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

<sup>106</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.



significant shifts in their roles, responsibilities, and prospects due to their affiliation with a military member. For this reason, this policy paper frames its analysis, data collection, and recommendations with an understanding of veterans as integral and interconnected within a network of relevant actors and influences.

### 3.4.1 State

In 2014, Ukraine established the State Service of Ukraine on Veterans Affairs, a central executive body function, which in 2019 was restructured into the Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA).<sup>107</sup> Before the establishment of the MoVA, government support for veterans was scattered across 20 departments and focused mainly on financial payments, access to sanatoria, public transportation discounts, and housing funds.<sup>108</sup> The creation of MoVA centralized government responsibility for these and other veteran needs, including veteran status registration, state and regional benefits, psychological support, rehabilitation, retraining and educational programs, and access to residential accommodations. In addition to managing the funding allocated to these services, the MoVA also oversees the funding and management of veteran reintegration projects led by civil society organizations.<sup>109</sup>

The Ukrainian government does not yet offer a tailored and holistic approach to providing veteran services. Regardless of the diverse lived experiences of veterans and their families, the system provides the same benefits to veterans, veteran families, and the families of the fallen: housing and communal services, discounts on rent, free medicines, educational benefits, travel benefits, loans for construction, house repairs, and housing for people in need of better living conditions.<sup>110</sup>

Research into veterans' benefit utilization has shown that the most popular benefits among veterans include transportation, public utility services, healthcare, and an annual one-off financial allowance. Veteran tax benefits, priority employment, scholarships for veterans' children, housing construction loans, and preferential education loans for veterans' children are the least utilized among veterans, possibly due to limited public awareness; approximately 10% of veterans indicated that they were not aware that these benefits were available.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, there are currently also a large number of unclaimed benefits, which are resource-intensive for the state.

Veterans in Ukraine benefit from a comprehensive healthcare system that includes free dental prosthetics, annual medical examinations, and access to sanatorium and spa treatments. Additionally, they receive priority service in medical facilities, pharmacies, and both inpatient and outpatient psychological treatment programs. Family members of military personnel, including those who have disappeared, are also entitled to free treatment in military hospitals in cases where public healthcare benefits are insufficient. Specific groups, such as individuals with disabilities, receive additional services like free prostheses and orthopedic products, outpatient and inpatient care for unexpected medical needs, and compensation for medical

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<sup>107</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."

<sup>108</sup> Van Metre and Boerstler, "The Trip from Donbas."

<sup>109</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."

<sup>110</sup> Brus and Pashkina, "Veterans Policy in Ukraine."

<sup>111</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), "Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey," February 2022.





travel costs. Some individuals with specific mobility issues may also receive transport assistance in the form of cars.<sup>112</sup>

Veterans can receive pension and financial benefits in various forms, including one-time cash assistance, annual payments, and the provision of pensions which are based on the length of military service. Furthermore, individuals with disabilities, families of soldiers missing in action, and families of the fallen are eligible to receive additional assistance and payments.<sup>113</sup>

Recent political developments have impacted the provision of veteran services at the local level. Since 2014, Ukraine has been carrying out an extensive government decentralization process, marked by the establishment of self-sufficient Amalgamated Territorial Communities (ATCs), later renamed Territorial Communities (*hromadas*). These communities have gained significant autonomy in terms of self-governance, tax collection, and public policy and received financial resources to construct new institutions and implement local development projects. Parallel reforms in the public health and education sectors have accompanied the creation of the *hromadas*. Additionally, in 2019, the nation undertook a new phase of decentralization in which the 1,469 *hromadas* assumed the major responsibilities of district-level governments, including education, healthcare, sports facilities, cultural initiatives, and social welfare. Because many programs tailored for veterans were developed and approved by district-level governments, these decentralization efforts may impact veteran support services.<sup>114</sup>

### 3.4.2 Civil Society

Over the last decade, in response to Russian aggression against Ukraine, approximately 1,000 veteran organizations have formed to help veterans reintegrate into civilian life and support their families. While most organizations operate locally, approximately fifty functions on a national scale. Despite the proliferation of veteran organizations, the persistent conflict and differing abilities of organization founders have presented obstacles to the formalization and unification of the veteran movement. While some organizations have grown into influential networks, others have stopped functioning.<sup>115</sup>

A recent study found that actors in this field generally agree that there is a distinction between "veteran organizations", which are founded by veterans or their families, and "pro-veteran" organizations, which provide assistance to veterans. The MoVA is working to formalize this distinction, using criteria such as the inclusion of veterans among founders and in statutory documents. However, while state authorities view this formalization positively, civil society organizations express concerns about the state's priorities, noting more pressing challenges such as ineffective Public Councils (advisory bodies of the MoVA), disjointed initiatives, and communication difficulties with state bodies.<sup>116</sup>

At present, experts observe a heightened level of activity among pro-veteran organizations, indicating a demand both for existing resources and for the enhancement of social, psychological, informational, and legal services provided by pro-veteran organizations. Currently, most collaboration and consultation involving pro-veteran organizations and other

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<sup>112</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."

<sup>113</sup> UNDP.

<sup>114</sup> UNDP; Kuzmin, "Where Did 354 Districts Go? Anatomy of a Loud Reform."

<sup>115</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."

<sup>116</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk.



stakeholders center on the development of state policies affecting veteran support services. However, the founders of pro-veteran organizations are not always directly involved in these efforts; some founders are also veterans, many of whom are currently serving on the front lines.<sup>117</sup>

In a 2024 survey of 218 Ukrainian civil society organizations (CSOs) conducted by Chatham House, 80% identified veterans' reintegration as the most pressing social challenge to be addressed through combined efforts from the government, businesses, and civil society, making it the top priority.<sup>118</sup>

CSOs engaged in veteran reintegration exhibit diverse characteristics regarding their geographical distribution, founding timelines, capabilities, operational scope, staffing patterns, and funding sources. Recent quantitative research has shown that organizations working within the veteran reintegration sphere are spread across Ukraine regions, with notable concentrations in Kyiv (27%), the West (25%), and the Center/North (30%); a smaller proportion of organizations operates in the South/East (18%). Most of these CSOs (73%) were founded between 2014 and 2022, indicating a surge in civil society initiatives during the Russian-Ukrainian War. Studies have found that roughly 38% of organizations operate nationally, with 51% focusing primarily on a single oblast or operating at a community level and 11% working across multiple oblasts.<sup>119</sup>

Research has identified significant trends in the scope of CSO operations. Most CSOs support veterans of the current conflict (78%), families of the fallen (72%), and families of veterans (68%). Additionally, many CSOs actively engage in addressing the needs of families of those missing in action (48%) or those in captivity (44%).<sup>120</sup> In addition to these categories, veterans organizations support female veterans, veterans with disabilities, IDPs, and returnees. The only notable group comparatively less well-represented in civil society programming is the community of LGBTQIA+ veterans, who may be less visible due to the military's conservative and traditional institutional culture.<sup>121</sup>

The primary services CSOs offer include psychological support, information and educational activities, and legal assistance for veterans and their families. They also support physical rehabilitation programs, cultural and creative activities, and, less commonly, medical support and material aid. Additionally, organizations facilitate veterans' participation in decision-making processes, engage with local authorities through roundtable meetings, conduct community visits, and create networking opportunities.<sup>122</sup> Some CSOs specialize in developing training programs, collaborating with local governments, engaging businesses to support veteran projects, and advocating for policy changes. However, for newer organizations, such specializations are often still at an early stage.<sup>123</sup>

Several initiatives from both national and international actors complement the formal state-regulated reintegration system. These encompass a variety of formal and informal efforts undertaken by national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and nonprofits, such as the

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<sup>117</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk.

<sup>118</sup> Lutsevych, "Ukraine's Wartime Recovery and the Role of Civil Society: Chatham House Survey of Ukrainian CSOs – 2024 Update."

<sup>119</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."

<sup>120</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk.

<sup>121</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>122</sup> Kinsella and Aras.

<sup>123</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."



Veteran Hub – which offers psychosocial support, legal aid, employment counseling, and community-building initiatives. While these organizations work to bridge the gap between policy and practice in Ukraine’s state-led reintegration framework, the lack of systematic coordination among programs poses a high risk of duplication.

For their workforces, CSOs predominantly rely on volunteerism. Strikingly, at least 39% of CSOs have no paid full-time employees, while 33% of CSOs do not have a single full-time or part-time employee.<sup>124</sup> Research also shows that most CSOs have psychologists (68%) and lawyers (64%) on their team. Other staff members and volunteers include administrators, social workers, childcare experts, teachers, career counselors, and, in a few cases, doctors and psychiatrists.<sup>125</sup>

The vast majority (92%) of CSOs have secured some degree funding from at least one source. Donations from ordinary residents serve as the primary revenue stream (50%), followed by contributions from businesses (26%), international organizations (26%), and local government budgets (25%). Additionally, some CSOs finance their activities through their own funds or membership fees (19%), while others rely on support from fellow Ukrainian NGOs (16%) or the state budget (5%). Notably, 96% of funded CSOs heavily depend on a single revenue source, with almost half (49%) relying entirely on one revenue source. Despite this dependence, only a small proportion (7%) of currently funded CSOs would need to cease operations in the absence of funding being cut, with some organizations capable of sustaining operations for extended periods without additional support.<sup>126</sup>

However, the two primary challenges facing Ukrainian CSOs are unstable funding sources and insufficient financial resources. These issues are compounded by a shortage of other resources such as transportation, office supplies, and staff. Because the tender processes are often opaque and burdensome, CSOs typically avoid seeking state funding and instead focus their collaborative efforts on organizations.<sup>127</sup>

International and intergovernmental agencies have launched initiatives to support the Ukrainian state, civil society sector, and military directly, including both long-term initiatives for service members and more recent initiatives for veterans. These efforts involve organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Liaison Office, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), among others, as well as bilateral funding partners. However, similar to national initiatives, these endeavors often lack cohesive coordination.<sup>128</sup>

### 3.4.3 Business

The business sector has shown considerable initiative in supporting veterans’ return to work, often collaborating with veterans’ NGOs, spearheading many reintegration initiatives.<sup>129</sup> The full-scale invasion in 2022 further accelerated this trend, making support for mobilized

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<sup>124</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk.

<sup>125</sup> Kinsella and Aras, “The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine.”

<sup>126</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, “Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023.”

<sup>127</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk.

<sup>128</sup> International Alert, “What’s next for Veterans in Ukraine? Promoting Inclusion to Improve the Reintegration Architecture for Former Combatants.,” March 2019.

<sup>129</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, “The Hard Return: Mitigating Organized Crime Risks Among Veterans in Ukraine.”



colleagues and veterans a top priority for employers, doubling down on their efforts to implement policies and programs dedicated to veteran support.

Large-scale industry enterprises and network companies typically have company-wide policies for supporting veterans. In contrast, smaller businesses, such as local IT companies, often adopt a human-centric approach, focusing on providing comfortable working conditions tailored to each employee's needs. Consequently, creating generalized veteran programs is not always deemed appropriate. Instead, many businesses prefer individualized support, considering factors beyond professional experience and preferential status. Data suggests that such situational responses to veteran employment are more common than systematic approaches. However, veterans' experiences can prompt employers to consider adaptation programs.<sup>130</sup>

Many companies consider psychological support crucial for helping veterans adapt to the civilian work environment. Some large industrial companies in Ukraine have dedicated staff psychologists and offer psychotherapeutic and psychiatric diagnostics. Other companies collaborate with external partners, especially from the public sector. Additional services provided by some Ukrainian companies include medical examinations, medical financing, in-office massage, training for inexperienced employees, and extra leave for veterans. Some companies also use their resources to offer veteran employees legal consultations.<sup>131</sup>

Informally, some companies give veterans priority at the selection stage of hiring processes. Companies hiring for technical and engineering positions often prefer veteran candidates with experience in combat operations; however, companies from these industries also provide employment opportunities to those without combat or technical experience. IT companies value "hard" and "soft" skills, enabling veteran candidates to compete for positions without extensive experience, either in or outside the military. For those without limited experience, the IT sector offers many training courses and internships to support veteran employment.<sup>132</sup>

Many Ukrainian companies, initially supporting veterans on a case-by-case basis, are now moving toward more systematic approaches to accommodate growing numbers of veterans. Notably, they emphasize the importance of providing support at the point of mobilization, creating a clear return pathway for veterans.

Examples of successful business-led initiatives include Oschadbank's veteran loan program, which helps veteran-owned companies and offers free business development support. Veteran-owned businesses also demonstrate strong mutual support and coordination. Public-private partnerships, such as the Association of ATO Veteran Entrepreneurs established in 2016, offer funding and educational resources to veteran businesses.<sup>133</sup>

#### 3.4.4 Families of Veterans, Prisoners of War and the Fallen

Veterans' families, who endure significant stress and responsibilities while their family members are deployed, continue to need support even after their loved ones return home. These family members include parents, spouses, minor children, adult children under 23 who are full-time students, and other dependents.<sup>134</sup> Experts have noted that support programs for

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<sup>130</sup> Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska, "Needs and Obstacles of Veterans in Employment," July 2023.

<sup>131</sup> Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska.

<sup>132</sup> Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska.

<sup>133</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "The Hard Return: Mitigating Organized Crime Risks Among Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>134</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."



veterans often insufficiently represent families, suggesting that organizations may struggle to reach enough family members due to limited resources.<sup>135</sup>

Despite the hardships faced by veterans' families and their underrepresentation in formal support programs, research shows that some family members actively participate in volunteer networks to support veterans and combatants. For instance, during the Donbas war, committees of mothers, wives, and sisters formed to support soldiers and their families, help them through traumatic experiences, and advocate for their rights. However, these committees represented only a small portion of the volunteer networks. Family members often provide direct support to soldiers by purchasing clothing and sending money. Many, however, are unable to offer broader support due to the increased financial, domestic, and emotional burdens associated with war and mobilization. These burdens limit their capacity to help veterans and combatants in a more sustainable and consistent manner beyond their immediate familial responsibilities.<sup>136</sup>

### 3.5 Existing Challenges

In Ukraine, the broad and ambiguous legal definition of veteran status complicates reintegration policies, as it includes many individuals beyond those directly involved in military defense. This ambiguity has historically led to challenges in determining eligibility for benefits, potentially enabling fraudulent claims and hindering the delivery of appropriate support, especially for groups like female combatants and those with disabilities. The sections that follow explore each of these aspects.

#### 3.5.1 Veteran Status Ambiguity

The veteran status in Ukraine includes a broad range of descriptive and legal definitions that are not adequately aligned with the reintegration policy, creating ambiguity regarding who qualifies for support and the nature of the assistance provided.<sup>137</sup> As of 2023, Ukraine's legal definition of a veteran is comprehensive, covering both current and former combatants, including those with disabilities due to war, and extends to various other categories, including long-serving military personnel, participants in the Revolution of Dignity, and those affected by the Chernobyl disaster.<sup>138</sup> Existing work suggests that the term is increasingly politicized and, as a result, includes a wide array of groups, extending beyond those directly engaged in military defense or law enforcement in Ukraine, which may dilute the extent to which the state can meet populations' specific needs.<sup>139</sup>

As a result, there is a lack of clarity and a potentially broad interpretative scope, enabling, for instance, the contention that provisions intended for veterans may extend to civilians living in conflict zones. Therefore, status ambiguity has raised concerns about possible fraudulent benefit claims by individuals and the inflation of claimant numbers to retrieve excess government funds by leaders.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."

<sup>136</sup> Stepaniuk, "Wartime Civilian Mobilization."

<sup>137</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."

<sup>138</sup> UNDP.

<sup>139</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>140</sup> Martsenyuk, Ganna Grytsenko, and Kvit, "The 'Invisible Battalion.'"



Additionally, overlapping classifications create conflicts: for instance, veterans with war-related injuries are designated only as persons with war-related disabilities, losing their lifelong Participant in Combat Operations status.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, some veterans have reported difficulties in accessing Veterans Certificates, an essential document to claim veteran-specific benefits and services, particularly those having served in “volunteer battalions” and those qualifying due to their war-related disability. Previously, women ATO volunteers who served in combat roles before these positions were officially permitted for women whose job titles did not reflect their actual duties were excluded from recognition as combatants. Consequently, they were denied benefits like free sanitarium treatments, utility service discounts, and additional compensation for injuries.<sup>142</sup>

These issues are likely exacerbated by restricted access to military records due to national security concerns and delays in paperwork processing by Territorial Recruitment Centers and Military Commissariats. The disruptions of the full-scale invasion may thus result in further challenges for individuals seeking to obtain a Veteran Certificate and for determining eligibility, particularly as significant numbers of future veterans are joining voluntary battalions or units at the local level.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, the task of identifying beneficiaries of veterans' policy in Ukraine has become significantly complex in light of the involvement of various groups in combat operations, including not only the Armed Forces of Ukraine but also volunteer fighters, resistance forces in the occupied territories (comprising civilians), and employees from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Border Guard Service.<sup>144</sup>

### 3.5.2 Economic Reintegration

As may be expected, the full-scale invasion and its economic consequences have worsened the labor market conditions for veterans. The war has resulted in a surge in unemployment and an expansion of the informal labor sector in Ukraine, the dimension of which remains undetermined. Since February 2022, about 1.32 million workers (28% of the total) in medium, small, and micro-businesses have faced layoffs, 18% have been furloughed, and 22% have had wage reductions. The Ministry of Economy estimates 2.6 million unemployed at the beginning of 2023, while the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU) suggests 4.2–4.8 million. Given these challenges, veterans, their families, and civil society primarily bear the responsibility for their financial autonomy. Employing veterans, alongside medical and psychological rehabilitation, thus constitutes a significant area of policy and program concern.<sup>145</sup>

As of 2023, the troop mobilization system resulted in a significant gap between military personnel and civilians who did not serve. Soldiers lack opportunities to recover lost civilian capital, including wealth, property, income, and job skills. Upon returning home, veterans compete with civilians who have continued to develop their civilian capital during the war.<sup>146</sup> 52% of veterans and military personnel surveyed by the UVF believe that following discharge, most veterans will lose their prior qualifications and will need further training compared to civilian job seekers.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

<sup>142</sup> Martsenyuk, Ganna Grytsenko, and Kvit, “The ‘Invisible Battalion.’”

<sup>143</sup> UNDP, “Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context.”

<sup>144</sup> Brus and Pashkina, “Veterans Policy in Ukraine.”

<sup>145</sup> Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska, “Needs and Obstacles of Veterans in Employment,” July 2023.

<sup>146</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

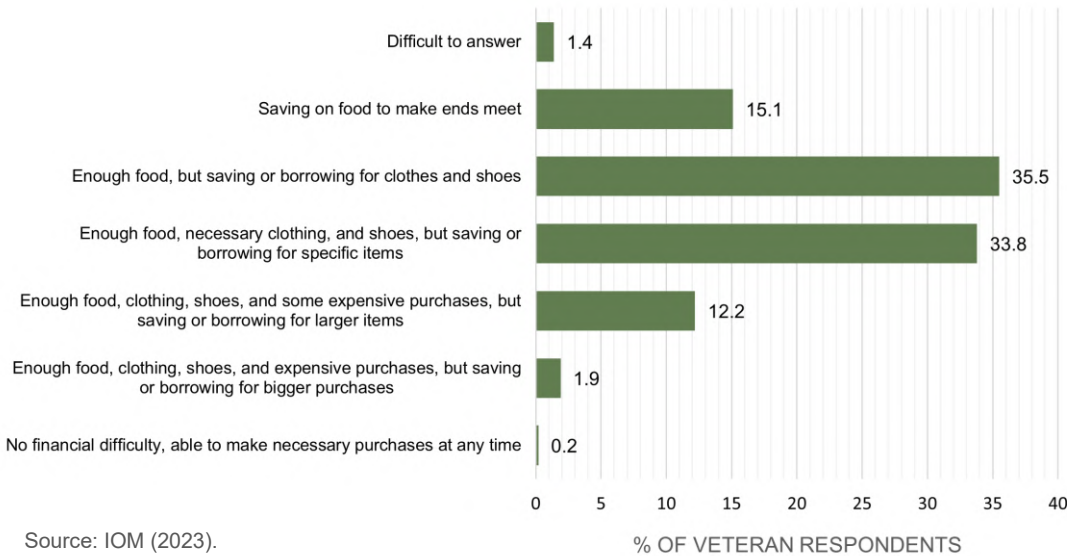
<sup>147</sup> Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska, “Needs and Obstacles of Veterans in Employment,” July 2023.



Thus, while the unemployment rate among veterans is relatively low, their employment status tends to be more unstable than that of their civilian counterparts. According to the 2022 IOM survey, one in five veterans who completed military service or service in law enforcement reported not having consistent employment in the six months before the survey.<sup>148</sup>

**Moreover, in the 2023 IOM survey, 50.6% of respondents stated having to save on food or clothes and shoes to make ends meet.<sup>149</sup>**

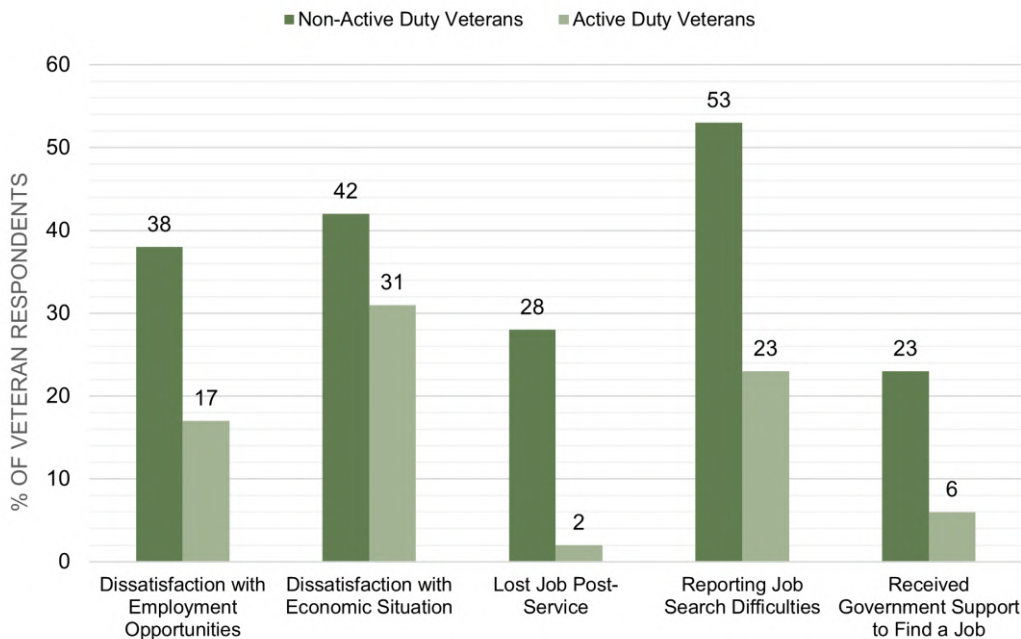
Figure 6: “How would you rate your household’s financial situation over the past 12 months?”



Source: IOM (2023).

**Active duty veterans experience more favorable outcomes in job searches, income, and economic circumstances than non-active duty veterans.<sup>150</sup>**

Figure 7: Experiences in job search, income and economic among active and non-active duty veterans.



Source: VRS (2021).

<sup>148</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

<sup>149</sup> Kinsella and Aras, “The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine.”

<sup>150</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans’ Current Employment Conditions.”

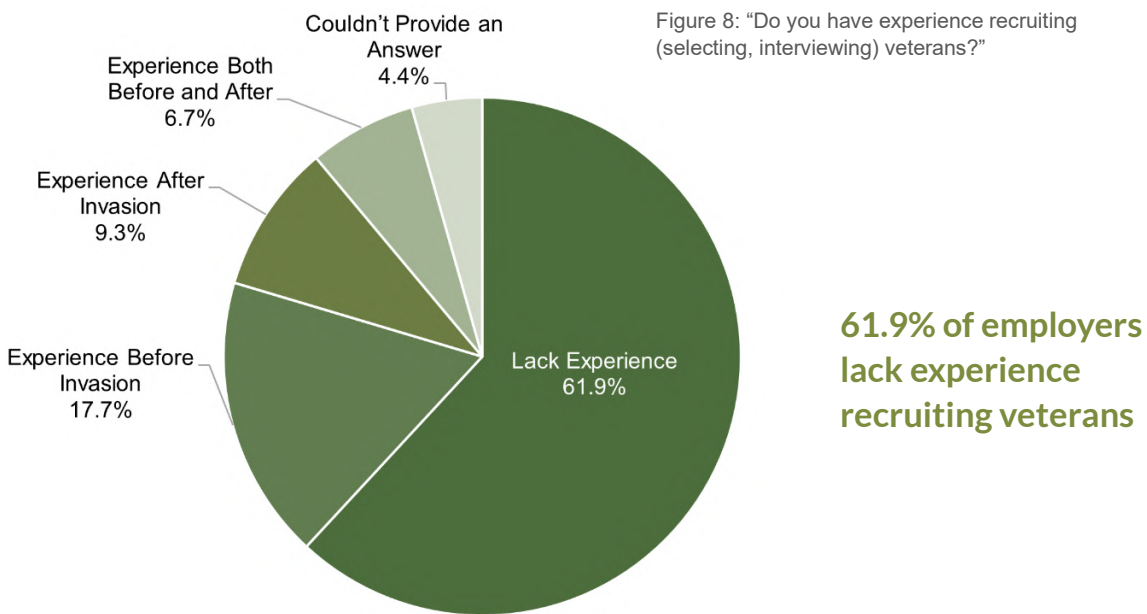
**Additionally, female veterans face greater economic vulnerability, with higher percentages reporting no income or reliance on social assistance compared to male veterans.<sup>151</sup>**

Veterans encounter various job market obstacles, including health issues and injuries, psychological well-being, skill loss during service, high competition, and lack of experience or limited mobility. In open-ended responses from the UVF “Needs and Obstacles of Veterans in Employment” survey, veterans highlighted barriers such as fear from employers about hiring veterans, communication challenges, hostile attitudes from civilians, reluctance to employ veterans, lack of legal protection, exclusion from the workforce, negative attitudes, and discrimination based on age or gender, with some veterans being deemed unreliable by potential employers.<sup>152</sup>

According the VRS, 32% of employed and 25% of unemployed veterans as well as 39% of veterans living in villages felt that employers were reluctant to hire them due to their veteran status.<sup>153</sup> Other survey data indicates that rural veterans typically face higher unemployment rates and fewer job opportunities compared to their urban counterparts and civilian rural residents – a trend also seen in the general population. Similarly, veterans with war-related injuries and disabilities are less likely to be employed. Veterans working in manual labor sectors more frequently report instances of unfair treatment in the workplace.<sup>154</sup>

**Military organizations differ from civilian businesses in management style and job roles, and civilian employers often fail to understand or value the skills veterans bring to the civilian job market.**

**This is compounded by the fact that many do not have any experience recruiting veterans.<sup>155</sup>**



Source: UVF (2023).

<sup>151</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Female Veterans in Ukraine.”

<sup>152</sup> Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska, “Needs and Obstacles of Veterans in Employment,” July 2023.

<sup>153</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans’ Current Employment Conditions.”

<sup>154</sup> Sereda et al., “Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022.”

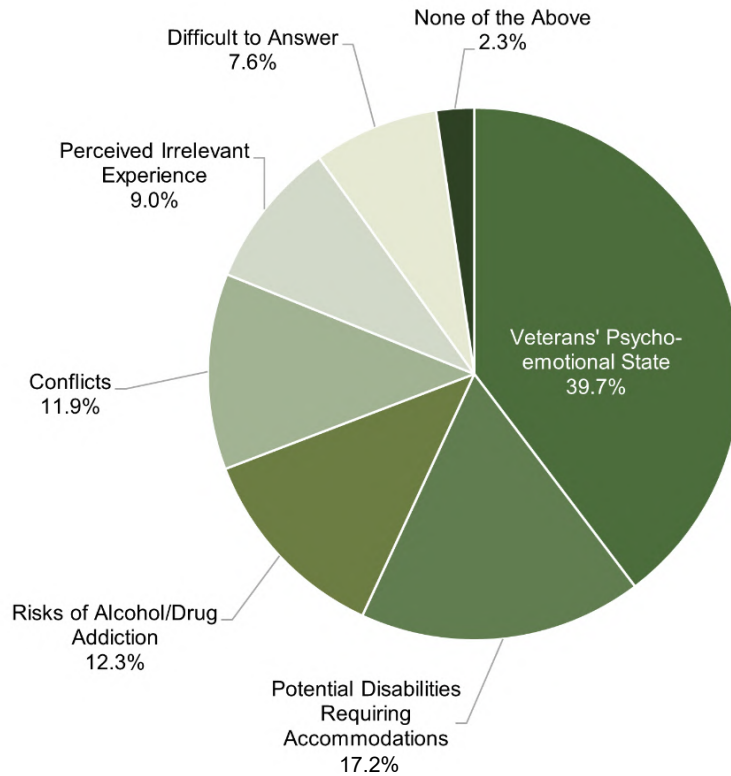
<sup>155</sup> Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska, “Needs and Obstacles of Veterans in Employment,” July 2023.



**This can lead to misconceptions about veterans' levels of resilience and adaptability, preserve stereotypes about their behavior and mental health, and create perceptions of inconvenience in hiring them.**

Figure 9: "Do you agree that employers might encounter these concerns or risks when hiring veterans?"

**39.7% of employers are concerned about veterans' psycho-emotional state**



Source: UVF (2023).

**All of these factors can diminish veterans' trust in employers, undermine their confidence during the job search, and reinforce the perception that their military experience is irrelevant to civilian careers.**

In some cases, the economic reintegration of veterans also faces challenges due to certain special benefits that can deter certain employers from hiring them. For instance, veterans are entitled to an additional fourteen days of leave under the law and may also be subject to mandatory military training. These obligations burden employers financially, potentially dissuading them from hiring veterans. However, the Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 12411 from February 2023, titled "Approval of the Procedure for Providing Compensation to Employers for Employment of Registered Unemployed," has since outlined the process for granting compensation to employers who hire registered unemployed veterans referred by the job center.<sup>156</sup>

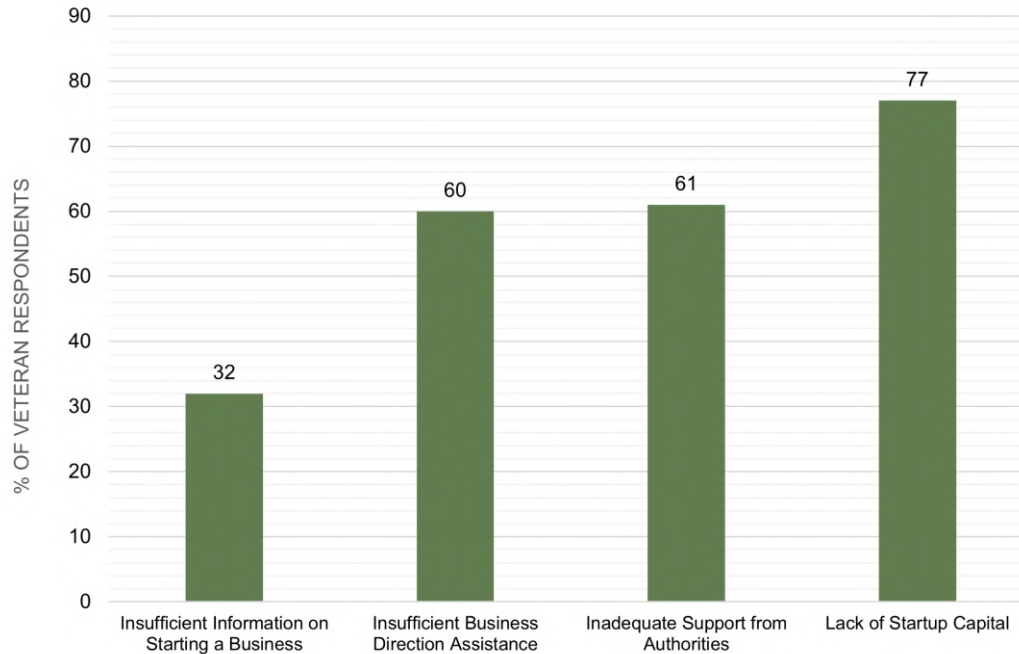
Moreover, Ukrainian CSOs like the Free People Employment Center are increasingly collaborating directly with employers to develop customized workplace integration programs. This has led many companies, for instance, to grant additional leave beyond the standard 14 days to support veterans' recovery from service.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>156</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions"; Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska, "Needs and Obstacles of Veterans in Employment," July 2023.

<sup>157</sup> Free People Employment Center, "Methodology for Implementing the Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program for Veterans."

## Many veterans wish to start businesses to gain greater autonomy and overcome civilian job market challenges, with 33% of those experiencing discrimination expressing this desire.<sup>158</sup> However, they often face obstacles:

Figure 10: Assessment of statements regarding the conditions to start a business, among the veterans who would like to start a business or have their own business (fully agree with the statements). Source: IOM (2022).



There is widespread recognition that economic reintegration for veterans is a priority. However, various issues hinder this process, including injuries sustained during military service, veterans' perception that their military experience lacks relevance in civilian careers and is undervalued by employers, and employers' apprehensions regarding veterans' psychological well-being and the adequacy of their skill set.

### 3.5.3 Wartime Reintegration

A key challenge in veteran reintegration during an ongoing war is designing programs and delivering services against the backdrop of a major humanitarian crisis and widespread reconstruction necessities. Many veterans' families have suffered displacement, both domestically and internationally. At the same time, their home communities may grapple with occupation, partial depopulation, or major war damage to property and infrastructure, which renders their social and economic situation precarious and future prospects uncertain.<sup>159</sup> The emotional, psychological, social, and economic implications of wartime disarray and instability significantly complicate a successful and sustained "return" to civilian life.

Another factor adding to this volatility in the Ukrainian context is the absence of a permanent large-scale *demobilization* prospect. Only a small fraction of veterans transition to civilian life with the certainty of *never* going back to military service, typically due to their age, severe health problems, disability or certain family reasons. In fact, for as long as the war or the ongoing threat from Russia persists, the majority of Ukrainian veterans remain engaged in active duty military service with limited periods of leave only or are *discharged* into the

<sup>158</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), "Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey," February 2022.

<sup>159</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."



operational reserve, which creates distinct contextual needs that reintegration policy ought to address.<sup>160</sup>

These unique wartime reintegration trajectories have not been adequately considered or communicated by the government in the past, leading operational reserve veterans to make life plans that conflict with the possibility of remobilization, resulting in potentially harmful disruptions. Additionally, the short or uncertain reintegration periods and the significant efforts and resources invested in maintaining operational readiness, such as through enhanced training, impact veterans' ability to adjust their personal and family lives and to generate sustainable income and savings in civilian life.

For ATO/SFO veterans, the transition during wartime typically lasted at least three years under optimal conditions but often extended to 5-7 years or more post-service. Consequently, many operational reserve veterans returned to military duty during the full-scale invasion shortly after reestablishing comfortable civilian lives – a scenario likely to be experienced by new cohorts of operational reserve members. Dynamic and resilient support solutions, such as those that avoid perpetual reintegration-cycle “restarts” with the repeated loss of key skills and assets (saying nothing of the psychological implications) do not currently exist.<sup>161</sup>

Considering the prevailing security threats faced by Ukraine and its dwindling ranks, it is reasonable to expect that the security sector will aim to retain combat-experienced veterans within military service and the operational reserve in the longer term, recognizing their crucial role in bolstering Ukraine's defense capability, even beyond the cessation of current hostilities.<sup>162</sup>

In this context, it is important to note that, as time passes, different “generations” of veterans with different needs and priorities will continue to emerge, as it is already visible in the divide between the older cohort of veterans who fought in Donbas after 2014 and the typically much younger volunteers and conscripts since the full-scale invasion: For instance, while the former often already have families and livelihoods to return to, many of the latter first need to anchor their civilian existence, which fundamentally alters the nature of the support required.<sup>163</sup>

The unsteadiness of wartime reintegration pathways is exacerbated by the fact that there currently is no legal framework governing the demobilization of military personnel, even as new waves of mobilization continue. As a result, terminating service is a process shaped by vague internal AFU regulations, decisions from superiors, and a number of medical or psychological assessments often perceived as redundant, arbitrary, or even dismissive of genuine concerns. The April 2024 mobilization law, which lowered the conscription age, had its demobilization provisions removed shortly before its passing, sparking an outcry among soldiers who have been continuously deployed since February 2022 or even earlier, from the onset of the Donbas conflict.

This legal gap leaves many soldiers with indefinite service terms and uncertain life trajectories, increasing psychological stress and a sense of social injustice. Furthermore, those declared eligible to be (permanently) discharged face a lengthy and opaque

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<sup>160</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

<sup>161</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>162</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>163</sup> Interview Notes, 11 September 2023, Ukrainian veterans nonprofit.

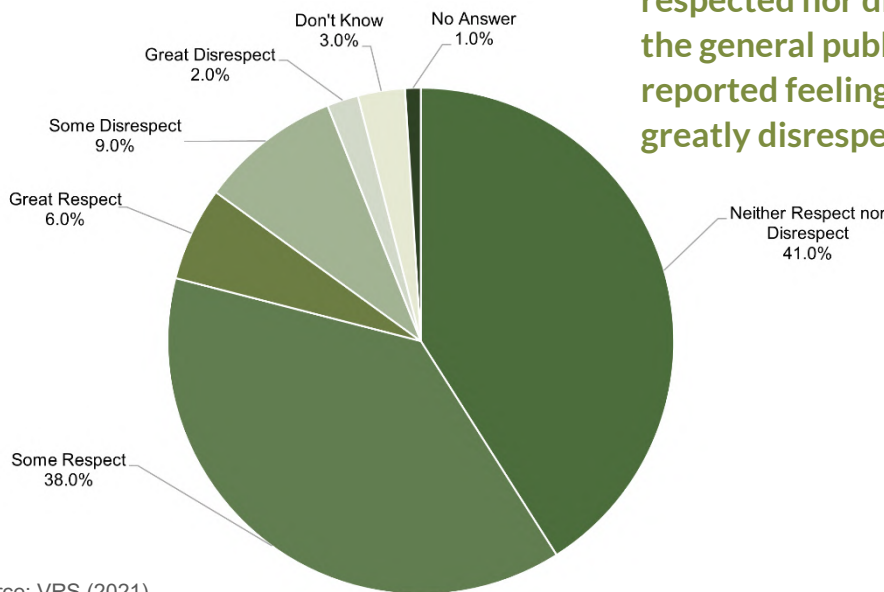


bureaucratic process for document collection, akin to the challenges experienced when trying to access general veterans benefits.<sup>164</sup>

### 3.5.4 Stigma

In 2019, 62% of respondents viewed veterans positively. By 2021, 64% stated they had “great respect” for veterans and 20% “some respect”. In 2023, trust in veterans surged, with 93% trusting those from the full-scale war and 95% trusting veterans of the 2014-2021 anti-terrorist operation (ATO).<sup>165</sup> However, looking at veterans’ own perspectives, a more nuanced and somewhat concerning picture emerges.

Figure 11: Veterans’ perceived respect by the general public.



**41% of veterans feel neither respected nor disrespected by the general public, while 11% reported feeling somewhat or greatly disrespected.**

Source: VRS (2021).

**In the VRS, 49% of male and 64% of female veterans reported experiences of harassment or discrimination from strangers, employers and friends due to their veteran status. This rate was higher among non-active duty veterans.<sup>166</sup>**

Additionally, in the 2022 IOM survey, nearly half of respondents (43%) acknowledged encountering at least one incident of unfair treatment or prejudice in spheres such as public transport, administrative services, or healthcare in the six months leading up to the survey. This rate was higher among those who had a disability certificate or injury that occurred when serving (53% and 54% respectively).<sup>167</sup>

Instances of discrimination have considerable implications for community relationships. Among respondents who indicated a deterioration in their relationships with neighbors and community members, 70% reported experiencing discrimination. Notably, one in ten respondents who had completed military or law enforcement service and those still active in

<sup>164</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, “The Hard Return: Mitigating Organized Crime Risks Among Veterans in Ukraine.”

<sup>165</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans’ Benefits Utilization and Experiences,” July 2021; Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, “Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023.”

<sup>166</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Female Veterans in Ukraine”; IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veteran Reintegration Experiences, Social Stigma, and Support Networks.”

<sup>167</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

military or related fields reported that such incidents compelled them to distance themselves from the civilian population and diminish their trust in others.<sup>168</sup>

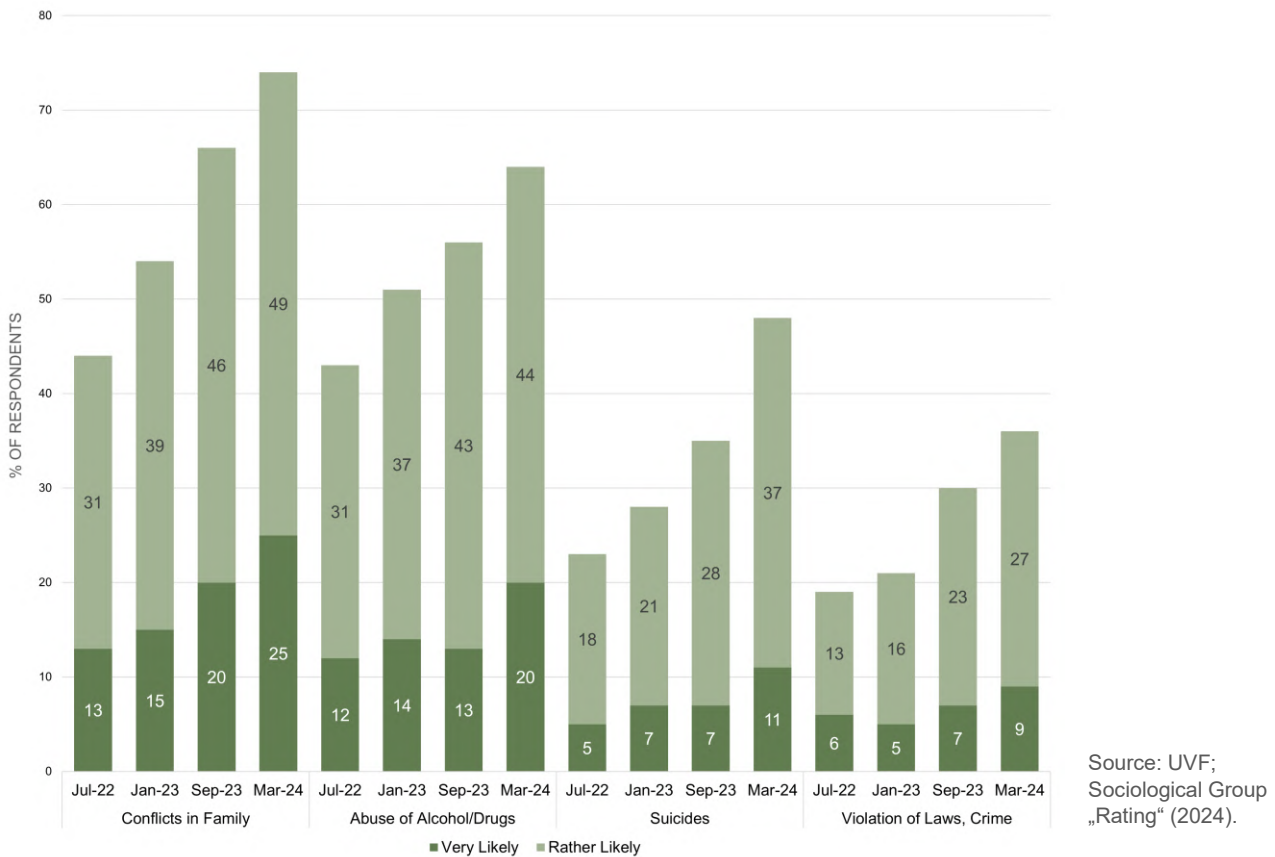
**These experiences reflect the persistent stigma – perceived and enacted – against veterans in Ukrainian society that hinders their reintegration process.**

There are, however, indications that this has recently been declining. According to the 2023 IOM survey, though based on a smaller sample size (n=593 compared to n=4,286 in 2022), only 14.3% of male veterans and 32% of female veterans reported experiencing or witnessing instances of discrimination or unfair treatment due to their veteran status.<sup>169</sup>

While the current war has altered this landscape, there are still common misconceptions and stereotypes relating to, for instance, veterans’ psychological stability and mental health conditions such as PTSD, service-related injuries and disabilities, and their dependency on the paternalism of the state. The representative “20<sup>th</sup> National Poll: The image of veterans in Ukrainian society” from February 2023 reflects some of the beliefs about veterans ingrained in society. The most commonly identified problem respondents think veterans face was psychological disorders (40%), ranking higher than the registration of social benefits (29%) and problems with physical health (28%).

**Moreover, the assessed risk associated with returning veterans increased by several percentage points between July 2022 and March 2024.<sup>170</sup>**

Figure 12: “Assess the degree of risk of such phenomena with veterans who will return from the Russian-Ukrainian war.”



<sup>168</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

<sup>169</sup> Kinsella and Aras, “The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine.”

<sup>170</sup> Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF) and Sociological Group “Rating,” “20th National Poll: The Image of Veterans in Ukrainian Society. January 14-16, 2023.”; Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF) and Sociological Group “Rating,” “27th National Poll: The Image of Veterans in Ukrainian Society. March 2-5, 2024.”

Furthermore, almost one-third (32%) of respondents felt “rather negative” about the prospects of veterans running in elections. Additionally, 13% of respondents still believed Ukrainian veterans abuse the benefits they receive.<sup>171</sup>

### Like the survey results above suggest, stigma is more pronounced against female veterans.

They face simultaneous gender discrimination and specific stereotypes about women in the armed forces, like being characterized as a ‘bad mother’ or the notion of a woman joining the military ‘in pursuit of a husband’.<sup>172</sup> For example, one respondent in a study by International Alert described a bus driver insinuating that she did not earn her veteran benefits from frontline deployment but in exchange for sex.<sup>173</sup>

It is worth mentioning that while the frustration and irritation resulting from stigma can compound mental health problems, there is also a general societal mental health stigma that prevents many veterans, especially men, from seeking treatment. This stigma is manifested in pathologizing stereotypes against people with mental health care needs and the reluctance of some veterans to admit vulnerability out of fears of being seen as “weak”.

When asked to identify which support sources are necessary for veterans *in general*, 55% pointed out individual counseling with a psychologist, 43% consultation with a psychologist with military experience, 39% attending veteran self-help groups, and 36% stress management training sessions.

Strikingly, when asked which support they would consider necessary *for themselves*, the figures were 28%, 17%, 19%, and 15%, respectively, while 42% indicated to be needing “none.” This highlights how many veterans are reluctant to admit needing help themselves while simultaneously being clearly aware of the benefits and importance of mental health care. Veterans are cognizant of this trend as they identified “They do not want to show their problems” as the top reason (56%) for why veterans do not seek psychological assistance.<sup>174</sup>

### This phenomenon is corroborated by the results from the VRS, where only 34% of surveyed veterans felt that they needed psychological support, while 78% believed their peers would need such help.<sup>175</sup>

Mental health care stigma in Ukraine is also influenced by the collective memory of Soviet-era usage of psychiatric clinics as a means of political repression.<sup>176</sup> In this context, there is a persistent belief among veterans that psychiatry is a punitive system and that being referred to psychiatric treatment is a punishment, which, in turn, extends to non-psychiatric mental health interventions.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF) and Sociological Group “Rating,” “20th National Poll: The Image of Veterans in Ukrainian Society. January 14-16, 2023.”

<sup>172</sup> Malchevska, “It’s like Playing with Death’ – Ukraine’s Female Front-Line Soldiers.”

<sup>173</sup> International Alert, “What’s next for Veterans in Ukraine? Promoting Inclusion to Improve the Reintegration Architecture for Former Combatants.” March 2019.

<sup>174</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

<sup>175</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans’ Benefits Utilization and Experiences,” July 2021.

<sup>176</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

<sup>177</sup> Bandura and Reynal, “Investing in Mental Health Will Be Critical for Ukraine’s Economic Future.”



### 3.5.5 Service Gaps for Veterans and their Families

#### 3.5.5.1 Health Care

There is a significant gap between the needs of veterans and their families and the actual response from the state. Current policy and support frameworks frequently fail to sufficiently identify or cater to the specific experiences of veterans, resulting in a shortage of tailored and nuanced provisions. For instance, the chronic physical and mental effects of participating in combat operations or the consistent occurrence of certain conditions among veterans compared to the general population are still poorly understood, highlighting the urgent need for thorough updates to the regulatory framework linking service and combat experience with health implications.<sup>178</sup>

The Medical Guarantees Program (MGP), which specifies the Ukrainian national health care benefit package, has not been tested for such needs-based compliance. In fact, there are a range of services essential for restoring and maintaining the health of veterans that aren't or are only partially covered by the MGP, including dental prosthetics and cancer treatment services, internal fixation plates, endoprosthesis, hearing aids, and psychiatric medication in outpatient care. Furthermore, the lack of services, programs, and medical specialists tailored to veterans with longer-term or lifelong disabilities and rehabilitation requirements is increasingly problematic, particularly in light of the rising number of veterans experiencing complex physical injuries. The MGP's mental health care package is also missing a specialized and comprehensive rehabilitation component that would benefit not only veterans but also general military personnel and trauma-affected civilians.<sup>179</sup>

In addition to the cultural barriers impacting utilization discussed in 3.5.4, MHPSS services in Ukraine – both for the general population and veterans – still lag in capacity, struggling to meet the surge in demand since 2014 and the subsequent full-scale invasion. The system remains overly reliant on psychiatric institutions, with limited community-based services, which are often more effective for veterans' needs. A national 24-hour helpline for veterans was not established until five years into the conflict. Further compounding these issues, funding cuts in 2020 led to substantial reductions in staffing levels and left mental health services underfunded, with poor availability and a lack of specialized resources and knowledge on veteran-specific therapeutic approaches among providers.<sup>180</sup>

Notably, similar to general population trends, rural veterans report poorer physical and mental health outcomes due to more limited access to services and lower economic security, both statistically linked to worse health. Moreover, women in particular both report lower availability and greater difficulty in accessing MHPSS services with the reSCORE survey indicating a 15% disparity for both aspects.<sup>181</sup>

#### 3.5.5.2 Family Support

Families of veterans are key stakeholders of emotional and practical support in the reintegration process: They crucially guide, shape, and bolster the reintegration pathways of their veteran relatives and assume various administrative roles and responsibilities, particularly in situations involving injuries, missing status, captivity, or death. However,

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<sup>178</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>179</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>180</sup> Seleznova et al., "The Battle for Mental Well-Being in Ukraine"; IREX, "Survey of Mental Health Providers."

<sup>181</sup> Sereda et al., "Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022."



government policy characterizes families primarily as caregivers rather than policy benefactors in their own right, neglecting the impact on their own well-being and failing to adequately address their needs due to a lack of comprehensive regulatory frameworks and low prioritization in state policy.<sup>182</sup>

This involves the absence of practical support and counseling structures for caregiving responsibilities, as well as insufficient compensation for the socioeconomic or educational impacts of these duties, especially when managing the simultaneous care of children. There are many more responsibilities that veterans’ relatives assume: It has become commonplace, for instance, that spouses take up managerial roles in veteran-owned businesses during instances of (re)mobilization or injury of their partners, further compounding, in many cases, their already strenuous situation. Furthermore, families of deceased veterans also face significant bureaucratic burdens during their most difficult times when it comes to fulfilling administrative duties while not receiving the necessary medical and social assistance to cope with their loss.

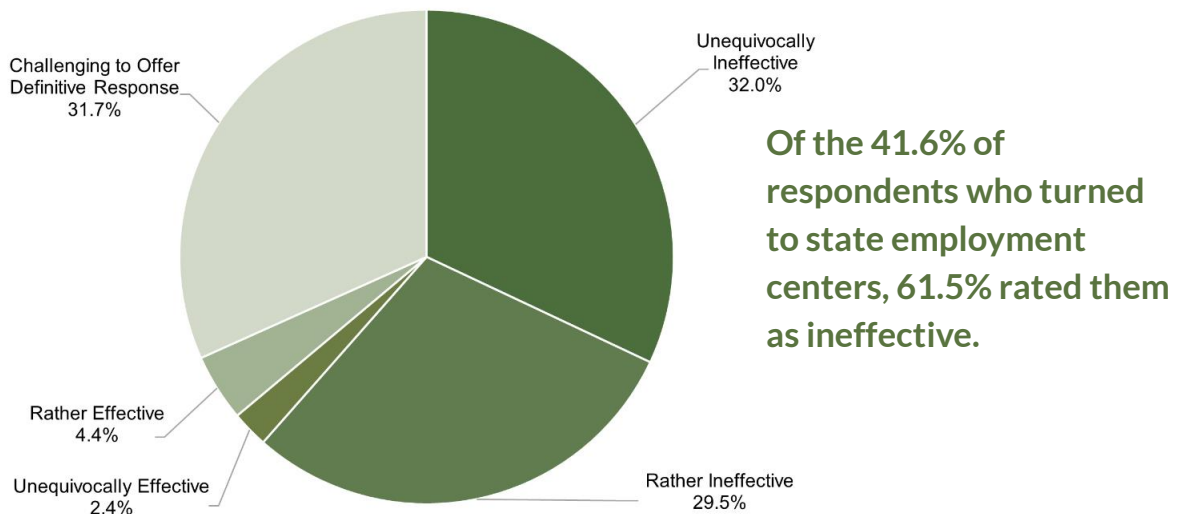
There are also gaps in the legislative definition of veteran families, with, for instance, children born after the death of their parent being excluded from status recognition and financial assistance. Another important yet neglected consideration is that veterans who are unable to count on family members for rehabilitation care or reintegration support in general are at an especially high risk of not receiving much of this vital assistance and socioemotional exposure.<sup>183</sup>

### 3.5.5.3 Economic Reintegration

Likewise, service gaps persist in the field of economic reintegration. In the 2023 UVF survey, veterans and military personnel highlighted the ineffectiveness of government employment centers in assisting them in their job search and mediating with potential employers.

As a result of low-quality and outdated candidate selection and training services, much of the responsibility is placed either on civil society or the initiative and adjustment measures by employers themselves.<sup>184</sup>

Figure 13: “How do you assess the effectiveness of state support for veterans in the field of employment?”



Source: UVF (2023).

<sup>182</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

<sup>183</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>184</sup> Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska, “Needs and Obstacles of Veterans in Employment,” July 2023.



It is worth mentioning that state-guaranteed education presently excludes private educational entities and courses provided by companies. This restriction notably narrows options for training or retraining, as private institutions often offer superior quality education and specialized training, bolstering employment opportunities in relevant sectors. Moreover, educational benefits extend beyond veterans to other priority groups, intensifying competition for limited educational spots or loans.<sup>185</sup>

Veterans have a range of specific needs when transitioning to civilian employment such as retraining, qualification development and psychological support and adaptation programs that are currently not sufficiently addressed. Besides direct service provision to veterans, there is a need to better prevent discrimination, incentivize veteran employment and guide employers in the process of accommodating disabilities and smoothing workplace transitions: 76.2% of respondents reported, for instance, that their (previous) place of employment did not implement adaptation measures for employees with combatant status while 87.1% believed in the necessity of such programs for themselves and other mobilized employees who return to civilian work.<sup>186</sup>

Moreover, state employment centers have proven ineffective to help veterans leverage the very particular skill set emerging from military and combat experience and referring them to employers that value these skills the most. Consequently, veterans often experience feelings of uncertainty and insecurity regarding their own capabilities of adjusting to the civilian labor market.<sup>187</sup> Another service gap lies in opportunities for business ownership: Many veterans express their desire to receive support through preferential loans, special tax deductions, training in areas such as marketing and business management, and guidance on writing a business plan, among other aspects.<sup>188</sup>

#### 3.5.5.4 Homogeneous Service Provision

Additionally, the government's reintegration policy suffers from a mostly homogenous and static approach to service provision for veterans and their families that is unresponsive to their very *heterogenous* personal backgrounds, situations, and trajectories. For instance, it does not properly identify and define the different stages of a veteran's life and reintegration environments like continuous military service, reserve force and the definitive transition to civilian life, failing to respond flexibly to needs arising in various scenarios. A homogenous approach to service provision also particularly affects already more vulnerable groups such as women, veterans with disabilities, residents of rural areas or economically disadvantaged veterans and their families – circumstances that may also overlap and create multiple layers of marginalization.<sup>189</sup>

Many existing provisions of Ukrainian veterans policy, for instance, are not sensitive and prepared enough to address the experiences of women veterans such as after-service childcare duties, higher vulnerability to homelessness and gender-based violence, the impact of combat injuries and psychological effects on their reproductive health and the consequences of gender discrimination and sexual violence on their mental well-being.<sup>190 191</sup>

<sup>185</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>186</sup> Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska, "Needs and Obstacles of Veterans in Employment," July 2023.

<sup>187</sup> Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska.

<sup>188</sup> IREX, "Survey of Veteran Business Owners: Summary of Findings."

<sup>189</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions."

<sup>190</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Female Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>191</sup> Serbeniuk et al., "The Impact of the War in Ukraine on the Reproductive Health of Female Military Personnel."



As another example of homogenous service provision, existing policy overlooks how a shortage of personal savings can lead some veterans to an immediate return to civilian work after leaving active service, bypassing a period of recreation and recovery essential to their well-being and healthy commencement of their reintegration journey. This goes as far as veterans retaining their previous employment having to start work one day after registering at the Territorial Recruitment and Social Support Center. Since current legislation does not guarantee an interim period of rest, providing this opportunity remains at the discretion of the employer, rendering transitional experiences severely unequal.<sup>192</sup>

Current service provision is also homogenous in the sense that it is tailored to the circumstances of the general population rather than veterans specifically. Employees at free legal aid centers, for instance, often lack qualifications on certain issues due to their common specialization. Additionally, the workload of the free legal aid system increases because it lacks distribution by areas of work, including a separate area for legal assistance to veterans, military personnel, and their families. As a result, the right to this assistance materializes inadequately while, in practice, veterans often seek legal assistance from private lawyers and public organizations instead of state-operated structures.<sup>193</sup>

### 3.5.5.5 Data Gaps

A key challenge underlying these service gaps for veterans and their families in Ukraine is the lack of comprehensive and systematic data. Current data collection methods for conscription and military personnel are unsystematic and/or incomplete, failing to adequately address the needs of veterans and their families. Further issues are the malfunctioning of the Unified State Register of War Veterans (USRWV), and a lack of integrated identification of veterans and their family members as a distinct beneficiary group across all state registers. Moreover, the outdated strategies of data collection and analysis fail to adequately consider demographic factors such as age, gender, region, and military experience.<sup>194</sup>

### 3.5.5.6 Funding Shortfalls

Many of the aforementioned service gaps are related to a lack of proper funding for crucial veterans' reintegration policies, particularly in the realms of health care, housing, and social protection. When, for instance, the right to rehabilitative care and psychological assistance is recognized, but budgetary shortages impede the employment and training of enough specialized personnel, the policies are rendered practically ineffective.

The same applies to housing, which ranks as the fourth most-needed benefit according to the VRS.<sup>195</sup> While rights and needs are formally recognized but formulated into insufficiently funded policy responses that, in turn, create further service gaps. Veterans' housing programs, while ambitious, are often not budget-supported, especially in light of widespread war-related property destruction and over 20 other categories of priority groups, including IDPs, filling the waitlists.

Such flawed prioritization is also reflected in the Ukrainian mental health care system where a historically conditioned overreliance on psychiatric inpatient facilities, often associated with stigma and mistrust, has divested much-needed funding from less invasive treatments, such

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<sup>192</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>193</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>194</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>195</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Benefits Utilization and Experiences," July 2021.



as talk-based therapy and community support frameworks.<sup>196</sup> Currently, effective funding allocation and streamlining are significantly hindered by poor coordination among various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, along with the aforementioned gaps in information regarding reintegration policy beneficiaries and their specific needs. Consequently, efforts are often duplicated, as seen in the case of overlapping benefit entitlements in the social sector, which is divided across multiple information systems both organizationally and technically.<sup>197 198</sup>

With the rapid increase of those eligible, it is apparent that the Ukrainian state budget will struggle with significant resource limitations to fully implement all declared benefits for veterans going forward. A stark example of the severe budget constraints is the suspension of free treatment at rehabilitation sanatoria in 2023 due to overwhelming demand – a service identified as a top priority by over 60% of veterans.<sup>199</sup>

Diluting policy with merely declarative responses, however, risks undermining the legitimacy of institutions unable to deliver promised benefits, nurture mistrust in the state and decrease the motivation for continued military service, especially among those veterans experiencing severely adverse conditions.<sup>200</sup>

Additionally, funding strategies from donor agencies for the civil society sector are not sufficiently conscious of needs or aligned with priorities, leading to major resource inefficiencies: According to a USAID report, CSOs working with veterans, who need stable and sufficient funding to develop and meet peak demands, are hampered by donor agencies allocating funds without prior knowledge of the Ukrainian context and thus little sensitivity to the administrative, communicative, or logistical requirements on the ground. In many cases, donor agencies also restrict support for certain activities like direct assistance to active military personnel, which limits CSOs' possibilities of working with (future) veterans.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Bandura and Reynal, "Investing in Mental Health Will Be Critical for Ukraine's Economic Future."

<sup>197</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>198</sup> International Alert, "What's next for Veterans in Ukraine? Promoting Inclusion to Improve the Reintegration Architecture for Former Combatants.," March 2019.

<sup>199</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "The Hard Return: Mitigating Organized Crime Risks Among Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>200</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

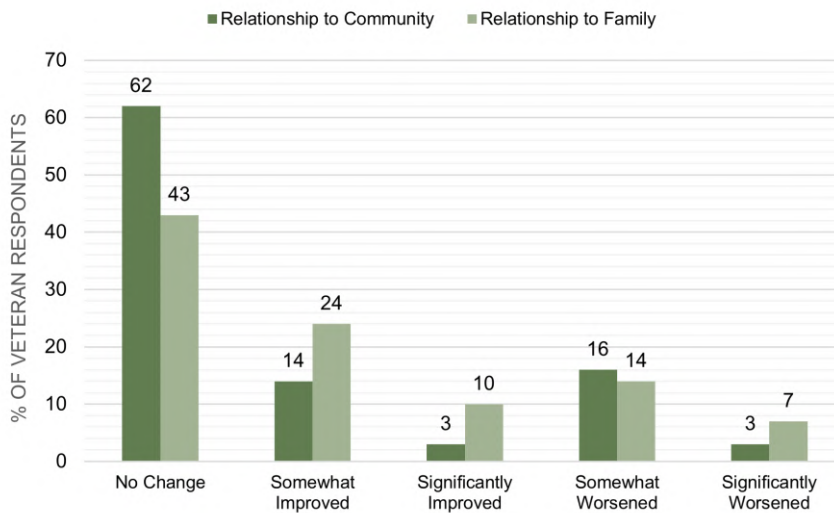
<sup>201</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."



### 3.5.6 Family and Receiving Community Readiness

In the VRS, around 20% of veterans perceived their community and family relationships to have worsened to some degree upon returning home.<sup>202</sup>

Figure 14: Veterans' perceptions on family and community relationship changes before and after service.

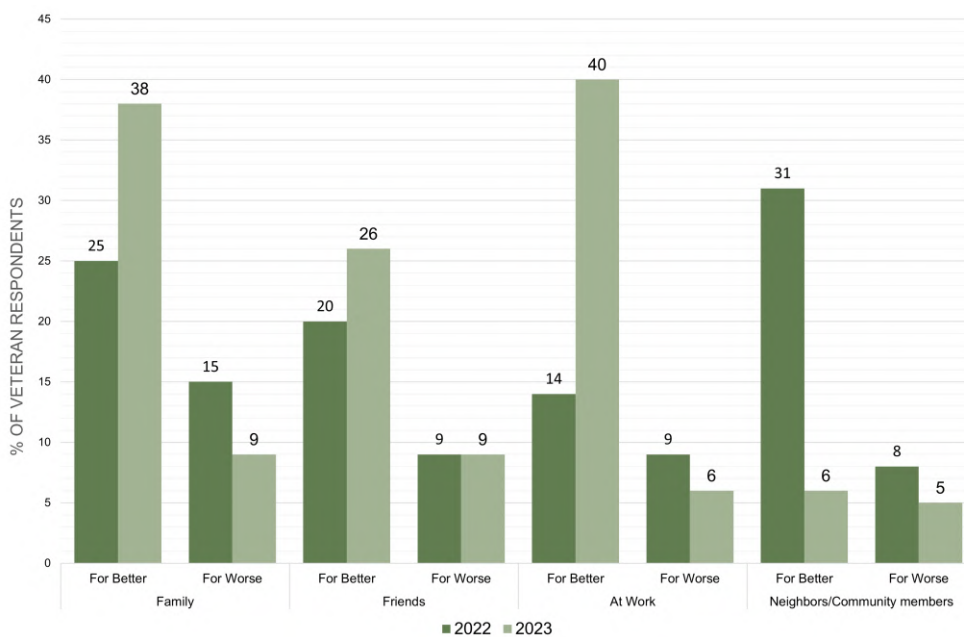


Source: VRS (2021).

Additionally, in the 2022 IOM Survey, nearly a quarter (24%) of surveyed veterans reported a decline in their relationships with family members, friends, colleagues, or neighbors, with this issue being particularly prevalent among those aged 35–44 compared to younger demographics. Conversely, veterans residing in Kyiv (22%), Western Ukraine (18%), and urban centers with populations exceeding 500,000 (18%) were more likely to report improved relationships with community members following their transition to civilian life.<sup>203</sup>

The 2023 IOM survey, though based on a smaller sample size, indicates some possible recent improvements in post-service relationship dynamics.<sup>204</sup>

Figure 15: Veterans' self-assessment of changes in relationships with others. Source: IOM (2022; 2023).



<sup>202</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veteran Reintegration Experiences, Social Stigma, and Support Networks."

<sup>203</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), "Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey," February 2022.

<sup>204</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."

Furthermore, 43% of VRS respondents reported having fewer civilian friends after service while 39% reported the same amount and 16% that they had more than before.

Meanwhile, their contact with peers, whom they trust due to shared experiences, remain strong after being discharged, with 47% reporting that they communicate with fellow veterans every day, 34% several times per week, and 14% several times per month.<sup>205</sup> Notably, the daily peer-to-peer interaction is 10% higher among female veterans, which may be attributable to the particular difficulty they experience reintegrating.<sup>206</sup>

**Notably, nearly two-thirds of veterans believe that only a minority of civilians grasp the challenges they face upon returning from conflict, with 22% feeling that no civilians understand.**<sup>207</sup>

In contrast, only 10% of veterans believe that the majority of civilians understand their challenges, and merely 1% feel that all civilians do.<sup>208</sup> Correspondingly, 21% of respondents in the “Twentieth National Poll: The Image of Veterans in Ukrainian Society” self-assessed as “not informed at all” and 41% as “rather uninformed” on the problems of veterans.<sup>209</sup>

Many frontline returnees experience considerable hardship due to psychological traumas, PTSD, physical injuries, lack of employment, and general frustration, altering the way they perceive and interact with the social world around them, which may put strain on their existing relationships with civilians. For example, family members of veterans observed that the time spent in combat zones consumes the attention of veterans, often leading to a detachment from daily life while this daily routine remains significant for other family members. The loss of shared experiences due to service can result in misunderstandings within the family and community members, particularly in the absence of professional mental health and psychosocial support for the veteran.<sup>210</sup>

A major challenge lies in preventing after-service stigma and social isolation due to the lack of necessary awareness and understanding within communities and families to appropriately receive, integrate, and engage veterans among them. This is also reflected in terms of local participation: the 2022 IOM survey shows that 41% believe they are unable to influence community life – a view that is most polarized in the northern macro-region where 23% of the veterans consider that they can influence their community, and 51% that they cannot.<sup>211 212</sup>

When asked to assess the factors that would enhance their participation, 25% of respondents expressed the desire to receive more respect and understanding from community members. Additionally, 16% emphasized the importance of more active cooperation from local

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<sup>205</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Female Veterans in Ukraine.”

<sup>206</sup> IREX.

<sup>207</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veteran Reintegration Experiences, Social Stigma, and Support Networks.”

<sup>208</sup> IREX.

<sup>209</sup> Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF) and Sociological Group “Rating,” “20th National Poll: The Image of Veterans in Ukrainian Society. January 14-16, 2023.”

<sup>210</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

<sup>211</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA).

<sup>212</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veteran Reintegration Experiences, Social Stigma, and Support Networks.”

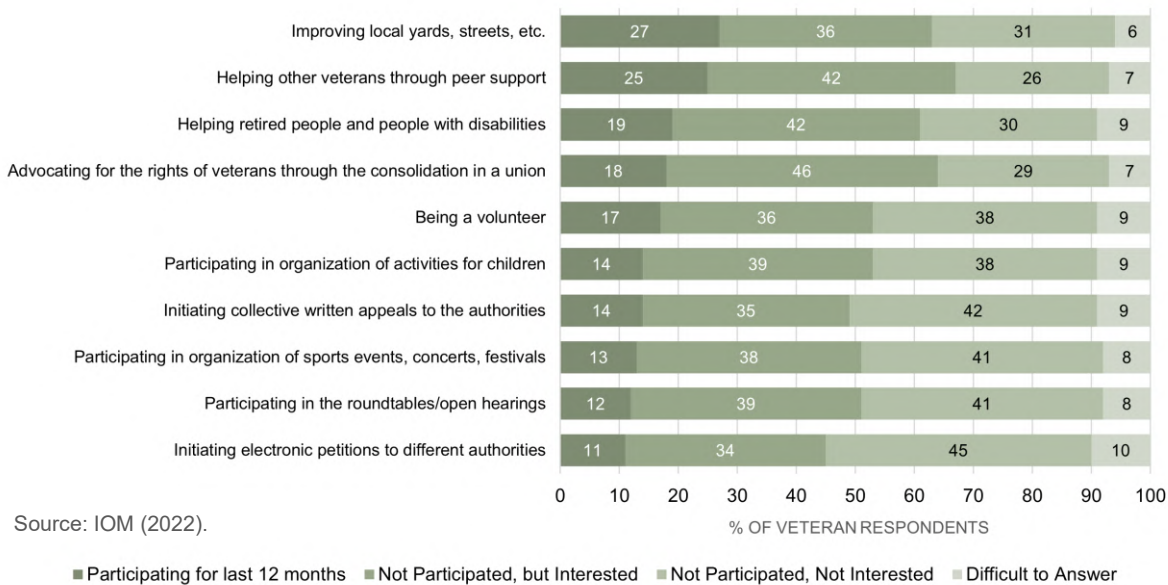


authorities, while 10% stressed the necessity for improved communication that considers their needs to stimulate their engagement in community life.<sup>213</sup>

This situation undermines the significant potential for more profound community integration, considering veterans are already active or willing to join different kinds of social cohesion activities. CSOs led by or working with veterans are already promoting this sort of community engagement, building spaces for dialogue, and improving the image of veterans in their communities.<sup>214</sup>

**On average, 17% of veterans have participated in one of the civic activities listed in the 2022 IOM survey, while 38.7% indicated a desire to do so.**

Figure 16: Experience of veterans participating in various social cohesion events and willingness to join them.



Veteran reintegration involves reshaping their connections with the state and society by fostering understanding and sensitivity to their perspectives, which is a critical factor for Ukraine's cohesion and stability. When these relationships break down, there is a heightened risk that former combatants may experience feelings of marginalization, exclusion, disenfranchisement, and political dissatisfaction – sentiments that could impede communities' and society's resilience to conflict drivers.<sup>215</sup>

A lot more needs to be done to build a society that is ready for and focused on veterans, which not only applies to families and ordinary community members but also to, for instance, local bureaucrats and business owners. There is still insufficient institutional knowledge for proficiently interacting with veterans and their family members in business, social services, administrative support, healthcare, legal assistance, and other essential sectors.<sup>216</sup>

<sup>213</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), "Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey," February 2022.

<sup>214</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA).

<sup>215</sup> International Alert, "What's next for Veterans in Ukraine? Promoting Inclusion to Improve the Reintegration Architecture for Former Combatants.," March 2019.

<sup>216</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

### 3.5.7 Capabilities Shortfalls

#### 3.5.7.1 Service Provision, Coordination and Harmonization

The current veterans reintegration policy of the Ukrainian state involves the administrations of 12 different ministries, with its formal direction emanating from the initiative and oversight of the MoVA. Yet, in reality, the ministry does not practically fulfill its intended mandate as the lead developer, coordinator, and controller of all government reintegration policy and, in turn, that of other stakeholders involved. As a result, Ukraine falls short of a unified, coherent, and sustainably planned state policy, which leads to, in many cases, flawed interagency communication and inconsistent strategies focused on short-term needs only.<sup>217</sup>

The most prominent example is healthcare, where the lack of a clear medical route for veterans amidst overlapping jurisdictions of the AFU, MoVA, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Policy, creates confusion among beneficiaries and service delivery inefficiencies, which is especially evident during the initial transition out of service.<sup>218</sup> Existing research has pointed out that, despite the importance of its mandate, the MoVA's authority over other cabinet ministries with core executive functions in its field of responsibility is quite limited. This means that the MoVA struggles to actually enforce and supervise many of the assistance standards for veteran services it devises.<sup>219</sup>

**While the majority (38%) rate the availability of services, amenities, and infrastructure as neutral, 26% consider it poor or very poor.**<sup>220</sup>

Notably, the current *performance* of service provision is far from ideal: According to the VRS, 37% of respondents highlighted poor service quality, 36% noted slow processing, and 30% cited issues related to corruption, nepotism, and fraud as the main challenges encountered trying to access benefits.<sup>221</sup> Furthermore, 12% of respondents in the 2022 IOM survey believed that local authorities are entirely unresponsive, while 60% reported that they are only partially responsive to veterans' needs. This lack of responsiveness leads to myriad avoidable inefficiencies, such as the reimbursement rates for medical treatments failing to keep pace with rising market prices.<sup>222</sup>

Moreover, in its current approach and structure, the MoVA does not effectively direct and integrate the non-governmental stakeholders of civil society, business, and the international donor landscape into its reintegration policy architecture – a deficiency caused by information gaps on the involved providers and insufficient engagement with them as well as disruptions in institutional knowledge management and strategy formulation due to frequent ministerial leadership changes and staff turnover. CSO perceptions, for instance, reveal that the central authorities lack coordinated work and effective communication with the civil sector.

CSOs find their interactions with local governments more positive compared to the central authorities, who are seen as unresponsive to requests and criticism while lacking a systematic, consistent and veteran-focused approach. In fact, establishing cooperation with the authorities was among the most urgent needs identified by CSO representatives after

<sup>217</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>218</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>219</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."

<sup>220</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>221</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Benefits Utilization and Experiences," July 2021.

<sup>222</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), "Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey," February 2022.



funding and staffing issues. A considerable share of them even pointed out they have only sporadically cooperated directly with the MoVA in the first place, which is partly attributable to the dysfunctionality of the MoVA's public consultative and advisory bodies.

The lack of a clear plan that effectively maps stakeholders and guides vertical and horizontal coordination exacerbates the frequency of duplicated efforts with simultaneous service gaps as well as poor data exchange, service protocols, and quality redirection among grassroots service providers. Due to the aforementioned limitations and performance issues, the MoVA was rated the worst in its effectiveness in service provision among the ministries, with 34% of surveyed CSOs rating it poorly and only 21% positively.<sup>223 224</sup>

Furthermore, the selection criteria for reliable CSO service providers remain underdeveloped, as does the financial preparedness of providers to operate with the retroactive and below-market price compensations that the state is able to offer. Moreover, these compensations are bound to strict reporting requirements, all of which make entry into the system feasible solely for well-established organizations with stable institutional frameworks and diverse funding sources, most of which are concentrated in urban areas where they can guarantee uninterrupted service of provisions until payment is received from the state.<sup>225</sup>

This creates barriers for new CSOs to enter the market or become integrated into the holistic, state-led reintegration system, preventing the innovation and diversification of service provision. This particularly impacts small organizations at the level of rural amalgamated territorial communities, as they lack the expertise and resources to engage with alternative national and international donors. Additionally, existing donors may be reluctant to fund organizations outside of their usual circle if not advised and incentivized to do so by the state.<sup>226</sup>

### **Notably, veterans in rural areas consistently rate the usage of health care, administrative services and welfare payments as less efficient.**<sup>227</sup>

More problems stem from the coordination between different governance levels: Ukraine's decentralization reforms have shifted government funding and -services, including those targeted towards veterans, closer to its citizens.

While many policy professionals see this as an appropriate development, the (lack of) coordination between the national government and local authorities can complicate the provision of vital services and benefits to veterans. National government-mandated benefits are not always accompanied by the requisite resources for their implementation, often placing local governments in an awkward position that need to be creatively resolved.<sup>228</sup>

For example, the execution of a national law that prescribes that families of deceased soldiers should receive priority in the allocation of state-owned land is left to regional and municipal governments, some of which do not have any land to give. In this case, a veteran is made dependent on the resources and political will of local authorities, which can lead to significant

<sup>223</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."

<sup>224</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."

<sup>225</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."

<sup>226</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions"; Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."

<sup>227</sup> Sereda et al., "Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022."

<sup>228</sup> Van Metre and Boerstler, "The Trip from Donbas."





regional differences in implementation and create instances of veterans receiving plots of land that are not appropriate to live on.<sup>229</sup>

The full-scale invasion will significantly impact systems and structures across all levels, which underscores the necessity for careful prioritization regarding service delivery and policy development to avoid overburdening institutional capacity at all levels. There remains ample opportunity to clarify and streamline roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms in the current reintegration architecture. The lack of a shared understanding fosters an environment of competition rather than collaboration while obstructing the clear communication among all involved stakeholders.<sup>230</sup>

The absence of a comprehensive and coherent policy widens the gap between policy objectives and practical implementation while neglecting the long-term needs of veterans. It also hampers the establishment of a clear definition of successful reintegration, impacting the design, accountability, and measurement of reintegration efforts. Lastly, reintegration policies often operate in isolation from broader national policies, such as those addressing disability or gender equality, instead of seeking synergies. This disjointed approach can lead to substandard services and missed opportunities to advance national objectives in these areas.<sup>231</sup>

### 3.5.7.2 Service Information and Access

Existing research indicates that a major challenge for veterans is accessing services and understanding their entitlements and the processes involving various related stakeholders, both at the central and local levels.<sup>232</sup>

This confusion is compounded by the fact that veterans often hold multiple statuses – such as service member, veteran, prisoner of war, internally displaced person, or individual with a disability – each requiring different types of government support.<sup>233</sup>

Veterans and their families lack adequate awareness of the rights, benefits, services and opportunities available to them, alongside having difficulties with documentation requirements, identifying the appropriate authority for applications, and understanding the procedures for accessing specific benefits, with some veterans unaware of certain entitlements altogether, further lowering utilization.<sup>234</sup>

The benefit utilization question in surveys highlights how this gap in awareness of the government's available support. For instance, while 58% of respondents of the 2023 IOM survey had received free medicines as prescribed by doctors and 47% had benefited from discounts on communal services such as gas, electricity, and water, only 7.4% had received grants for self-employment or retraining. Although some of these differences can be attributed

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<sup>229</sup> Van Metre and Boerstler.

<sup>230</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."

<sup>231</sup> International Alert, "What's next for Veterans in Ukraine? Promoting Inclusion to Improve the Reintegration Architecture for Former Combatants.," March 2019.

<sup>232</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."

<sup>233</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

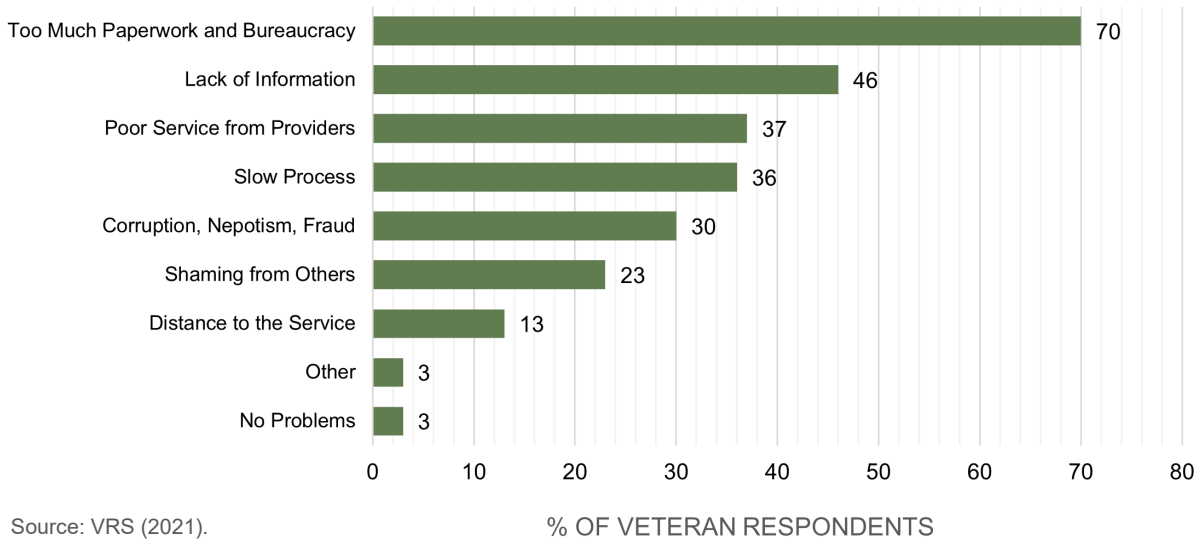
<sup>234</sup> Veteran Hub.



to varying needs, a significant portion of respondents also reported unsuccessful attempts to obtain certain benefits or services.<sup>235</sup>

**70% of veterans surveyed in the VRS reported difficulties accessing benefits due to excessive paperwork and bureaucracy.<sup>236</sup>**

Figure 17: Challenges veterans experience accessing benefits.

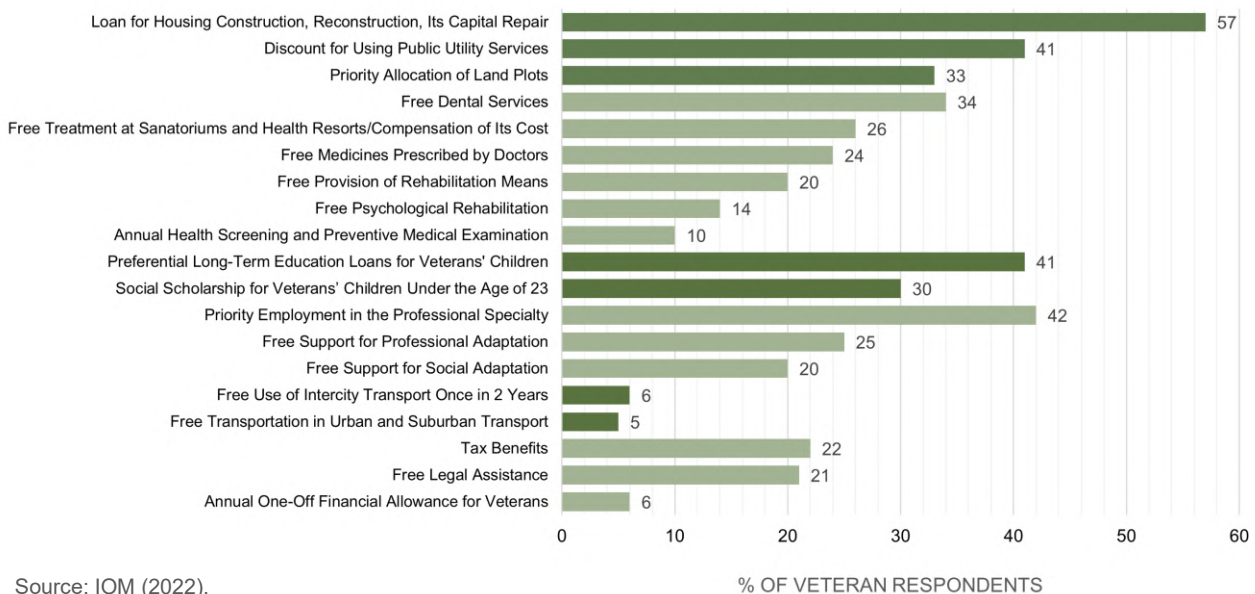


Source: VRS (2021).

Notably, some respondents in a study by the UVF reported relying on personal connections and corruption payments to obtain benefits, citing their lack of preparedness to navigate the bureaucratic process.<sup>237</sup>

**The benefits that veterans most frequently had troubles accessing include housing and education loans, priority employment, and public utility discounts.**

Figure 18: The share of veterans who did not obtain services or benefits among those who attempted to do so.



Source: IOM (2022).

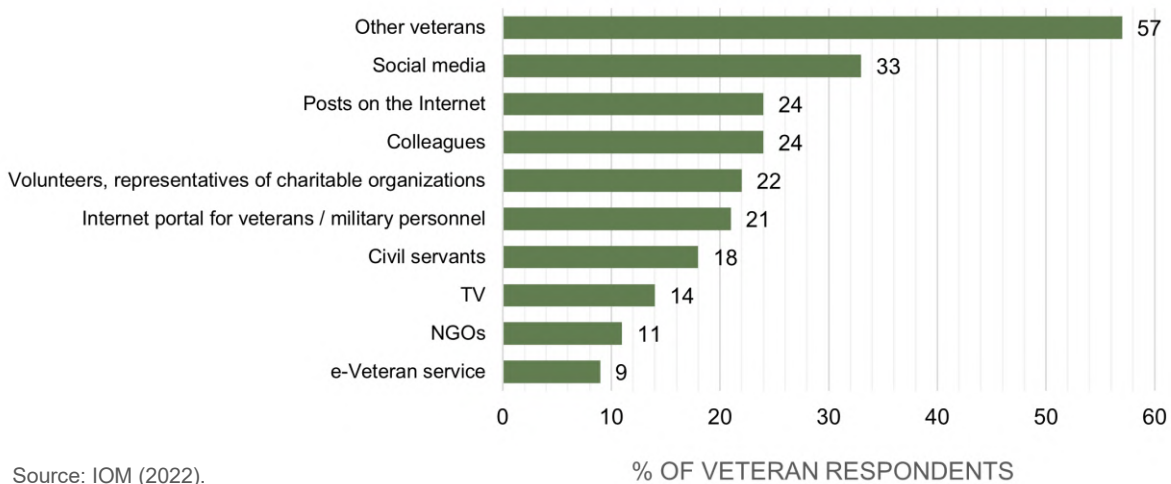
<sup>235</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

<sup>236</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans’ Benefits Utilization and Experiences,” July 2021.

<sup>237</sup> Kirillova et al., “The Needs of Veterans 2023.”

## The primary source of information on benefits and services is overwhelmingly word-of-mouth among fellow veterans.<sup>238</sup>

Figure 19: Information channels used by veterans to search for benefits, services, guarantees.



Source: IOM (2022).

This situation, for instance, leads to veterans and their families often facing difficulties in obtaining reimbursements for medical treatments, rehabilitation, and prosthetics. Recent research from Veteran Hub revealed that they frequently pay roughly as much out of pocket as they receive from government funds, largely due to a lack of information or understanding of the necessary bureaucratic processes. Moreover, upon leaving service, veterans without visible injuries or wounds may not fully recognize their actual health status or potential future risks. Consequently, they frequently postpone seeking medical and psychological assistance until they reach a critical juncture or may altogether refrain from seeking help, particularly in cases involving mental health issues.<sup>239</sup>

In fact, 42% of interviewed veterans in the 2022 IOM survey stated that the reason veterans do not seek psychological assistance is that they do not know whom to contact and how.<sup>240</sup> Additionally, the right to free legal aid, while comprehensive on paper, remains underutilized due to both the overwhelming workload of free legal aid centers and veterans' lack of awareness about this benefit and how to access it.<sup>241</sup>

According to interview data from UNDP, the biggest obstacle for disabled veterans in acquiring disability confirmation documents lies in the extensive interaction required with numerous public authorities and the protracted document issuance process, which is exacerbated by the insufficient automation of administrative procedures. Additionally, disabled veterans often do not know about certain benefits, such as priority in seeking and retaining employment during staff reductions, along with additional leave and salary in cases of temporary incapacity for work, which disadvantages them at the workplace and may lower their confidence about seeking employment.<sup>242</sup> For disabled veterans, the need to enhance

<sup>238</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

<sup>239</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

<sup>240</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

<sup>241</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

<sup>242</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans’ Current Employment Conditions.”

service accessibility also extends to rendering public infrastructure more barrier-free, both physically and digitally, especially in service information and provision environments.<sup>243 244</sup>

The lack of clear informational support during and after the transition out of service, along with unclear pathways and referral processes that fail to account for overlapping entitlement statuses, hampers effective veteran reintegration policy, even in areas where service coverage may not be the issue. In a UVF survey, family members of veterans identified informational support as the top need (39%), ranking even before psychological assistance (38%).<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

<sup>244</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans’ Current Employment Conditions.”

<sup>245</sup> Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF), “Portrait of a Veteran in Russian-Ukrainian War.”



### 3.5.8 Mistrust

In the existing literature, mistrust in civilian social environments and institutions is commonly cited as a major obstacle for successful veterans' reintegration. While 70% of veteran respondents in the 2022 IOM survey believe that they should be very careful in relations with people, a finding which is similar to that of the general population, only 23% of the veterans agreed that "most people can be trusted," compared to a rate of 30% among the general population.<sup>246</sup>

Mistrust fundamentally impacts how veterans interact with their civilian environment and the sources of support they are offered. For instance, in terms of economic reintegration, veterans in the VRS reported that, in 92% of cases, they did not seek help from government institutions to find employment. Instead, they overwhelmingly relied on their personal networks (85%). Another source by the UVF mentions that veterans, especially those gaining combatant status prior to the full-scale invasion, commonly exhibit distrust towards potential employers and employment assistance, which impacts the success of their job search.<sup>247</sup>

Moreover, some veterans' reluctance to seek psychological assistance is rooted in mistrust toward civilian mental health care providers, believing that they are underqualified and unable to understand their experiences and hardships – a concern echoed by the providers themselves. This mistrust may partially explain why family members, friends, and colleagues are the primary source of emotional support and counseling for veterans (58%), far more important than local centers for social and psychological rehabilitation (12%).<sup>248</sup>

While mental health care is the most delicate area for service-related trust, not least because of the associated stigma, mistrust is also ascribed to be an issue in physical health care when medical staff is perceived to be lacking preparedness and understanding of issues specific to veterans. Additionally, because of a lack of providers operating in small communities at the regional level, veterans are reported to be more likely to personally know service providers, which challenges their trust in the confidentiality of the service.<sup>249</sup>

Mistrust is utterly harmful to reintegration since it can decrease the utilization of vital support services, alienate and isolate veterans from their families and communities and thus nurture a culture of mutual social disappointment.<sup>250</sup> Mistrust can also reinforce existing and sometimes intersecting problems of service-related mental health issues, unemployment, substance abuse, violent behavior or crime. Unaddressed mistrust of the civilian systems may also delegitimize the government in the eyes of veterans and cultivate the political radicalization of certain peer groups among them, who often grow closer after service, while their ties to the broader society weaken.<sup>251</sup>

Perceived responsiveness of institutions may play an important role in how much they are trusted. In the reSCORE survey, although based on two very different sample sizes, veterans

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<sup>246</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), "Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey," February 2022.

<sup>247</sup> Kirillova, Znoviak, and Kazanska, "Needs and Obstacles of Veterans in Employment," July 2023.

<sup>248</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), "Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey," February 2022.

<sup>249</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>250</sup> IREX, "Survey of Veteran Business Owners: Summary of Findings."

<sup>251</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "The Hard Return: Mitigating Organized Crime Risks Among Veterans in Ukraine."

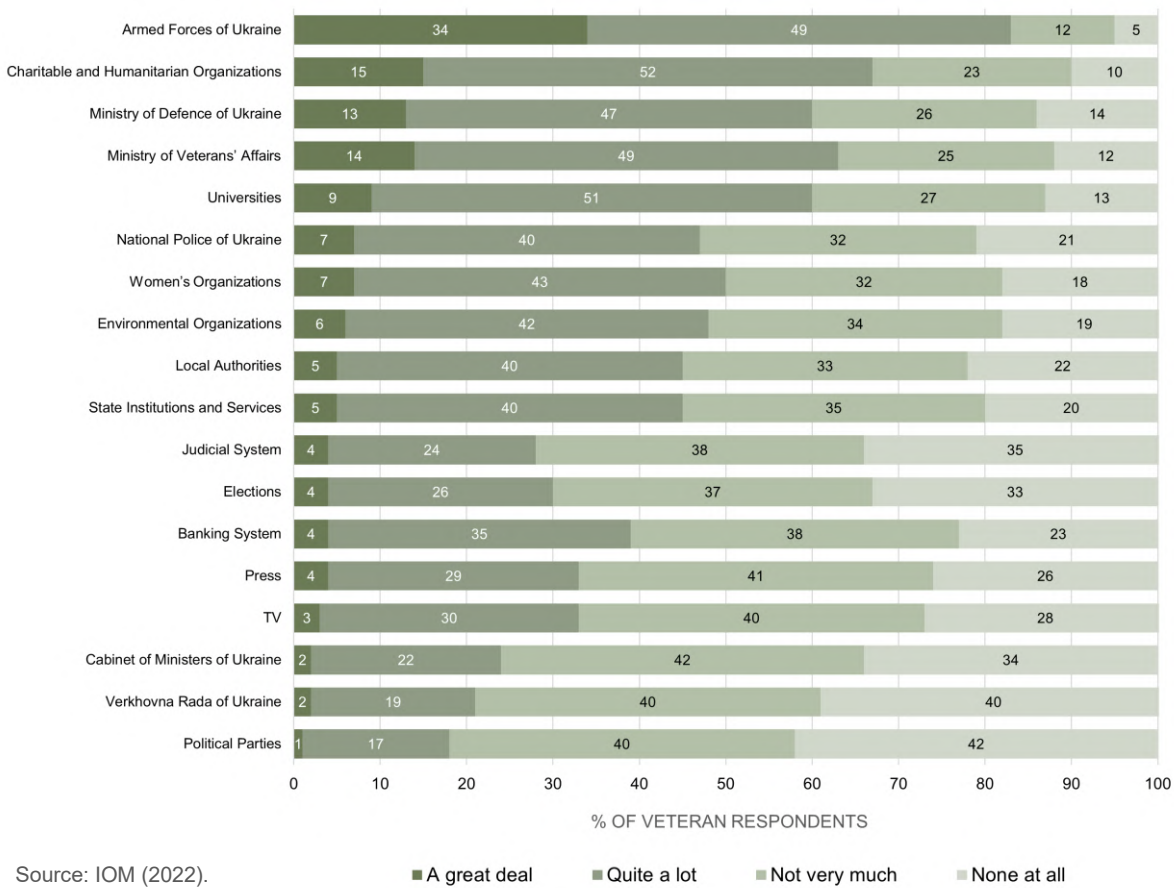


rated the attentiveness of public institutions to the needs of ordinary people six percentage points lower than the general population.<sup>252</sup>

Of the veterans surveyed by the IOM in 2022, nearly a quarter (23%) who had completed their military or law enforcement service cited the perceived indifference of government officials as the most challenging issue they encountered upon finishing their service. In contrast, of the veterans who expressed confidence in the responsiveness of local authorities to their needs, 70% indicated trust in the local government (versus 45% overall).

**Veterans exhibited very low or no trust all towards elections (70%), the judicial system (73%), the cabinet of ministers (76%), parliament (80%) and political parties (82%).<sup>253</sup>**

Figure 19: Veterans' trust in social institutions.



**The 2023 IOM survey found that veterans’ families exhibit trust levels very similar to those of the veterans themselves.<sup>254</sup>**

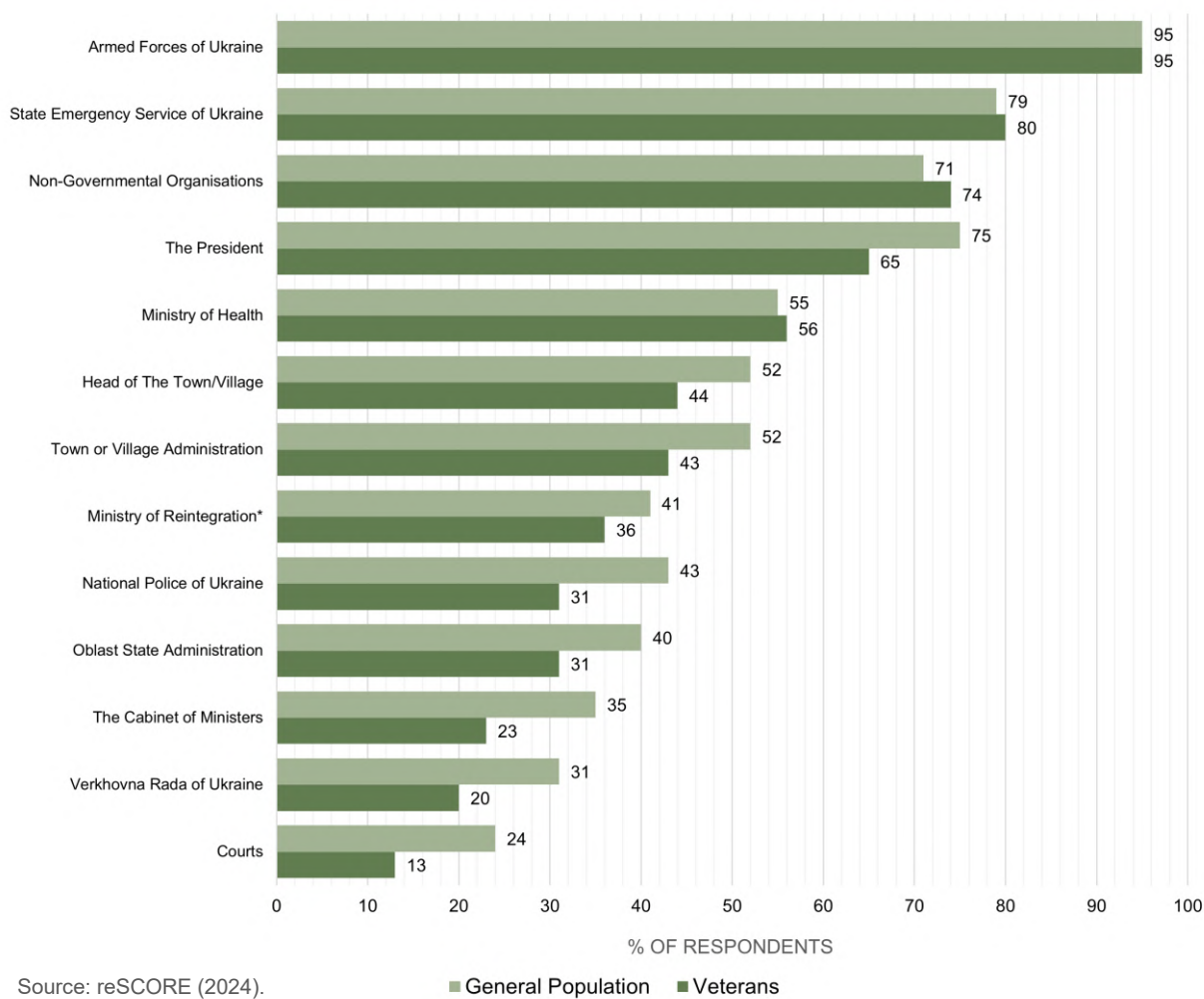
**Additionally, results from the 2023 reSCORE survey have shown that trust in most central and local institutions is several percentage points lower among veterans compared to the general population.**

<sup>252</sup> Sereda et al., “Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022.”

<sup>253</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), and Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), “Veterans Reintegration in Ukraine: National Survey,” February 2022.

<sup>254</sup> Kinsella and Aras, “The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine.”

Figure 20: Trust in institutions among the general population and veterans.



\* Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories

## The gap between veterans' and civilians' trust levels in institutions has widened since the 2021 reSCORE survey.

Moreover, 51% of veterans surveyed believe that parliamentarians can be bribed (compared to 35% of the general population), 50% believe that judges or prosecutors can be bought (compared to 35% of the general population), and 34% believe the police are corrupt (compared to 26% of the general population). Moreover, only 23% of veterans indicated that they trust the daily news on TV while 42% of the general population do.<sup>255</sup>

Veterans' low trust in certain institutions correlates with the sentiments of the general population and the extent of this mistrust varies considerably across surveys. It is clear, however, that veterans are particularly susceptible to further erosion of trust in state institutions, especially as the ongoing war continues to strain both their well-being and the institutional capacity to provide adequate services in the future.<sup>256</sup>

<sup>255</sup> Sereda et al., "Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022."

<sup>256</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "The Hard Return: Mitigating Organized Crime Risks Among Veterans in Ukraine."



## 3.6 Existing Policy and Program Recommendations

### 3.6.1 Veteran Status and Identities

#### 3.6.1.1 Cultural Identity and Narrative

Stakeholders working in veterans advocacy emphasize how the cultural identity of Ukraine can be significantly enriched by integrating the experiences and sacrifices of veterans into its collective narrative. To achieve this, a comprehensive strategy of respect and commemoration must be developed, with clear long-term plans and indicators for implementation. The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, along with relevant authorities, should spearhead the formulation and execution of such a strategy at national, regional, and local levels.<sup>257</sup>

Identity is crucial in designing programs and policies for Ukraine's veterans because it is deeply intertwined with the sociohistorical context of the nation, particularly shaped by the ongoing Russian invasion. This evolving identity influences how veterans perceive themselves and their societal roles, impacting the effectiveness, acceptance, and relevance of policies and programs. Understanding this dynamic identity is key to ensuring that these initiatives are successfully implemented, measured, and evaluated, as they must resonate with the veterans' experiences and perspectives shaped by current and historical events.<sup>258</sup>

Recent gray literature has revealed that the identity of Ukraine's veterans is deeply intertwined with national identity, embodying the ethos of resilience and sacrifice for independence and sovereignty. This identity, shaped by the experience of defending national values and territorial integrity, is central to policy development, ensuring that veterans are respected and reintegrated and their experiences are acknowledged as fundamental to Ukraine's social and economic fabric. Acknowledgement entails both discursive recognition – e.g., symbolic expressions of public appreciation and respect – as well as compensation and other forms of tangible support as they navigate wartime losses and meaningful, dignified pathways to civilian life.<sup>259</sup>

The value of continuing to feature authentic stories from soldiers and veterans in war reporting, through interviews and documentaries – including on mainstream television – is also emphasized. This approach aims to build veterans' confidence in these media sources, especially given their current low trust in televised news. Additionally, it could help the general public gain a deeper understanding of veterans' experiences, fostering greater empathy toward them.<sup>260</sup>

Currently, policy audiences note that there is an absence of a unified concept for honoring the sacrifices of Ukrainian veterans. Inconsistencies and inequalities in existing memorial and burial policies can lead to competition and increased social tensions between families of those who were killed in action. To address these issues, a unified program should be developed to value and reflect upon the contributions of veterans, which will serve as a cornerstone for national unity. This program should establish transparent criteria and procedures for expressing respect and perpetuating the memory of veterans, based on objective indicators such as awards and veteran status. In addition, legislative measures, such as the adoption

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<sup>257</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>258</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>259</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>260</sup> Sereda et al., "Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022."





of formal laws on commemorative activities, can help to ensure consistency and modernity in honoring veterans' memory.<sup>261</sup>

Existing policy recommendations stress that any commemorative efforts should be rooted in the Ukrainian historical context, while also being informed by global best practices. Expertise and resources from the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy and the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory should be leveraged to help guide these initiatives. Additionally, local programs should also be developed at various levels to express respect and honor veterans within communities and workplace environments. Such initiatives are expected to not only honor the memory of veterans and deceased soldiers, but also to contribute to the development of civil identity and national consciousness, ultimately strengthening Ukraine's defense capability in the long term.<sup>262</sup>

The Russian-Ukrainian War underscores the importance of solidifying Ukraine's ideological paradigm and embracing the deeds of its veterans within the national ethos. A critical contextual nuance of identity in the Ukrainian context is the salience of a national identity divorced from the so-called "Russian World." Nationally developed content has identified a sense of "cultural denial" experienced in the war with Russia<sup>263</sup> – a sentiment that will have significant implications for reintegration, rebuilding, and memorialization experiences.

### 3.6.1.2 Addressing Stigma and Mistrust

The government and civil society should engage in inclusive dialogue with major veteran and employer associations to address biases and develop solutions for the reintegration of Ukrainian veterans into society as individuals treated with dignity and respect. This effort should focus on training, positive showcases of veteran employees, and campaigns to challenge stereotypes, with special emphasis on including disabled, female, and rural veterans.<sup>264</sup> To ensure effective implementation, engagement with grassroots organizations and veteran leaders is considered essential, fostering collaboration and leveraging local expertise to close the gap between the general population and veterans.

Additionally, policy audiences advocate for the active promotion of a positive image of veterans through nationwide campaigns, which should feature veterans' personal stories and portray them as dependable community members.<sup>265</sup> From a policy perspective, it is important to shift from approaching veterans as disempowered or passive individuals to viewing them as empowered, resourceful, and diverse people. Current work, therefore, stresses the need to include veterans as active stakeholders in the policymaking process and to explore veterans' reintegration pathways from their own perspectives, avoiding external misconceptions and prejudices.<sup>266</sup>

Veterans report significantly lower trust in public institutions, including the police and central and local government bodies, compared to the general population, alongside heightened perceptions of systemic corruption. CSOs working with veterans recommend targeted research to understand the roots and impacts of this mistrust, enabling the design of

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<sup>261</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>262</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>263</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>264</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions."

<sup>265</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veteran Reintegration Experiences, Social Stigma, and Support Networks."

<sup>266</sup> International Alert, "What's next for Veterans in Ukraine? Promoting Inclusion to Improve the Reintegration Architecture for Former Combatants," March 2019.



interventions that address it, particularly for oblast and municipal administrations, as they play a critical role in delivering essential benefits and services.

They also advocate for greater veteran involvement in decision-making, especially within the MoVA and the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories. Establishing functioning local branches of the Council of Veterans of Ukraine could further enhance veteran engagement, establishing confidence in political and bureaucratic leadership and a sense of ownership over the process.

Building and restoring veterans' trust in the political and administrative system – and, by extension, in civilian society – relies primarily on improving these systems' responsiveness and sensitivity to veterans' perspectives. Another critical factor, however, is addressing areas where trust may be intentionally undermined through misinformation aimed at fostering political radicalization. Civil society organizations, therefore, recommend implementing media literacy initiatives with veterans on how to navigate content responsibly, given that veterans increasingly rely on and trust less regulated, non-traditional online media sources.<sup>267</sup>

### 3.6.1.3 Veteran Status

Recent research has highlighted the urgency of revising and updating the legal framework governing veterans' social status and protection in Ukraine, particularly the 1993 law "On the Status of Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection." These legislative changes should work to harmonize veterans' status and be informed by comprehensive discussions and a veteran-centric, inclusive approach that addresses the current sociodemographic profile and needs of veterans.<sup>268</sup>

Previous approaches to determining veteran status and issuing certificates have become overwhelmed due to the scale of mobilization, war-related disruption and displacement. Existing policy recommendations stress the need to address the inclusion of individuals from voluntary battalions or units and the urgency to develop practical solutions for verifying status.<sup>269</sup>

In November 2023, amendments to the veteran law simplified the procedure for obtaining combatant status, requiring only a single "certificate of participation" in hostilities along with basic personal data. However, this raises questions about the accessibility of obtaining such certificates to *everyone* eligible and whether there are plans to similarly simplify the bureaucratic processes for other veteran statuses outlined in the law.<sup>270</sup>

Additionally, further developments of definitions and laws related to veterans' status should also consider separating, to the extent possible, the establishment of definitions of what constitutes a war veteran or associated groups from specific ranges of benefits or entitlements. Although benefits may be granted, closely linking definitions and eligibility to service provision can complicate matters and hinder status determination in certain cases.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Sereda et al., "Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022."

<sup>268</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."

<sup>269</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."

<sup>270</sup> Press Service of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, "The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine Adopted a Law Simplifying the Procedure for Obtaining the Status of a Participant in Hostilities."

<sup>271</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."



In this context, it has been suggested for veterans' policy to adopt a “narrow” eligibility approach, focusing specifically on individuals who directly participated in hostilities to defend the state’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, or to accomplish other state-defined objectives, along with their family members. This definition would exclusively categorize veterans as those individuals connected by direct combat experience, distinctly separating civilians with war-related entanglements (mostly in the “war participant” category) from the concept of “veteran”. Consequently, the recipients of veterans' policies would be clearly defined at the legislative level, concentrating the efforts of the Ministry of Veterans solely on these targeted beneficiaries.<sup>272</sup>

Civil society organizations also highlight that a veteran may be eligible for several simultaneous entitlements. Therefore, policy audiences propose prioritizing a person's experiences as the primary criterion for assigning them a particular status. By defining these experiences, it becomes possible to assess their impact on the well-being of those holding such statuses and to provide suitable and dignified support that logically follows from these experiences and their consequences. The principles governing status determination should be transparent, equitable, and reflective of the nature of the events in which an individual directly participated and the type of experience they acquired.<sup>273</sup>

In cases where veterans have multiple defining experiences, veterans should have the ability to enter the category of multiple statuses, for example – a veteran and an internally displaced person or a veteran and a person with a disability. In line with the principle of allowing individuals to hold multiple social statuses, some policy professionals propose eliminating the designation of a person with a war-related disability. Instead, these audiences advocate for veterans who hold both veteran status and disability status to be granted privileges within legislation pertaining to both categories. This would entail issuing a distinct certificate for veteran status and a separate document verifying disability. This approach is believed to make those who suffered major health impacts as a result of military service feel less separate from other veterans and to reduce stigma.<sup>274</sup>

Existing recommendations stress that having multiple statuses does not confer an advantage over others. Rather, it simply underscores the need to consider all social needs criteria comprehensively. While the prioritization of veterans or individuals with dual/multiple status(es) can serve as a tool of state policy, it is imperative to exercise caution and transparently communicate such decisions as part of the broader state policy concerning veterans and their families. State policy must consider the interests of all citizens and avoid discrimination against any particular group.<sup>275</sup>

## 3.6.2 Basic Livelihood Support

### 3.6.2.1 Economic Reintegration

Citing successful approaches of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, practitioners working in the sphere recommend the government to mitigate post-discharge income loss by introducing targeted tax benefits and exemptions. These could include property tax reductions, income tax breaks, and waivers on fees for certain services. Such measures

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<sup>272</sup> Brus and Pashkina, “Veterans Policy in Ukraine.”

<sup>273</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

<sup>274</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>275</sup> Veteran Hub.



would help veterans retain more of their income, enabling them to invest in their families, education, or entrepreneurial endeavors.<sup>276</sup>

On the employer side, policy professionals advocate for introducing various government incentives to encourage businesses to actively engage with veterans and share responsibility for their economic integration. Currently, certain state-provided veteran benefits can deter employers from hiring veterans (e.g., temporary disability benefits, additional paid leave), as they represent additional expenses. A possible approach to help offset such expenses and reduce the financial concerns of employers about hiring veterans would be to provide tax benefits and/or other financial incentives to employers for hiring veterans. Other financial support to employers could ensure that individuals in military service retain preferential rights to job security and continue receiving salary payments upon signing their military contract.

Moreover, the government could prioritize businesses that hire (or are willing to hire) veterans in partnerships and public procurement processes. In addition, the policy literature also suggests developing a system of government incentives to encourage international businesses operating in Ukraine to actively hire veterans.<sup>277</sup>

Representatives of the government and civil society should be engaged in a broad dialogue and involve representatives of the largest veteran associations and employers' associations to identify existing biases and develop solutions to enhance veterans' employment prospects. These efforts would include conducting discussions with large employer associations, providing training programs, and showcasing successful examples of veteran employees across various industries. Simultaneously, a nationwide information campaign should be rolled out to challenge stereotypes and promote a positive image of veterans in the Ukrainian workforce.<sup>278</sup>

The MoVA, in consultation with donors and NGOs, should craft messages emphasizing the benefits of hiring veterans, highlighting their attributes as disciplined, reliable, and stress-resistant workers. These initiatives should pay special attention to veterans with disabilities, female veterans, and those residing in rural areas to ensure their inclusion in the workforce.<sup>279</sup> State policy should also avoid stigmatizing and stereotyping veterans as carriers of certain qualities or pigeonholing them into specific industries. Instead, reintegration policies should foster an environment where veterans are viewed as valuable assets across all sectors.<sup>280</sup>

Additionally, given the diverse needs and experiences of Ukrainian veterans, it is considered imperative to ensure that professionals interacting with them possess the appropriate competencies. Training programs should be developed and scaled to equip specialists from various fields, including social services, healthcare, legal services, human resources, and administration, with the skills needed to support veterans and their families while navigating the job market. In a similar vein, efforts should be made to synchronize best practices and enhance awareness among Ukrainian employers on effectively interacting with veterans. Legislative measures may be considered to systematize the most effective approaches.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Hersak, Odarchenko, and Kopanytsia, "Building Bridges Veteran Policy in the U.S. and Ukraine."

<sup>277</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions"; Kirillova et al., "The Needs of Veterans 2023"; Sereda et al., "Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022."

<sup>278</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions."

<sup>279</sup> IREX.

<sup>280</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>281</sup> Veteran Hub.



Ukrainian state policy needs to recognize veterans and their families as valuable human capital, focusing on their well-being and providing resources for their competitive reintegration into civilian life, considering the gap created by military service. Existing policy recommendations collectively emphasize the importance of investing in training and (re)qualification for Ukrainian veterans.

Comprehensive career support services should align with international standards and leverage the expertise of NGOs and local communities to ease veterans' transition from military to civilian employment. Special attention should be given to veterans with disabilities and those requiring rehabilitation for war-related injuries.

Key recommendations include updating the classifier of professions and aligning military and civilian job descriptions to help veterans better understand their competencies and develop potential career paths. Additionally, revising the state program for education and professional adaptation is critical. This should involve creating competitive training programs that transform veterans' military experiences into assets for industries such as defense, healthcare, and construction. To expand access, a mechanism for compensating educational costs should replace the current admission system for state-funded institutions, enabling veterans to choose from a wider range of educational opportunities.<sup>282</sup>

Lastly, raising awareness about educational opportunities for veterans, their families, and the families of fallen veterans is considered paramount. Programs that support veterans' continuing education are considered especially important for young veterans who joined the military right out of school (with or without completing their studies).<sup>283</sup>

Policy recommendations also suggest that the Ministry of Veterans Affairs and the Ministry of Defense should collaboratively develop a joint plan for veteran discharge and workforce reintegration. This plan should include a 2–3-month preparation period with education, skill development, psychological support, and ongoing monitoring, following international standards and best practices from NATO countries, in partnership with organizations experienced in veteran reintegration.<sup>284</sup> This transition period should also allow time for recovery and recreation, which are considered vital for a positive transition into civilian life.

To ensure that veterans are able to take time to recover from military service, especially in cases when veterans have a lack of personal savings and/or civilian capital, veterans should be provided with a one-time cash payment or a temporary (up to three months) extension of salary payments from the military budget during their transition period.<sup>285</sup>

Some policy actors are calling for additional statutory provisions, including a national mandate requiring employers to reserve a legislatively defined percentage of job positions for veterans and establishing uniform standards for mandatory workplace accommodations for veterans with disabilities.<sup>286</sup> More is also needed to inform disabled veterans of their existing rights to special assistance and benefits.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families"; Hersak, Odarchenko, and Kopanytsia, "Building Bridges Veteran Policy in the U.S. and Ukraine."

<sup>283</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>284</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions."

<sup>285</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>286</sup> Kirillova et al., "The Needs of Veterans 2023"; Sereda et al., "Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022."

<sup>287</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions."



Furthermore, a joint effort between the MoVA and the Ministry of Digital Transformation could better ensure relevant and useful databases of employment information to support policy and program development together with international actors. Finally, the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Policy can support through programs that provide education and pathways to accessible employment.<sup>288</sup>

The lack of engagement with state agencies in terms of seeking support for economic reintegration suggests that, in addition to the generalized mistrust towards state institutions, there exists a need for more awareness raising regarding state services, as well as active collaboration with NGOs and private sector partners (e.g., employers, trade unions, associations).<sup>289</sup>

Existing policy recommendations also prioritize entrepreneurship as a means of supporting Ukrainian veterans and their families. This focus underscores the importance of increased attention to veterans' businesses. There is a proposal to develop incentive programs aimed at fostering entrepreneurship within the veteran community and their families, including support systems for initiating business ventures and potential tax incentives. Additionally, policymakers should consider prioritizing veteran-led business proposals in public procurement, acknowledging their unique contributions and expertise.

To further enhance these efforts, programs and preferences should be established to facilitate the application of military experience in civilian business settings, while removing bureaucratic barriers. For example, veterans with experience driving armored vehicles should be eligible to retrain as commercial drivers and start their own businesses without the need for additional licensing exams.<sup>290</sup>

Moreover, recognizing the vulnerable nature of veteran businesses, efforts should be made to involve spouses and family units in defining such enterprises. In a similar vein, policy professionals advocate for the establishment of support programs specifically tailored to assist veteran-owned businesses and co-owners during periods of re-mobilization.<sup>291</sup>

To complement these efforts, a series of training sessions covering topics such as marketing, business management, and grants/investment raising are recommended, alongside the creation of a community for experience-sharing among veteran business owners. Furthermore, the provision of mini-grants to support and nurture veteran-owned businesses is deemed essential for their growth and sustainability.<sup>292</sup> These recommendations collectively highlight the importance of fostering entrepreneurship within the veteran community while also ensuring their integration into the wider economy.

### 3.6.2.2 Family-Centered Assistance

Navigating their paths post-service is a difficult task for veterans, but they are often not alone in their journey. Veterans' families also face unique experiences that deserve recognition and adequate support. Existing policy approaches towards veterans' families have generally not been extensive, which means there is a need for holistic, end-to-end programs that support family reunification and address the unique challenges faced by families of military personnel, including those who have been abroad, to prevent the loss of human capital and labor

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<sup>288</sup> IREX.

<sup>289</sup> IREX.

<sup>290</sup> Hersak, Odarchenko, and Kopanytsia, "Building Bridges Veteran Policy in the U.S. and Ukraine."

<sup>291</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>292</sup> IREX, "Survey of Veteran Business Owners: Summary of Findings."



resources. Effective interaction with these families is not only essential for the veterans' reintegration but also for reinforcing the motivation of soldiers and the country's defense capability as a whole.<sup>293</sup>

Several key recommendations proposed by Veteran Hub address the needs of veterans' families in the reintegration policy framework. Considering that families play vital roles in the well-being and reintegration of veterans, their experiences, contributions, and needs must be legally acknowledged and integrated into programming. This entails identifying veterans' family members, collecting and analyzing data to understand their experiences, recognizing their roles as stakeholders and beneficiaries of veteran reintegration policy, and developing legislation that reflects their concerns to provide them with appropriate support and recognition. To help achieve such programs, policy audiences recommend integrating veterans' family members into the Unified Register of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs and subsequently integrating them into other digital state systems (without creating a separate social status).<sup>294</sup>

Additionally, existing policy recommendations stress the right of veterans and their families to transparent information about the scope of government assistance that is available to them. The creation of accessible awareness-raising campaigns will empower beneficiaries to make informed decisions and access the support they need. Furthermore, timely crisis support should be made available to veterans and their families in cases where systemic solutions prove ineffective. In a similar vein, policy professionals stress the need for rehabilitation programs which allow family representatives to participate.<sup>295</sup>

Another key recommendation is to develop targeted initiatives for families of military personnel who served abroad during their military service. These programs should focus on reintegrating these veterans and their families into Ukrainian society to prevent the loss of valuable human capital and labor resources.<sup>296</sup>

### 3.6.2.3 Housing and Shelter

Housing holds a particular cultural significance in Ukraine, as home ownership is widespread and strongly associated with people's sense of identity, well-being, and security. A lack of access to appropriate housing, including home ownership, is considered detrimental for the reintegration of displaced people in Ukraine, and may therefore also be an important factor in reintegration of some veterans.<sup>297</sup> Adequate housing is one of the basic needs of veterans and serves as a vital prerequisite for their successful reintegration.

Given the slow progress of the existing accommodation waiting list – impacted by the growing number of IDPs and more than 20 other categories of priority applicants – it is essential to provide veterans with alternative housing mechanisms. These could include leasing programs, concessional lending, and state-backed housing loan initiatives. Drawing lessons from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the government could offer mortgage insurance and guarantees to private lenders, enabling veterans to access financing for home purchases, renovations, or repairs under favorable terms such as reduced interest rates and extended repayment periods. Additionally, ensuring that those on the accommodation waiting list for

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<sup>293</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>294</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>295</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>296</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>297</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."



years receive their entitlements or benefit from alternative mechanisms is critical for upholding their right to decent living conditions.<sup>298</sup>

Internal displacement is a significant issue in Ukraine, affecting veterans and their families. Due to delays in obtaining IDP status caused by their military service, veterans should be prioritized within the broader IDP population. Dual-status veterans, such as those who are IDPs or have disabilities, should receive additional consideration based on their intersecting needs. Furthermore, veterans with physical disabilities must be supported through housing adjustments that enhance functionality and mobility or by financing new housing when modifications are not feasible.<sup>299</sup>

### 3.6.3 Differentiated Needs and Tailored Service Provision

State policy should cover the physical, mental, material, and social determinants that affect veterans' health and well-being should not independently but holistically. To achieve such a comprehensive approach, the study of the variability of veterans' experience should be expanded, with due regard to how veterans' paths can vary depending on the circumstances of their military service and many other factors. Another important element to consider is how reintegration policy should include families of veterans, families of the fallen, military personnel without combat experience, and others.<sup>300</sup>

#### 3.6.3.1 Urban-Rural Divide

To address disparities between Ukraine's rural and urban populations, with the latter experiencing disadvantages such as fewer job opportunities, lower incomes and poorer health outcomes, recommendations to improve conditions in rural areas largely align with prescriptions for broader veteran policy, emphasizing the urgency of dedicating more attention to rural communities specifically.

Priorities include ensuring equitable and universally accessible service coverage and registration pathways across all locations, providing skills development training tailored to rural job markets, and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in rural regions through subsidies and grants to boost employment and stimulate economic recovery. Additionally, supporting CSOs involved in rural revitalization efforts can further reinforce these goals.

As another aspect, strengthening existing veterans' networks can facilitate connections between urban veterans organizations and rural veterans through online platforms and events. These networks can establish mentorship programs that expand rural veterans' access to employment, training, and educational opportunities.<sup>301</sup>

Moreover, existing work recommends enhancing capacity and standardizing services of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs' regional offices, enabling them to facilitate dialogue with local authorities and employers, and transferring knowledge to local communities. This approach would improve service quality at the local level, including generating clear procedures for seeking help and consultation, and would be a crucial step towards creating a unified system for veteran services, especially in rural areas undergoing decentralization.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families"; Hersak, Odarchenko, and Kopanytsia, "Building Bridges Veteran Policy in the U.S. and Ukraine."

<sup>299</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>300</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>301</sup> Sereda et al., "Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022."

<sup>302</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Current Employment Conditions."





### 3.6.3.2 Gender-Sensitive Support

The policy literature highlights the importance of ensuring that reintegration programs are gender-sensitive and address the unique needs of women veterans and their families. A critical priority is the prevention of sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV) in military settings. Existing recommendations emphasize the need for systems and processes that enable victims to safely and confidentially report incidents and receive appropriate care, support, and protection. To this end, the MoVA should collaborate with security sector entities and international experts to eliminate the permissive environment for SGBV by establishing comprehensive prevention and response mechanisms.<sup>303</sup>

To integrate gender considerations into national strategies, the MoVA is advised to engage gender experts at all management levels to guide gender-sensitive programming and monitor instances of gender discrimination. Raising awareness of SGBV is a suggested first step, which can be achieved through targeted training and awareness campaigns for key personnel and decision-makers in the security and defense sectors. Additionally, the incorporation of mandatory courses on gender equality and SGBV prevention in military universities and educational systems is critical for fostering a culture of respect and accountability within traditionally male-dominated military structures.<sup>304</sup>

Simultaneously, additional work is required to cultivate a more positive image of female veterans in society at large. The Ministry of Veterans Affairs can spearhead this work, with support from Ukrainian NGOs. Efforts can include a variety of activities, ranging from public awareness campaigns and panel discussions featuring prominent figures and opinion leaders, as well as multimedia creation such as blogs, short film, vlogs, and community events. These initiatives should focus on celebrating the important contributions of female veterans, dispelling stereotypes surrounding women in the military, and promoting positive images of women veterans as military personnel with a high level of professionalism, skill, and dedication. Communication strategies targeted to the general population should actively showcase the involvement of women veterans and underscore their significant contributions to Ukraine.<sup>305</sup>

Upon transitioning back to civilian life, many female veterans encounter unique physical health concerns. Exposure to toxins during service, for instance, can lead to increased risks of conditions such as breast cancer. Early diagnosis through measures like mammograms for women exposed to toxic substances is critical and requires proactive institutional involvement.<sup>306</sup>

Moreover, female veterans frequently experience significant reproductive health challenges during and after military service. These may include the loss of reproductive function due to combat-related injuries, trauma, or illnesses. To address this, it has been proposed to establish preferential programs for assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), such as in-vitro fertilization (IVF), to support female veterans. Furthermore, access to comprehensive reproductive health services, including abortion counseling, should be prioritized to ensure women receive holistic medical care. Donors and NGOs are encouraged to collaborate with

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<sup>303</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families”; UNDP, “Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context.”

<sup>304</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>305</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>306</sup> Hersak, Odarchenko, and Kopanytsia, “Building Bridges Veteran Policy in the U.S. and Ukraine.”



grassroots organizations to develop and foster safe communities where women can access essential support and medical care, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions.<sup>307</sup>

Further recommendations regarding women veterans' health emphasize the importance of ensuring that providers of MHPSS services are consistently and adequately trained in gender sensitivity. This involves practitioners avoiding the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and assumptions about female service members while recognizing and addressing the specific mental health challenges faced by women veterans.<sup>308</sup> The postpartum period, for instance, is often an especially difficult time, with heightened stress levels that PTSD can further exacerbate. In these situations, women veteran organizations serve as a vital resource, offering safe spaces for open dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. It is therefore essential for MoVA, government institutions, and international actors to empower and sustain these female veterans' associations.<sup>309</sup>

Providers should be encouraged to draw lessons from successful gender-inclusive MHPSS systems implemented in other contexts. An example of an evidence-based approach to building these capacities is a clinical trial conducted by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which involved 277 women veterans diagnosed with PTSD. This comprehensive study compared the effectiveness of prolonged exposure therapy to present-centered therapy, offering valuable insights into treatment outcomes for female veterans.<sup>310</sup>

In addition to the prevention of SGBV and the provision of adequate medical and psychosocial support, the policy literature also underscores the importance of integrating gendered needs into economic and social reintegration programming. Support services should be established to facilitate the successful economic reintegration of female veterans. Collaboration with women's veteran organizations is considered key in understanding and addressing the gender-specific needs of female veterans in the job market.<sup>311</sup> There is also a call to identify and develop specific training and employment opportunities for female veterans, with labor market surveys and analyses dedicated to identifying opportunities tailored to their needs.<sup>312</sup> These programs should pay special attention to women veterans in living in rural areas and women with disabilities, as they often experience additional marginalization.<sup>313</sup>

Policy audiences emphasize that gender-specific programs and services across all areas can be effectively facilitated by appointing dedicated program managers at key service junctions, such as the Women Veterans Program Managers at Veteran Healthcare facilities in the U.S. These managers would oversee and refer services, coordinate outreach initiatives, and advocate for women veterans. They would also ensure the availability of knowledgeable and supportive staff equipped to address the specific concerns of female veterans and their families.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families"; Kirillova et al., "The Needs of Veterans 2023."

<sup>308</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Female Veterans in Ukraine"; International Alert, "What's next for Veterans in Ukraine? Promoting Inclusion to Improve the Reintegration Architecture for Former Combatants.," March 2019.

<sup>309</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>310</sup> Veteran Hub; Hersak, Odarchenko, and Kopanytsia, "Building Bridges Veteran Policy in the U.S. and Ukraine."

<sup>311</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Female Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>312</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."

<sup>313</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>314</sup> Hersak, Odarchenko, and Kopanytsia, "Building Bridges Veteran Policy in the U.S. and Ukraine."



### 3.6.3.3 Life-Cycle Implications

The experience of military service and combat operations reverberates through veterans' lives, shaping their well-being long after they return to civilian life. The journey of reintegration is deeply personal, with each veteran navigating their unique challenges at their own pace. It is imperative that reintegration policies for veterans and their families recognize the profound and lasting impact of their experiences, providing comprehensive support throughout their lifetimes.<sup>315</sup>

Currently, the state system of veteran affairs operates under a static model, offering uniform support to veterans and their families across all stages of life. This approach overlooks the evolving needs of individuals as they progress through different life phases. The discourse surrounding veteran policy tends to focus on short-term solutions, often neglecting the long-term implications and the diverse demographic factors that influence veterans' experiences.<sup>316</sup>

To address these shortcomings, policy audiences propose adopting a dynamic strategy that encompasses short-, medium-, and long-term periods tailored to the projected life expectancy of today's veterans. This strategy should prioritize support at all stages of life, including end-of-life care, and be informed by a holistic understanding of the veteran population, considering demographic factors that impact their needs.<sup>317</sup>

Accessibility and convenience are paramount in the proposed policy framework, with a focus on ensuring that all beneficiaries can access the support they require. Furthermore, state policy should flexibly adapt to changes in veterans' paths, and provide appropriate assistance in the event of captivity, injury, missing in action, or death. This support should also be adapted to each policy environment, sensitive to the needs of veterans' families throughout the various stages of the veteran path – in military service, in the reserve force, and in civilian life.<sup>318</sup>

In the final stages of life, veterans and their families have to navigate a common system of palliative support and administration of processes related to death and commemoration, which should be subject to humanization and changes. Considering the lack of capacity in the palliative care system, many veteran families will provide the necessary end-of-life care on their own. Recognizing the likelihood of premature mortality rates among veterans, policy audiences stress that family caregivers may require specialized palliative support to provide the necessary care for veterans. Patronage and case management tools should pay special attention to end-of-life care, facilitating and humanizing bureaucratic processes and providing adequate support to veterans' families from the last months/days of life to funeral services and the mourning period.<sup>319</sup>

### 3.6.3.4 Wartime Reintegration

To enhance the wartime resilience of Ukraine's veteran support systems and safeguard the country's defense capabilities, policy audiences recommend differentiating reintegration frameworks to address the unique, often precarious, relationship of active duty and reserve force veterans to civilian life, while also establishing legal certainty regarding prospects for

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<sup>315</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Family: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>316</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>317</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>318</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>319</sup> Veteran Hub.



permanent demobilization. These changes would result in a modernized, more resilient, and enduring security and defense strategy.

Keeping veterans in active military service and sustaining their ability to serve, even beyond the current period of mobilization, requires updated infrastructure and support systems, including streamlined, user-friendly medical examination and treatment protocols with efficient referral systems, compassionate and responsive personnel management practices, and continuous procurement of suitable equipment for soldiers.

For veterans transitioning into the operational reserve force, policies and regulatory changes should focus on maintaining combat readiness while nurturing civilian human capital. Likewise, they should allow for a balance with civilian life and offer tailored support programs that consider the effects of continued reserve service on veterans and their families. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by reservists and drawing insights from ATO/JFO reserve mobilizations – including limited long-term planning opportunities – the government should clearly define re-mobilization pathways, outline service conditions and benefits, and ensure transparency about its impact on reintegration.

It is also considered crucial to acknowledge that the experiences of ATO/JFO veterans in the reserve force and ‘new’ veterans in the reserve forces may significantly differ. Regular needs assessments should be conducted to ensure that these status-sensitive policies remain relevant and effective.<sup>320</sup>

Moreover, think tanks observing the societal risks of current veterans policy in Ukraine, emphasize the urgency to enact a comprehensive legal framework for demobilization. A dedicated demobilization law should establish clear, fixed terms of service for soldiers, transparent administrative procedures, and immediately accessible support pathways for veterans, reducing the bureaucratic and psychological burdens currently faced by military personnel. Both legal and internal organizational changes within the AFU are essential to standardize demobilization, including a transition from commander-led management to a more systematic approach.

Systematizing demobilization processes should create a scalable mechanism capable of managing the inevitable yet still uncertain large-scale demobilization of the AFU, whether at the next phase or the eventual conclusion of current hostilities.<sup>321</sup>

### 3.6.3.5 Support for Families of the Fallen

Policy audiences underscore the critical importance of ensuring that families of the fallen and veterans dealing with grief and loss receive sufficient assistance from government services. Support for families of deceased veterans is a crucial aspect of honoring their memory and ensuring their well-being. Existing policy recommendations stress the need to develop a support route for veterans’ families from the moment of death notification throughout their lives. This route should prioritize the needs of families, identify them as key actors and beneficiaries of state processes, minimize bureaucratic and administrative pressure, and offer comprehensive support programs and commemoration initiatives. To avoid social tensions, it is critical that this support is provided in an equal, uniform, and systemic way.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>321</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, “The Hard Return: Mitigating Organized Crime Risks Among Veterans in Ukraine.”; Comment made by an IOM International Programme Officer revising this report.

<sup>322</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Family: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”



Families of the fallen commonly face significant administrative burdens during their time of grief and are faced with a bureaucratic apparatus that can be experienced as lacking efficiency and empathy. Policy professionals recommend conducting a detailed analysis of processes related to receiving state-guaranteed assistance for family members after the death of a veteran in order to identify ways to streamline bureaucratic processes and ease the administrative load on families during their most acute phases of grief. Identifying possibilities for digitalization is also considered key in this regard. In addition, service providers should undergo training in ethical communication with grieving families to ensure that they possess the necessary competencies to efficiently and professionally support individuals in the final stages of life and aid relatives throughout the mourning period. Moreover, legislation should be enacted to guarantee extraordinary leave and employment protections for family members of veterans who were injured, missing, captured, or killed, acknowledging and addressing their unique needs and challenges.<sup>323</sup>

Currently, families of the fallen are divided into two separate statuses: family members of fallen (deceased) veterans, and family members of fallen (deceased) defenders. Drawing from the proposed approach regarding general veteran status (section 3.6.1.3), civil society organizations propose consolidating these into a single status for family members of deceased veterans, leaving the possibility of individuals falling under multiple other/related statuses. In addition, there are notable exceptions within the current definition of families that require attention in policy and legal frameworks. Policy recommendations advocate for the development of legislative measures to include children of deceased veterans in the definition of family members of the fallen.<sup>324</sup>

Reintegration programming would best serve military-affiliated communities by strengthening community-level MHPSS systems for families of the fallen, utilizing existing centers as platforms for providing services and support groups. Importantly, this support should be integrated into the community, focusing on helping these families return to socially active lives, enhancing their psychological well-being, and providing opportunities for employment and personal development.<sup>325</sup> Furthermore, existing policy recommendations stress that families of the fallen may benefit from informational campaigns and practical support to guide them in the process of obtaining status and benefits.<sup>326</sup>

### 3.6.3.6 Healthcare Needs and Medical Services

In order to effectively support veterans' reintegration, long-term physical and psychological support services will be required.<sup>327</sup> In addressing the imperative of supporting the mental health needs of Ukrainian veterans, policy recommendations underscore, besides expanding its reach and accessibility, the necessity of normalizing access to MHPSS.<sup>328</sup> This includes promoting and encouraging veterans to seek psychological assistance while also raising awareness among them and their families about the principles of quality care.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>324</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>325</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>326</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>327</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."

<sup>328</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Design Focused on Healthcare Utilization Among Veterans," July 2021.

<sup>329</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."



Recognizing the collaborative effort required, it is also suggested that the Ministries of Veterans Affairs, Social Policy, and Health work together to develop national campaigns aimed at fostering mental health awareness and promoting help-seeking behaviors amongst veterans. Notably, the higher percentage of female veterans who sought mental health support, as compared to men, indicates a potential avenue for leveraging their openness to such services in informational campaigns and programming. In addition, since educated veterans are more likely to use healthcare services, they are highlighted as another key group that could help to enhance acceptance and promote mental health support within the veteran community.<sup>330</sup>

Utilizing personal anecdotes and testimonials from those who have benefitted from mental health assistance, especially respected and high-profile figures, can enhance the acceptance and relatability of the experience. Promoting the use of non-stigmatizing language and refraining from perpetuating negative stereotypes is also considered highly beneficial. Including individuals with lived experiences of war-related mental health challenges in the development, planning and execution of campaigns will help to ensure their effectiveness and authenticity.<sup>331</sup>

In addition to normalizing the use of mental health resources within the veteran community, existing policy recommendations also stress the critical need to enhance the capacity of healthcare providers across various fronts. This includes equipping medical professionals with specialized skills to address combat-related injuries, particularly focusing on associated traumas and their potential long-term implications. Specialized training programs tailored to physicians and nurses would enhance their understanding of combat experiences and the prevalent physical and mental health issues among veterans.<sup>332</sup>

Initiatives such as training primary care practitioners in early disease detection through institutions like the Academy of the National Health Service of Ukraine and ensuring the availability of mental health programs at medical universities are considered instrumental.<sup>333</sup>

Existing research also advocates for creating a network of veteran-friendly healthcare facilities. These facilities should provide accessible information for veterans, such as booklets distributed before discharge, contacts for psychological and crisis services, and health awareness resources. Additionally, facilities should be free from architectural or other accessibility barriers. Assigning a manager or coordinator could enhance veteran-friendly practices, focusing on staff training, organizing and streamlining care processes for veterans, coordinating with the MoVA, and keeping service information up to date.<sup>334</sup>

Additionally, there is a recognized need to address deficiencies in mental health protocols and standards, requiring the translation and adaptation of foreign protocols for veteran-related issues, as well as investment in the education, training, and recruitment of mental health professionals.<sup>335</sup> Comprehensive training programs encompassing addiction, trauma, grief, sleeping issues, PTSD, and various therapeutic techniques (such as Cognitive Behavioral

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<sup>330</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Design Focused on Healthcare Utilization Among Veterans," July 2021.

<sup>331</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>332</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>333</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>334</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>335</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Design Focused on Healthcare Utilization Among Veterans," July 2021.



Therapy (CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)) are considered essential.<sup>336</sup>

Furthermore, policy professionals also recognize how community members outside of the medical field can support the mental health needs of veterans. For example, they suggest that chaplains should receive training in recognizing mental health disorders and be included in mental health initiatives.<sup>337</sup> In a similar vein, the creation of support groups, including those for veterans' families and mental health workers, would provide crucial avenues for assistance and collaboration.<sup>338</sup>

Policy audiences have also suggested that family members, with proper training, could offer basic mental health and psychosocial aid to veterans and their families. Despite lacking formal counseling or professional psychology qualifications, lay counselors can receive training to provide basic mental health assistance, offering essential support through empathetic listening and guidance. Moreover, these informal counselors can raise awareness in their communities about mental health, reduce stigma, offer crisis intervention, and facilitate connections with professional mental health services when needed. However, the scope of such informal assistance prior to professional support should be clearly outlined to ensure adherence to the 'do no harm' principle.<sup>339</sup>

Moreover, professionals working in the veterans sphere suggest that trusted service providers from civil society could facilitate the establishment of local support groups for male and female veterans, offering an accessible platform where they can connect with peers and discuss daily life. To improve accessibility, these support groups can be held online, especially benefiting veterans in remote or rural areas or those with disabilities.<sup>340</sup>

In order for healthcare professionals to be able to assess the capacity needed to provide appropriate health services to veterans, comprehensive data collection on the immediate and long-term health needs of Ukrainian veterans is considered crucial. Key strategies include establishing interdepartmental mechanisms for robust data collection, analysis, and forecasting. Thorough analyses of military service and combat circumstances are believed to help develop predictive scenarios of potential health implications for veterans. A deeper understanding of these effects is essential, given the high variability in war-related injuries, whose effects are not always immediately visible – especially regarding their impact on reintegration and veterans' ability to adapt to related challenges.

Data collection should also help establish the most urgent primary health needs of veterans. Meanwhile, long-term strategies should include an expansion of (information) infrastructure and resources to address the full range of veterans' health needs.<sup>341</sup>

Central to this approach is the creation of comprehensive databases detailing veterans' medical histories pre-deployment and pre-discharge, enabling proactive monitoring and tailored healthcare program development. Having access to soldiers' health records two to three months before discharge would empower healthcare professionals to accurately gauge

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<sup>336</sup> IREX, "Survey of Mental Health Providers."

<sup>337</sup> Deahl and Andreassen, "Ukraine: Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Service Veterans."

<sup>338</sup> IREX, "Survey of Mental Health Providers."

<sup>339</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>340</sup> Sereda et al., "Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022."

<sup>341</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families"; Sereda et al., "Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022."



service requirements and design specialized interventions, thereby optimizing veterans' healthcare outcomes.<sup>342</sup> These pre-discharge health assessments could be arranged through the use of mobile psychiatric- and medical units at the front.<sup>343</sup>

In addition to capacity development, existing policy recommendations also suggest several systemic changes and enhancements in healthcare service provision for veterans. These recommendations advocate for the implementation of free mandatory healthcare examinations by general practitioners upon discharge, following guidelines tailored to individuals with military and combat experience. These examinations should encompass both physical and mental health screenings, with provisions for referrals to specialized care and support services as necessary.<sup>344</sup>

Collaboration between government bodies and healthcare providers is essential to establish a monitoring system for veterans' health, tracking recovery progress and addressing the consequences of physical and mental traumas. This system could be integrated into a veteran electronic registry (e-registry), ensuring comprehensive and accessible health data. To complement this, the Ukrainian government should adopt telemedicine and a centralized electronic health record (EHR) system, modeled after successful U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs practices, to improve healthcare delivery and efficiency.

Telemedicine would enable veterans, particularly those in rural or underserved areas, to consult specialists remotely, reducing travel burdens and addressing geographic barriers to care. Meanwhile, a centralized EHR system would streamline healthcare administration, reduce bureaucracy, and enhance collaboration between providers. Such innovations, including regionally deployed EHR systems, would ensure better care coordination and quality assurance through certified protocols for combat-related injuries and mental health treatments. Together, these measures would modernize veterans' healthcare, improving both access and outcomes.<sup>345</sup>

Moreover, initiatives such as mobile assistance services teams are proposed to provide crisis support and promote social adaptation, especially in remote areas. Lastly, existing policy recommendations advocate for auditing and expanding the Medical Guarantees Program (MGP) to align with the evolving needs of veterans in Ukraine. Payment mechanisms to finance medical services beyond the program's coverage, such as dental care and cancer treatment, are also proposed.<sup>346</sup>

To support veterans with physical injuries and disabilities, there is a need for a comprehensive system for long-term care and rehabilitation, including individualized programs for veterans with complex injuries, continuous rehabilitation care, and infrastructure for those with irreversible functionality loss. Existing policy recommendations also stress that accessible and barrier-free public space is a fundamental requirement for physical and physiological rehabilitation and active reintegration of veterans. Urban planning should ensure that public

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<sup>342</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Design Focused on Healthcare Utilization Among Veterans," July 2021.

<sup>343</sup> Van Metre and Boerstler, "The Trip from Donbas."

<sup>344</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>345</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Design Focused on Healthcare Utilization Among Veterans," July 2021; Hersak, Odarchenko, and Kopanytsia, "Building Bridges Veteran Policy in the U.S. and Ukraine."

<sup>346</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."





facilities and public transport vehicles are accessible for people with disabilities, as well as consider the needs of veterans who suffered trauma related to noise and light pollution.<sup>347</sup>

### 3.6.4 Capabilities Strengthening

#### 3.6.4.1 Collaborative Capacity

Effective policy development for veterans and their families requires the collaboration of government, public sector, beneficiaries, and community stakeholders, with a specific institution leading, coordinating, and controlling its implementation.<sup>348</sup> Existing policy recommendations advocate for a new overarching state policy that recognizes the unique needs and contributions of veterans and their families, ensuring their dignified access to services and support. This policy should be comprehensive, well-coordinated, and adequately funded to effectively support the reintegration and well-being of veterans and their families. Moreover, civil society organizations emphasize the need for feedback and input opportunities on policies and programs affecting veterans, as well as the importance of access to relevant information and data regarding veterans and their needs.<sup>349</sup>

The MoVA is advised to strengthen its coordination in developing and implementing veteran support policies, invest in staff training and human resources, bolster collaboration with advisory bodies and CSOs, and establish networks for research on veteran needs. Additionally, it should seek international support to enhance its analytical, communicative, and partnership skills, with an emphasis on effectively publicizing and coordinating policies for veteran families.<sup>350</sup> For the Ministry of Veterans Affairs to be able to take on these tasks, Ukrainian veterans' policy should be centralized within this Ministry, with the MoVA being the central executive body responsible for implementing state policy aimed at protecting the rights of Ukrainian veterans.

Decentralization, which involves gradually differentiating social support functions and service provision between state agencies and civil society organizations, has been acknowledged as a crucial strategy in meeting the needs of the veteran population, especially in rural areas. It is recommended that the MoVA develops strategies, establishes quality standards, and allocates funds, while local government bodies, in collaboration with CSOs, provide the services. Being an integral part of this administrative vision, civil society organizations will be indispensable in ensuring the availability of services going forward, especially considering the state's budget constraints.<sup>351</sup>

Additionally, the role of the MoVA in the Cabinet of Ukrainian Ministers should be increased, and policy audiences recommend granting the status of Deputy Prime Minister to the Minister for Veterans Affairs. To improve coordination and communication, existing recommendations also highlight the benefits of creating deputy positions for veterans issues in other key ministries and executive bodies. With these institutional changes in place, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs should be able to develop overarching policies for veterans and their families, monitor adherence to said policies, provide guidance and coordination to government agencies on veteran topics, advocate for the prioritization of veterans policies across

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<sup>347</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>348</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>349</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>350</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023"; Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."

<sup>351</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Benefits Utilization and Experiences," July 2021.



government sectors, collaborate with diverse stakeholders to align efforts, and conduct research and communication efforts to identify and address crisis situations affecting veterans and their families.<sup>352</sup>

In light of the current situation in Ukraine, it is imperative to consider the significant impact of the ongoing conflict on systems and structures, emphasizing the need for careful prioritization in service delivery and policy development to avoid overwhelming institutional capacity.<sup>353</sup> Collaboration among institutions and organizations working on veteran reintegration is considered crucial, with a particular emphasis on the unification of approaches, policies, and strategies across the various Ministries and Departments in charge of providing services to veterans and military personnel.<sup>354</sup>

Additionally, the establishment of an interdepartmental working group can address mismatches between benefits provision and veterans' actual needs, enabling a shift towards a people-centered approach.<sup>355</sup> Moreover, regular updates of existing mappings and collaborations of various organizations supporting veterans, including NGOs, businesses, faith-based organizations, opinion leaders, military chaplains, peer-to-peer networks, and cultural associations, are essential for effective support and reintegration efforts.<sup>356</sup>

#### 3.6.4.2 Absorptive Capacity

Reintegration plans will need to cater to several key scenarios, such as providing support for personnel who are unfit to continue or released from active service during the war period, facilitating the rapid but controlled release of a significant number of military forces at the end of hostilities while ensuring continued security provision, as well as establishing a long-term system to support ongoing military-civilian transition with the regular planned release of those who have completed service. Preparation is necessary to receive the large wave of veterans in any end-of-war scenario, as well as the subsequent waves of disengaging service members over regular intervals.<sup>357</sup>

In order to facilitate the reintegration of veterans into civilian life, existing policy recommendations emphasize the need to continue to develop a comprehensive electronic system for combatant registration.<sup>358</sup> A digital “passport” of each soldier’s service record – including combat service, payment history, and, where applicable, injury records – could be integrated into platforms like Diia, the state e-services application. This would automatically provide access to benefits, replacing the paper-heavy processes that veterans commonly cite as sources of frustration, delays, and wasted resources.<sup>359</sup>

The development of this system should be led by a working group that includes representatives of service members and veterans networks, legal and psycho-social providers, gender advisers, local and national NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders

<sup>352</sup> Brus and Pashkina, “Veterans Policy in Ukraine.”

<sup>353</sup> UNDP, “Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context.”

<sup>354</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

<sup>355</sup> IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans’ Benefits Utilization and Experiences,” July 2021.

<sup>356</sup> International Alert, “What’s next for Veterans in Ukraine? Promoting Inclusion to Improve the Reintegration Architecture for Former Combatants.,” Policy Brief, March 2019.

<sup>357</sup> UNDP, “Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context.”

<sup>358</sup> UNDP.

<sup>359</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, “The Hard Return: Mitigating Organized Crime Risks Among Veterans in Ukraine.”



selected according to relevant, inclusive, and transparent criteria. Ensuring transparency during the data-collection and registration system should help ensure trust and buy-in. Additionally, the system must account for the unique challenges posed by security concerns, such as delays in immediate availability or backlogs of data entry. Despite these hurdles, prioritizing the implementation and rollout of the registry is essential due to its significant potential to improve service delivery and planning.<sup>360</sup>

Policy officials highlight that the registration system and digital “passport” must be inclusive, ensuring it accurately captures the situations of both male and female veterans, including volunteers who were not officially documented in the AFU prior to their integration. The system should also accommodate veterans with physical disabilities or mental health conditions, ensuring accessibility and appropriately granting them the statuses and benefits they are entitled to.<sup>361</sup>

The unified electronic registry should not only match veterans’ specific circumstances to relevant benefits but also proactively highlight underutilized forms of assistance. For example, push notifications could be sent via Diia to inform veterans about educational and employment along with other tailored benefits, based on the personalized information stored in their digital “passport”. Additionally, by digitizing service records and integrating them with military medical commissions, the system could streamline fitness assessments and expedite post-service benefit claims. The Ministry of Defense’s planned ‘Army+’ app<sup>362</sup>, set to launch in 2024, is a step in the right direction by digitizing a soldier’s daily administrative tasks and providing access to self-development resources. However, a more comprehensive digital service, specifically focused on post-discharge trajectories, is needed to encompass a soldier’s entire lifecycle and necessities, from active service to post-discharge reintegration.<sup>363</sup>

Another key capacity-enhancing recommendation is to leverage digital platforms such as Telegram, Facebook, and YouTube more intensively as primary communication channels for veterans, who are increasingly reliant on online media and show less trust in traditional television news. Channels managed by fellow military personnel and veterans can further boost engagement and reinforce the credibility of the source. These platforms can be used to raise awareness of available services and benefits, including digital resources that support veterans in their transition to civilian life.<sup>364</sup>

Similarly, civil society organizations working in the veterans’ sphere recommend improving the efficiency of veteran benefits delivery and reducing reliance on personal connections or corruption to access services. This could be achieved by establishing official, specialized support services in partnership with relevant government institutions. As with benefits

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<sup>360</sup> UNDP, “Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context.”

<sup>361</sup> International Alert, “What’s next for Veterans in Ukraine? Promoting Inclusion to Improve the Reintegration Architecture for Former Combatants.”

<sup>362</sup> Army+ aims to modernize its armed forces by allowing soldiers to file reports, request vacations, and seek medical or financial assistance through a smartphone interface. While praised for its potential to streamline processes and improve service delivery, adoption has been slow due to technical issues, a lack of awareness, and commanders’ reluctance to fully engage with the platform. The app represents a step toward creating a unified digital military system, similar to NATO standards, but its success depends on overcoming the hurdles of AFU bureaucracy and gaining trust among troops. (Yermak, 2024)

<sup>363</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, “The Hard Return: Mitigating Organized Crime Risks Among Veterans in Ukraine”; IREX, “Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans’ Benefits Utilization and Experiences,” July 2021; International Alert, “What’s next for Veterans in Ukraine? Promoting Inclusion to Improve the Reintegration Architecture for Former Combatants,” March 2019.

<sup>364</sup> Sereda et al., “Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022.”



information, consolidating these services into dedicated centers would allow veterans to access essential support – such as assistance with benefit applications and employment services – in a single, accessible location.<sup>365</sup>

### 3.6.4.3 Data Collection and Sharing

In the immediate term, it is crucial to obtain reasonably accurate and updated estimates of the numbers of personnel requiring reintegration support, which is a complex and sensitive task. Essential data requirements include data disaggregated by age, gender, region, military experience, exposure to trauma, and health and disability status. This information is considered vital for formulating both emergency and long-term care plans. If standard reporting systems are currently inactive, emergency assessments should be considered as an option to gather this essential data.<sup>366</sup>

This lack of data compounds the issue of the unmet needs of the population groups, especially in terms of the length of time that support is required. Reintegration is a long-term process and requires matching and sustained commitments from the public sector and donor communities. With this in mind, more research and inclusive approaches should occur that take into account those including those affected by imprisonment, missing persons, and fatalities in military service. Furthermore, the impact of war extends beyond the veterans themselves, affecting their families through various forms of victimization and trauma.<sup>367</sup>

Such experiences, varying widely among different individuals and families, underscore the necessity for tailored state policies that acknowledge and address these long-term, often hidden casualties of war. This approach recognizes the lingering effects of trauma and victimization not only on veterans but also profoundly on their families, necessitating a broad, inclusive, and detailed policy response.<sup>368</sup> In support of this, more initiatives are needed to develop and support technological infrastructures to facilitate tracking of individual statuses, needs, and coordinated delivery of social services.<sup>369</sup>

The Ukrainian context requires comprehensive and robust data collection strategies, ensuring the proper functioning of the Unified State Register of War Veterans (USRWV), and integrating cross-cutting identification of veterans in all state registers, especially in social protection and healthcare.<sup>370</sup> Furthermore, there is also a need for robust qualitative data collection initiatives, as it provides deeper insights into the unique experiences and needs of veterans, which are essential for shaping effective policy and program development. Qualitative data, capturing the nuanced aspects of veterans' lives, complements quantitative measures, leading to more tailored and impactful interventions.<sup>371</sup>

Policy audiences also emphasize how high-quality, timely data is essential for quantifying risks and providing an evidence-based understanding of veteran trajectories. In addition to guiding policy, data can play a vital role in dispelling stigmatization. Clear and accurate statistics can counter negative stereotypes by illustrating the true scale of veteran

<sup>365</sup> Kirillova et al., “The Needs of Veterans 2023.”

<sup>366</sup> UNDP, “Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context.”

<sup>367</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

<sup>368</sup> Veteran Hub.

<sup>369</sup> Veteran Hub; UNDP, “Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context.”

<sup>370</sup> Veteran Hub, “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families.”

<sup>371</sup> Singh et al., “Experiences of Mental Health and Functioning among Conflict-Affected Populations.”



vulnerabilities and successes. For example, understanding the actual rates of addiction, crime, or unemployment can help shift public perception and highlight areas of resilience within the veteran community. Finally, building data infrastructure will enhance the state's ability to anticipate and respond to emerging trends, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and that support systems remain adaptive.<sup>372</sup>

In this endeavor, academic partnerships play a pivotal role, leveraging expertise in research methodologies and data analysis to enrich the understanding of veterans' circumstances, thereby enhancing the precision and efficacy of support strategies at all levels. Ensuring data security and expanding knowledge about veterans' experiences and needs is vital for developing precise government, international, and grass-roots support strategies.<sup>373</sup>

#### 3.6.4.4 CSO Sector

Civil society organizations are more trusted by veterans than any political entity or other institution involved in veteran support policy. Consequently, they hold substantial potential for advancing veterans' policy, which, as noted in existing policy literature, can be elevated through targeted refinements in their approaches and capacities, along with adjustments in the institutional and funding landscape that supports their operations.<sup>374</sup>

CSO stakeholders have reported desires to maintain permanent staff, enhance cooperation with authorities, and improve employee qualifications. Recent reporting has found that Institutional support, alongside training in project management and professional development, should be prioritized for CSOs. There is a need for the specialization and professionalization of services like legal, psychological, and social support, with a strong emphasis on quality control and standardization, ideally with involvement from state authorities. The donor community and the state should increase their support to enhance civic engagement among returning veterans and to develop family-focused programs at the state level. Additionally, targeted institutional and organizational support is crucial to enable veteran organizations to effectively integrate into the service provision sector.<sup>375</sup>

Experts anticipate a rise in the resurgence or establishment of new veteran-led organizations following waves of discharge in Ukraine, which will require the closure of further CSO funding gaps and specialized support in legal establishment and growth. This suggests that at this juncture, both the government and ideally donor organizations will have improved insight into the needs of the community as well as the avenues for supporting their civic engagement. For instance, representatives from international organizations suggest that future support should be extended to a variety of organizations, particularly those at the local level, which will be formed and operate in the interests of veterans within their respective communities.<sup>376</sup>

Moreover, CSOs should focus on diversifying their partnerships and actively participate in mentoring programs to aid newly formed groups. They need to streamline their grant application and support processes to effectively assist these emerging entities. With the ongoing transition to privatized veteran services, it is crucial for CSOs to bolster their systemic institutional support capabilities. This includes enhancing coordination with state authorities

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<sup>372</sup> Sereda et al., "Returning Home: Understanding the Perspectives of Veterans in Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022."

<sup>373</sup> Havrylyshyn, Eckardt, and Yakushko, "Management Research on the War in Ukraine."

<sup>374</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>375</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."

<sup>376</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk.



and international organizations and aligning donor activities to prevent overlap and maximize impact.<sup>377</sup>

CSOs must also secure long-term institutional support, emphasizing operational stability, effective governance, and strategic planning. The donor community should facilitate coordinated support, focusing on specific networks, thematic areas, and veteran groups while keeping abreast of sector changes and addressing new requirements. A revision in policies concerning international support for active servicemen transitioning to veteran status is necessary. Finally, CSOs should improve communication with potential applicants, invest in training for their staff, and implement projects that focus on psychological health and preventing professional burnout.<sup>378</sup>

Considering the large number and wide variety of organizations active in the veteran reintegration sphere, civil society organizations are encouraged to work together and provide clear, relevant, and easily accessible information in one centralized place to improve outreach and support for veterans. Streamlining their main communication efforts via a shared platform will make their services more accessible to veterans navigating the complex and diverse support landscape. The creation of a comprehensive guidebook for veterans could be a possible starting point for informing veterans about available resources and benefits and increasing awareness.<sup>379</sup>

Additionally, existing recommendations also emphasize the effectiveness of word-of-mouth recommendations from veterans' personal connections in reaching veterans, building trust, and recommending services. Organizations operating in the veteran reintegration field are encouraged to employ various outreach methods, including word of mouth, social media, and community engagement. Their communications strategy should focus on helping veterans rather than insinuating that they have a problem, aiming to encourage them to seek assistance without feeling stigmatized. Furthermore, collaboration between organizations and local veteran support groups is deemed crucial for effective support and outreach. Effective communication channels for reaching veterans include messengers and social media, with a focus on topics such as rehabilitation and employment.<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk.

<sup>378</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk.

<sup>379</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>380</sup> Kinsella and Aras.



# 4. Findings



The following findings are derived from fieldwork carried out in Ukraine by CI researchers in the summer of 2023 and from discussions that took place at CI's first "Out of War" conference in October of that year. The theme of this conference was "Global Insights to Support Strategies for the Reintegration of Ukraine's Frontline Returnees." (for more information on the fieldwork and conference methodology, [see Appendices A-C](#)).

#### 4.1 Identity-Based and Sociocultural Challenges

Ukraine's veterans lead multifaceted lives. Interviews with veterans and institutional and organizational stakeholders clearly demonstrate the diverse identities that veterans in Ukraine adopt; they report that veterans identify as military volunteers, service members, religious leaders ("war priests"), civilian supporters for the armed forces, public sector officials, and bureaucrats. Importantly, these identities coexist with a range of other civilian and non-service-related understandings of self and intersubjective constructions of identity in everyday life (e.g., parent, breadwinner, professional). The complex adoption of multiple identities – often simultaneously – raises important questions about veterans' self-image, expectations, political alignments, and the varying ways in which their experiences of war and reintegration influence their life trajectories.

The wide variety of backgrounds, experiences, and identities can lead to tensions among service members. Responses to mandatory mobilizations, for example, have highlighted the social and class differences that exist in the armed forces and what those differences mean for their life trajectories and those of their families. Many veterans are hesitant to return to the front lines, emphasizing feelings of exhaustion, mental and physical strain, and heightened stress. Yet well-connected, affluent individuals can evade mandatory service by leaving the country, often with their families, while those who cannot are compelled to serve. Not all who can leave do so; some respondents reported that they chose to stay and fight while using their resources to evacuate their families. However, that well-connected and affluent veterans can keep their families safe, while less-resourced veterans cannot, reinforces the socioeconomic divisions within the armed forces.

Another key source of tension is the range of motivations for joining the armed forces. Respondents suggest that while some service members are driven by their allegiance to the Ukrainian cause, others are motivated by the potential for personal achievement or advancement. These individuals participate in the armed forces to enhance their resumes, gain combat experience, compensate for professional setbacks in their past military careers, or gain a sense of identity or purpose they have not been able to find elsewhere. Such personal goals, for some, are not perceived as legitimate reasons to join and can fuel doubts about the loyalties and trustworthiness of military personnel. As one respondent, a member of the Special Forces Unit of the Foreign Legion, claimed: "Many are here for the wrong reasons."

Mistrust among veterans is also fueled by stereotypes related to socio-cultural differences and identities. A frequently mentioned regional stereotype is that Ukrainians in the Eastern regions of the country, closer to Russia, are insufficiently loyal and so more likely to leave the country than join the fight. While one respondent asserted that this perception was unfounded and stressed the contributions of both Eastern and Western regions to the Ukrainian cause, another respondent claimed that while evacuating a village they had encountered disloyal Eastern Ukrainians working for the Russians – an experience that reinforced the negative regional stereotype. These data points bring attention to how personal experiences and ideas





associated with different regions can impact group cohesion and perceptions of commitment to the conflict, adding complexity to the experiences of fighters, both foreign and domestic.

Many respondents also expressed their concerns that service members are under-trained and that some misrepresent their past military and professional experiences. Under-trained medical personnel responsible for addressing complex injuries on the front lines especially worried respondents. Some also noted the relative ease of joining the Foreign Legion due to the pressing need for military personnel. One respondent stated that the Foreign Legion requires no proof of previous military service; another stated: “The Foreign Legion has grown desperate in recruiting enough people to meet their personnel needs, and so lack of previous military experiences is now very common.” This tendency to overlook past military experience in recruiting and onboarding has led veteran respondents to suspect that a relatively large number of their peers have civilian backgrounds and may be misrepresenting their minimal military training.

While differences in background and experience may fuel tensions among veterans, those differences also can be beneficial.

During the “Out of War” conference, participants framed the diverse profiles of service members, veterans, and civilian contributors to Ukraine’s defense efforts as an opportunity to foster a more inclusive and cohesive society. Amidst the ongoing conflict, the notable improvement in attitudes towards veterans has been paralleled by a similar positive shift towards women, the LGBTQIA+ community, and foreigners. This transformation reflects evolving perceptions and recognition of the diverse contributions and challenges faced by these groups across the country’s regional and socioeconomic divides – a change in part facilitated by the fact that women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and foreigners have fought for Ukraine. Some Ukrainian attendees of the conference argued that, as veterans play a pivotal role in shaping the future of Ukraine, it is imperative that such positive changes are harnessed to foster inclusivity and support for all individuals, irrespective of their background or identity.

## 4.2 Generational Differences

The interviews reveal distinct differences in attitudes, values, and needs of older and younger veterans. The older generation of veterans tended to voluntarily enter the armed forces after establishing careers, marrying, and having children; when they return home, they desire to return to the stability and comfort of their pre-war lives and prioritize the places, people, and routines that are familiar – what one respondent called their “ten-foot world”. This sentiment is poignantly expressed by an older veteran from the Anti-Terrorist Operation Union of Veterans in Kalush, who remarked, “We don’t need to speak English; we need to speak to our families.”

The younger generation makes up the majority of veterans in Ukraine, and unlike their older counterparts, most were conscripted before pursuing higher education, establishing non-military careers, and starting families. These veterans must face the daunting task of building their post-war lives from scratch, and respondents and conference participants emphasized the need for reintegration efforts to address this younger cohort’s distinct needs.

Efforts to support veterans must consider the impact of conscription on younger veterans. Respondents reported that conscription may exacerbate feelings of diminished autonomy and betrayal among younger soldiers. One conference participant pointed out that these feelings, in turn, may make younger veterans especially vulnerable to frustration, mistrust in government and associated institutions, and substance abuse, particularly if they encounter



difficulties establishing themselves educationally and economically. Respondents and conference participants identified establishing a business as both a common desire and a potential setback for young veterans. According to one conference participant, only a small number of veterans achieve success in starting their own businesses, so it is important for reintegration efforts to include business training and to offer pathways into existing organizations rather than focusing exclusively on entrepreneurship.

While conference participants stressed the importance of addressing the needs of younger veterans, they also advocated for the inclusivity of veteran programs across all generations. Veterans, they argue, share a bond that transcends distinctions in age, experience, and background. One participant highlighted the success of a business training program that integrated Donbas veterans with veterans who served in the Soviet-Afghan War. Conference participants suggested a similar program: older veterans of the Russian-Ukrainian War who had established their own businesses could facilitate knowledge exchange and share best practices with younger veterans. Such an intergenerational support system may not directly provide the financial assistance they offer but would offer valuable guidance and build a more cohesive veteran community across generational divides.

### 4.3 Women's Role in the War

The data highlights a multifaceted landscape for women – within and outside the armed forces – in the war, involving stereotypes, evolving identities, and impactful roles in supporting mental health.

Women successfully hold critical roles in Ukrainian military operations. According to the Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement (UWVM), one woman served in an assault group for two years, became pregnant and gave birth, returned to the military after her pregnancy, and is now advancing to join the Special Operations Force. This woman and others like her exhibit the strength and skills of women in the military.

Nevertheless, the UWVM says, women routinely face significant challenges in carrying out their duties and advancing their military careers. Some challenges are practical; women often have difficulty obtaining proper uniforms and body armor. They also struggle to advance their careers and to have their work officially recognized by the military. Stakeholders suggest that most women are limited to so-called “soft positions,” and even those women who do engage in combat do not always do so officially; instead, they are registered as holding non-combat roles such as “cook.”

Interviewed veterans also describe the popular and harmful stereotypes applied to female fighters: women join the military to find husbands; women prefer desk roles and paperwork; women are “companion pieces” for male soldiers. These stereotypes perpetuate a false and damaging view of women's important contributions to the military, and respondents from the UWVM stress the need for a system that recognizes and promotes the skills of female soldiers.

Respondents and conference participants also expressed concerns about the protection of women's human rights within the military. Conference participants pointed to the lack of women's health practitioners, as well as a shortage of psychologists with specialized training and experience in handling issues commonly faced by female veterans, such as gender-based stereotypes and sexual assault.



Furthermore, the experiences of women in captivity, especially as prisoners of war, highlight the necessity for improved collaboration and communication between organizations handling prisoners of war and those supporting veterans. Upon returning, female prisoners of war often encounter inadequate preparation and support from both their families and medical professionals. This lack of preparation can worsen their distress, particularly when they undergo interrogation after their release.

Responses from the UWVM and UVF also show that women outside of traditional military roles provide crucial support to soldiers and veterans. While their loved ones are on the frontline, they manage businesses, handle childcare duties, engage in project management and advocacy, and assume community leadership roles. Many female family members of fighters have also supported war and reintegration efforts by taking on pivotal roles in organizational, institutional, and grassroots leadership. One organization that supports both families of fallen soldiers and reintegration efforts described how the mother of a fallen soldier contributes by assisting in the creation of camouflage nets.

Additionally, women provide significant care labor through social and emotional support to their family members returning from war. Respondents married to veterans shared that they had encouraged and convinced their military partners to overcome skepticism and reservations to seek formal mental health support. One woman, for example, described that her husband had returned home with PTSD when she was five months pregnant, and she convinced him to seek medical help for his distress. The challenges faced by wives managing their spouse's mental health concerns during and after service underscore the crucial need to address mental health needs within the broader veteran community.

Respondents also observed generational differences in the needs and experiences of veterans' wives. Older women mainly expressed concerns about their spouses being away, dealing with exhaustion, and facing medical issues. In contrast, some younger women struggled with emotional and psychological challenges associated with the insecurity of their newer relationships. These differing experiences underscore the evolving dynamics within the broader veteran community and the necessity for tailored support systems for veterans and their families.

Organizations advocate for gender-sensitive policies and programs that acknowledge and address the unique needs and challenges women and female veterans face. In particular, the UWVM emphasizes the importance of advocating for the United Nations' Gender, Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, which takes a broader perspective on the role of women in peacebuilding and security beyond their direct involvement in the military. From expanding military roles to post-service opportunities, education, and psychosocial support for veterans and their families, the UWVM and other organizations call for comprehensive and inclusive approaches to veteran reintegration that support women both in and outside of the military.

#### 4.4 Mental Health and Psychological Care

The Interviews conducted for this study highlighted the various psychosocial challenges faced by veterans, such as PTSD and moral injury, which are exacerbated by extended service periods with breaks as infrequent as 6-10 months apart. This leads to consecutive high-stress situations without sufficient time for the mental processing of initial war exposure. "War is scary; not everyone (can) join," one soldier from the Foreign Legion shared, adding: "Sometimes I will have my friend's blood under my fingernails for days." Additionally, on their



return to civilian life, veterans may face a complex array of problems, including hyper-vigilance, paranoia, loneliness, and unemployment.

Mental health problems associated with the war are not limited to veterans. Notably, as one conference participant remarked, the experience of the full-scale invasion has also dramatically altered the psychological well-being of civilians who have suffered occupation and shelling. The increased prevalence of trauma – and, in extreme cases, suicides – among civilians can exacerbate the mental health struggles of veterans close to them. Therefore, respondents and conference participants emphasized the need for an integrated therapy approach involving veterans, their families, communities, and civil institutions; this approach must recognize and address the interactions between widespread war-time mental health impacts. Such an approach, stakeholders say, must be sensitive to different veteran profiles (e.g. foreign legion members, conscripts, volunteers, former POWs) and local contexts.

Conference participants also underscored the need for mental health services to address the prevalence of moral injury among veterans. While the Russian-Ukrainian war has been characterized by a stark delineation between “good” and “bad” that resonates widely on the global stage, and while soldiers feel strongly that they are defending their homeland against a clear enemy, killing others can nevertheless result in emotional turmoil and potentially lead to moral injury.

Veterans may also experience moral injury not associated with killing: they may have felt impotence or guilt in the face of fellow soldiers’ injuries and deaths and larger military setbacks. Conference participants reflected on the fact that the mental toll experienced by veterans confronted with ethical dilemmas and traumatic and morally injurious events can leave them “physically intact but morally destroyed.” This, they argued, requires dedicated and specialized support.

Many respondents highlighted the need for more psychologists and mental health specialists, especially in hospitals, and for dedicated mental health programs. Many argued that mental health services should be available to veterans; while physical health programs are included in veteran benefits, mental health support is not. One Foreign Legion soldier stated they paid for their own mental health care out of pocket at \$100 an hour.

In the absence of accessible mental health support, veterans and their supporters have sought alternatives. Many veterans turn to religion. Religion and religious institutions have played an important role in the war; in western Ukraine, many individuals were motivated by religious convictions to join the military, viewing the defense of their nation as a righteous endeavor, and churches supported the state in supplying provisions to the military. Conference participants stated that military priests provide significant psychological assistance to veterans both during and after military service. However, military priests themselves endure exhaustion, balancing front-line duties with civilian rehabilitation efforts.

Others have sought to address the shortage of traditional mental health support by introducing alternative treatment options for veterans. One veterans’ organization attempted to introduce psychedelic-assisted therapy and medical cannabis to address PTSD, depression, anxiety, and combat trauma. However, this initiative faced legal challenges and ultimately was thwarted. Nevertheless, several respondents argued that more treatment options for veterans need to be explored, including psychedelics or medicinal cannabis.

Both interview respondents and conference participants noted that a range of actions associated with mental health problems – substance abuse, crime, domestic violence, and suicides – proliferate at an unknown scale among veterans and veteran family members. While numerous Ukrainian organizations endeavor to gather data on these issues, they face



many practical limitations, including limited available data, intentionally imprecise data (to prevent misuse by Russia), rapidly changing statistics, and decentralized data tracking processes. To address these challenges, some respondents have suggested collaborating with organizations with similar problems; the United Kingdom, for example, has successfully gathered veteran incarceration data and devised corresponding reintegration programs, and their experiences could provide valuable insights and strategies for reintegration efforts in Ukraine.

Respondents and conference participants also expressed concern about the risk of radicalization. They stressed the need for holistic reintegration and mental health programming to mitigate this risk in the long term. Notably, interview respondents expressed concern over an influx of military personnel into football hooligan groups and current recruitment by right-wing extremist groups in recent years. This has introduced a new dynamic within military units where rival football factions may conduct outreach on social media, influence group interactions, and potentially radicalize younger members. Within this context, one conference participant underscored the necessity of therapeutic techniques to channel anger and negative emotions towards constructive, outward-facing endeavors rather than internalized grievances.

Whereas many veterans emphasized the limited mental health support that is available to them, organizations also express challenges with veteran readiness for seeking mental health services, particularly among men. Even in cases where mental health resources are available, some veterans may be hesitant to seek mental health support due to social stigma or their own personal reservations. Some respondents also attributed the reluctance to seek or accept mental health support to the conservative leadership in the military and their skepticism towards psychosocial and mental healthcare, as well as their skepticism towards external specialists.

Respondents repeatedly stressed that veterans must be adequately prepared to communicate and accept external support, whether from their community or through formal structures. As Pislya Sluzhby (PS), a Ukrainian civil society organization working with veterans, stated, "You can't help the person who doesn't want help." PS reports that some wounded veterans address their mental health problems on their own by engaging in activities such as sports or by leaving Ukraine to live elsewhere. In contrast, others feel resigned to their distress and unable to seek support. While PS strives to reach out to veterans and their families, establish trust, identify their needs, and provide the appropriate resources, the organization also employs an evaluation mechanism that helps them determine the veteran's willingness to participate actively.

As highlighted during the conference and corroborated by survey data, peer-to-peer strategies prove highly effective in addressing veterans' reluctance to seek mental health support.<sup>381</sup> According to respondents, recommendations and referrals by other veterans and disseminating success stories can serve as important entry points into care and avenues for demystifying psychological support. Adjusting communicative strategies to destigmatize and build trust in mental health care will be a vital effort to increase its utilization.

#### 4.5 Physical Injuries and Medical Needs

The interviews also highlighted the complex challenges in providing medical care to wounded soldiers, not least of which are widespread distrust in the Ukrainian healthcare system,

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<sup>381</sup> Deahl and Andreassen, "Ukraine: Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Service Veterans."



particularly in military hospitals, and bureaucratic obstacles to securing care and disability benefits. Respondents lack confidence in the Ukrainian healthcare system to address the injuries soldiers receive. Some criticized the quality of care provided at military hospitals, suggesting that they favor amputations over complex procedures and have inferior equipment and maintenance compared to civilian hospitals. Respondents also expressed concern about the shortage of civilian doctors in Ukraine; throughout the war, many have either mobilized or fled to other countries in Europe. In this context, soldiers are finding themselves with injuries that cannot be treated domestically and so must travel abroad for care.

On the front lines, in particular, respondents and conference participants say medical care is not only inadequate but risky. The UWVM states that there are insufficient medical kits for combat medics and insufficient training for paramedics. Additionally, the drugs used for pain management on the front lines pose serious addiction risks with potentially fatal consequences. Respondents called for a reevaluation of permissible medications for pain management by the Ministry of Defense.

Many veterans returning from the war are expected to have disabilities and/or significant medical needs, and they must go through a commission to receive disability status and access disability benefits. However, this process, a remnant of the Soviet era, is reported as mired in corruption, bureaucratic clumsiness, and inefficiency, making it difficult to secure one's disability status and benefits in a timely manner. One respondent commented that while state-sanctioned medical commissions are necessary for evaluating veterans' fitness for remobilization or rehabilitation, the institutional process can be dehumanizing. She stressed that medical commissions must be more user-friendly and human-centered for veterans to receive the care they so urgently need.

Non-Ukrainian soldiers face additional hurdles in accessing (medical) care since they are not eligible to receive compensation for their war-related injuries and are forced to bear the expense on their own. This often causes soldiers to leave the Foreign Legion as soon as they get injured to seek help elsewhere and to avoid having to navigate the complicated landscape of accessing healthcare in Ukraine.

Multiple interview respondents noted that the veteran population is projected to surge from the current 800,000 to an estimated 2 million, raising significant concerns about a potential crisis in support services. In an already overwhelmed system ill-prepared to handle the influx of veterans, the burden of reintegrating disabled veterans and veterans with severe medical needs will inevitably fall on communities. Many communities, especially those in rural areas, lack the inclusive infrastructure for people with disabilities, and this may hinder participation in civil life for a large share of Ukraine's veterans. Respondents emphasized the urgency of increasing the economic, psychosocial, and community support available to veterans with medical needs and/or disabilities. They stressed that support and incentives for these adjustments need to target state sector services and facilities and every other part of the public sphere.

#### 4.6 Kinship and Family Needs

Veterans' relationships with their families are considered vital aspects of social reintegration. Yet, re-establishing familial bonds poses a complex challenge for soldiers, families, and those who support them. Interview respondents and conference participants stressed that deployment stresses families. There is often little opportunity for contact between active fighters and their family members at home. Without contact with loved ones, active fighters



lack the emotional support provided by their families and may become detached from their family roles and responsibilities. At home, families suffer from uncertainty and anxiety about the whereabouts and well-being of their fighting family members, compounding other stressors caused by their absence.

However, when veteran families are finally reunited, other problems arise. Respondents and conference participants argued that fighters' prolonged exposure to violent conflict can make returning to family life difficult for both veterans and their families. Returning soldiers often undergo significant changes in attitudes, behavior, and mood that their loved ones may not anticipate or accept. Their family members' lack of understanding and preparation regarding what to expect from returning veterans can further stress relationships. Many interview respondents, particularly those from veteran backgrounds, expressed a desire and need for dedicated spaces for veterans and their families to reconnect away from daily responsibilities and allow for rebuilding familial bonds. Several respondents advocated for the establishment of civil society rehabilitation programs.

ATUOV reported running a successful initiative focused on veterans and their families. This organization arranges daily excursions for veterans and their families with a range of activities that allow them to rebuild familial connections, improve their communication, spend quality time together, and realign with their family lives. Representatives of ATUOV shared instances of families on the edge of separation who were able to reunite through these activities. Excursions like this can also help veterans build networks with others outside their family and find business partners, advisors, and friends. In the future, ATUOV hopes to scale up the program to include veterans and their families across Ukraine, as well as families of the fallen.

Addressing the challenges facing veteran families with nuanced support and tailored support services is essential, as unresolved family dynamics are an existential problem for Ukrainian society. In the context of ongoing cycles of remobilization, which remain central to Ukraine's defense for the foreseeable future, stable family relationships are indispensable.

## 4.7 Economic Reintegration

Employment is necessary for the successful economic reintegration of veterans; economic activity serves as a crucial source of recognition and social capital, enabling veterans to establish a permanent and meaningful foothold in civilian life. However, unemployment remains a significant problem for Ukrainian veterans. There are no official unemployment statistics from the Ukrainian government; however, according to a UVF survey, 28% of veterans are unemployed. Their research on general unemployment suggests that job opportunities are extremely limited and that there are approximately 186,000 unemployed veterans and civilians in Ukraine in 2023.<sup>382</sup>

One of the major barriers to veteran employment is the lack of accommodations for people with disabilities. As the number of veterans returning with disabilities increases, there is a pressing need for infrastructure and policies that accommodate their unique challenges in both job markets and societal integration. Interview and conference participants noted that prioritizing stable income and employment opportunities for all veterans is essential for a successful reintegration process, as it addresses their basic needs and reduces the risk of

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<sup>382</sup> Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF) and Sociological Group "Rating," "20th National Poll: The Image of Veterans in Ukrainian Society. January 14-16, 2023."



developing PTSD or other psychological issues stemming from unemployment and financial instability.

There have been some efforts to address unemployment among veterans. For example, the Coalition of Veterans' Spaces has initiated a pilot program to train veterans to become case managers. As a pilot, they are engaging 30 veterans and veterans' families from different regions to "prepare them to work at the local level, such as in the social sphere with veterans and their families, and at centers of administrative services." The primary responsibility of these case managers is to facilitate other veterans' access to benefits, connect them with services for economic, social, and political reintegration, and advocate for veterans' rights. However, despite these efforts, the organization has encountered barriers to communication, particularly within the armed forces, where closed information channels can hinder the efficient dissemination of information about rehabilitation and reintegration.

While peer-to-peer support is considered a helpful model for some veterans' economic reintegration, especially in the career transition or recruitment stages<sup>383</sup>, respondents warned that immediate engagement in such counseling work after returning from war could cause retraumatization. Several respondents cited instances where veterans who assumed case manager roles within NGOs to support fellow veterans' legal needs struggled to carry out their work due to being burdened by their own traumatic experiences. They argued that it is critically important to address trauma as a prerequisite to these pathways of reintegration.

Respondents named skill development for veterans as a key link in veterans' reintegration into the economy and community. Younger veterans comprise a significant portion of the broader veteran population and often have limited education, pre-military employment history, and established social and economic resources. Respondents emphasized that younger veterans need affordable training and education to help them overcome these barriers.

Most interview respondents recognized that veterans already gain valuable and transferable skills during their military service, such as critical thinking, leadership, resilience, and "hard skills" like IT and engineering. However, the challenge lies in translating these skills into practical applications for civilian life to enhance economic participation and, as some conference attendees highlighted, communicating the value of these skills to potential employers. Conference participants suggested providing skill transfer training for civilian jobs during military service to facilitate smoother career transitions for veterans. Although organizations like the UVF offer such training in certain regions, particularly on the rural community level, it is not yet implemented on a systematic or widespread basis.

Moreover, respondents and conference participants did express the need for additional training programs and educational initiatives for veterans to gain skills not attained through military service, such as English language and business training. Veterans can also face obstacles in accessing existing educational resources. For example, to access higher education, veterans must compete with civilians for a limited number of available university admission slots, even though civilians have access to more time, resources, and opportunities. One respondent suggested the creation of programs tailored to veterans outside of traditional education structures, such as special certificates for veterans, technical education, specialized vocational training, and training collaborations with potential employers.

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<sup>383</sup> Free People Employment Center, "Methodology for Implementing the Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program for Veterans."





Education programs specifically for veterans do exist in Ukraine. As one conference participant pointed out, there is a master's degree program and 3-month certificate program courses for veterans offered at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy's School of Public Administration. These courses are designed to cultivate skills applicable in the context of Ukraine's reconstruction and strengthening of infrastructure, defense, and cyber capabilities – a possible synergy that was frequently emphasized with regard to reintegrating veterans while leveraging their precious human capital. In the past, the UVF has supported veteran-led initiatives of demining territory and expanding frontline fortifications.

Myriad examples of veteran-centered education programs exist outside Ukraine. In the United States, for example, four-month veteran certificate programs are available for high-demand practical occupations like carpentry and welding. Similarly, in Colombia, the National Training Service (SENA) offers comparable courses to ex-combatants from non-state armed groups aimed at honing civil engineering skills to aid in constructing their own homes in rural regions.

Many respondents and conference participants suggested that there is a strong need for structured business education programs to enable veterans to start and manage businesses. Some participants, like the Deputy Mayor of Kalush, proposed creating a program that pairs veterans who lack the necessary know-how with business leaders from local communities for mentorship and consultation. Others suggested offering incubation programs for veterans to start their businesses.

However, resource constraints often form an obstacle to the implementation of such programs. Access to grants and economic opportunities often depends on business and language skills, creating a barrier for veterans who may struggle with these aspects. One respondent described this key challenge, "Veterans also need support for implementing their businesses – administrative assistance, accounting, etc. – I know how to produce something, but it's difficult for me to be an accountant and a lawyer and document, for example, and I need people who understand that. To start off by yourself, it's very difficult."

Still, there are several NGOs with existing programs that train veterans in entrepreneurship and management. Organizations, including the UVF and Pislya Sluzhby (PS), are actively involved in preparing programs to teach veterans the basics of entrepreneurship, including how to run a business and understand risks and opportunities. For example, the UVF has collaborated with Ukrainian Catholic University to design a series of courses that allow veterans to learn about various professional topics. Pislya Sluzhby (PS) taps into their network of veterans' groups to identify programs and opportunities best suited to veterans' needs, whether it is university courses or courses designed by NGOs. They have also partnered with universities to offer free or low-cost courses for veterans.

Participants also highlighted the possibility of combining training and employment with further key transitional structures to support veteran needs. For example, many veterans seek a period of rest after completing their service, which they may not always be able to take due to job obligations upon their return. To address this, the UVF coordinates with employers to secure time off for veterans. Not all veterans take advantage of this; some feel compelled to return to work promptly to financially support themselves and their families, even when they need time to address their mental health needs and adjust to civilian life.

Participants suggested that the private and public sectors could facilitate work and reintegration by implementing policies and programs supporting veterans. Already, many companies are keen on developing individualized programs tailored for veterans. Ukrainian companies are grappling with a 10-20% loss in workforce; to address the scarcity of available



talent, some are utilizing HR management strategies to integrate and reintegrate veterans into the workforce effectively. Additionally, UVF representatives highlighted an ongoing initiative of the Energy Company of Ukraine, a state-owned critical infrastructure holder, to provide psychological support and professional development opportunities to their returning veteran employees. Legal measures that safeguard veterans' rights to attend therapy sessions without fear of termination could further aid in veterans' successful transition back into civilian life while maintaining employment stability.

Veterans and the organizations that support them identify agriculture as a key sector for investment, entrepreneurship, and veteran-led businesses. Representatives from UVF underscored agriculture's status as a pivotal sector, stating that: "Ukraine is an agricultural country." They described a competition they organized to support agricultural businesses specifically for veterans, which already has 10 projects funded at \$75,000 each. The success of these projects not only benefits veterans' families but also injects positive economic growth into communities. Moreover, as conference participants pointed out, engaging veterans in agricultural programs offers therapeutic benefits and contributes to restoring war-affected areas by providing meaningful work and allowing veterans to reconnect with their land.

#### 4.8 Community-Based Reintegration

Successful reintegration requires understanding how veterans want to participate in community life and engage with civilians and vice versa. Many veteran interview respondents expressed a desire to be treated "normally" and to return to their lives as they were before the war. Others, however, want to leverage their leadership experiences from the military to engage in community affairs actively. As one conference participant explained, returning veterans "will want to have a word to say in the community life, they will try to grow in the election process, they will try to join the local authorities and institutions. They can change this country. They will be a powerful community when the war ends."

Addressing the needs of both sets of veterans requires minimizing the civil-military gap and facilitating a seamless transition for veterans by fostering their active participation in community development and decision-making. However, many respondents and conference participants warned that communities are unprepared for the anticipated influx of veterans, sometimes referred to as the "veteran tsunami," and this lack of preparation will present a range of challenges to efforts to reintegrate veterans.

Civilians' poor understanding of veteran experiences may lead to mistreatment and misunderstandings. Many veteran respondents recalled problems communicating with civilians after getting out of the military, and they stressed the importance of two-way communication training to mitigate these challenges and foster mutual respect. One Ukrainian conference participant from the UVF cited as an example a Veterans' Affairs campaign for civilians to assist veterans with a range of tasks, including bureaucratic paperwork, to establish a culture of gratitude and reciprocity towards veterans in the public sphere.

The IREX and all-Ukrainian 2024 mental health program "Are you okay?" offers another example of an initiative that enhances communities' preparedness for veteran experiences. The informational campaign educates the public on how to avoid potentially re-traumatizing veterans by refraining from asking uncomfortable questions about their service. Instead, a simple "thank you" is encouraged, acknowledging their sacrifice as they strive to move



forward in their lives.<sup>384</sup> Campaigns like these are crucial since the general 'respect' for veterans rarely translates into 'understanding.' While significant percentages of society express positive feelings towards veterans, many of these same individuals also feel disconnected from veterans' experiences, often unsure of how to act, what to say, or how to be supportive.

While emphasizing the need for communities to be prepared for returning veterans, conference participants also noted that veterans must be prepared for the changes their communities will have undergone in their absence. Veterans, they argue, should be aware of possible transformations in power dynamics, patterns of inclusions and exclusion, and needs and expectations. Just as the returning veterans underwent change during service, so did their communities. As Heraclitus famously said, "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river, and he's not the same man." As much as servicemen and servicewomen are changed by war, so too are their "rivers" – the communities, families, and social networks to which they will return.

Another source of potential disconnect and misunderstanding between civilians and veterans is their different expectations for what reintegration will bring. As Brattia Z Prykarpattia (BZP), a Ukrainian NGO, explained: "Civilians expect that the military will come back, and we will fix corruption, and we'll work together to make our country more like Europe, but the reality is that they are going to have more issues when they come back. So, how do you bridge that gap?" In addition, BZP elaborated that some veterans may resent civilians for leading normal lives in a time of war and may expect to be owed something from civil society upon their return.

To address these divisions and foster community resilience, cohesion, and shared purpose, participants in the "Out of War" conference proposed leveraging resources, ideas, and practices from both civilians and veterans, with a particular emphasis on the valuable contributions of young people. Specifically, participants suggested carrying out initiatives that combine the social and economic needs of veterans and civilians. Drawing on historical precedents like the American G.I. Bill post-World War II, conference participants argued that large-scale initiatives to reform national disability and health policies could make society more inclusive and accessible for all, while engaging both veterans and civilians.<sup>385</sup> Smaller-scale initiatives, like the beautification of townscapes and parks could likewise enrich communal life and foster meaningful connections with both others and one's environment.

Conference participants also emphasized that veterans' military-related skills, such as adaptability and tenacity, can be integrated into long-term leadership structures in communities, citing examples from ex-combatants in Namibia and veterans in the United States, one attendee proposed paid internships for veterans that capitalize on these skills and prepare them for conflict resolution and community engagement activities that also draw attention to the challenges faced by IDPs.

In addition to initiatives that combine the social and economic needs of veterans and civilians, respondents and conference participants proposed that creating spaces specifically dedicated to veterans and their needs could present opportunities for civilians and veterans to work together toward successful community reintegration. Most veteran respondents

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<sup>384</sup> Ukrainian National News (UNN), "Are You Okay? Launched a New Campaign with Veterans: What Is This Project About."

<sup>385</sup> Signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on June 22, 1944, the so-called G.I. Bill, provided American World War II veterans with funds for college education, unemployment insurance, and housing. (National Archives, "Servicemen's Readjustment Act (1944).")



expressed a desire for such spaces, where they could cultivate camaraderie with their peers and provide each other resources both during and after the war. One veteran respondent underlined the importance of being able to be with one's peers, stating: "We all have the same type of emotion; we understand each other." Such familiarity and shared experiences between service members, respondents suggest, eases communication and allows them to rebuild trust and forge connections in spaces where they are more confident they will be understood.

Spaces for peer-to-peer support, mentorship, and collaboration have been instrumental for psychosocial reintegration, but they also can foster broader community reintegration. The IRF highlighted the success of Veteran Hubs in various cities in Ukraine, and IREX and the Victor Pinshuk Foundation are also funding a Veterans' Hub network. Supported by donors and local authorities, this network promotes a decentralized approach to veteran support rooted in communities, fostering connections between veterans and activists on the ground. These Veteran Hubs serve as community centers where veterans, volunteers, and activists collaborate to advocate for veterans' rights, provide social, psychological, legal, and educational support for veterans and their families, and share experiences.

While Veteran Hubs are effective in urban settings, there are challenges in reaching remote communities and villages, and respondents underline the need to establish similar veteran centers at the community level. As an example, one respondent pointed to mobile groups acting as veteran centers in different communities, with the aim of decentralizing support and making it more adaptive to local conditions. This kind of community-based reintegration initiative also offers an opportunity to partially divorce local funding allocations from the national strategy, enabling a more adaptive and dynamic response to veterans' needs. Local budgets offer more agility and freedom in expense management, allowing communities to tailor programs to veterans' needs and contribute to their own development in highly contextualized ways.

Furthermore, one of the interviewed organizations suggested that employing civilians in veterans' organizations can have multifaceted advantages in facilitating communication and understanding, as well as maintaining capacity as veterans go into cycles of deployment. "I think having a civilian as the face of it kind of reduces the possibility of it being politicized, used for political reasons," a representative explained. "Because the face isn't a veteran. It's assisted by veterans." This kind of "demilitarization" of organizations that support veterans could be effective in bridging veteran-civilian gaps.

In addition to creating spaces dedicated to veterans, respondents also proposed that communities incorporate recreational and therapeutic activities into their veteran reintegration processes and especially encouraged the use of art therapy. In Ukraine, an initiative involving local artists providing painting lessons to wounded soldiers has received positive feedback from participants. Such initiatives, respondents argue, can serve both as a form of therapy for veterans and as a means of bridging the civil-military gap. One conference participant drew on examples from Northern Ireland to show how art can facilitate community healing by addressing collective traumas and allowing former combatants to share their experiences creatively. Others suggested that communities open public art classes or provide opportunities for veterans to lead art classes for civilians to enable civilians and veterans to interact, dispel myths, and find common ground.

Others have suggested that increasing veteran visibility in the public sphere could help to bridge the civilian-military gap. A conference participant offered the example of a women veterans' initiative involving the planting of decorative apple trees as a visible tribute to female



veterans who lost their lives in the war. Respondents also suggested expanding an existing initiative: the creation of memorial boards in educational institutions to educate students about the sacrifices made in the defense of Ukraine. These boards feature QR codes linked to videos depicting the lives of current service members and fallen soldiers.

Interview respondents and conference participants also stressed that civil law enforcement and the criminal justice system can play an important role in the successful reintegration of veterans into communities. Specifically, they argued that people within these institutions must become more aware of veterans' physical and psychosocial needs. As one respondent stated: "The police need to understand who the veterans are, how they can react, the problems they can have, and how to communicate and interact with them. But also, to instruct them on what will be the main veteran problems with the law – domestic violence, substance abuse, street fights, etc." To prevent stigma and marginalization, law enforcement – as well as the broader community – must recognize that some veterans' substance abuse issues and problematic behaviors have psycho-emotional root causes and do not reflect their "true selves."

One conference participant offered the Veterans Restorative Justice Project (VRJP) led by the Office of Military Affiliated Communities (OMAC) at the University of Chicago as a blueprint for supporting Ukrainian veterans involved in criminal offenses. By incorporating mental health and employment aid, conditions and supervision from veteran judges, and continuous educational prospects, the program offers comprehensive assistance to veterans involved in the criminal justice system, both while veterans are incarcerated and upon their release.

Respondents and conference participants emphasized the need for veterans who encounter legal problems to have access to legal support and trauma-informed care. The International Renaissance Foundation (IRF), an organization working on amnesty programs for veterans, explained that criminalization poses a significant threat to veterans and that there is a need for veteran advocates to work with courts, prosecutors, and police to create supportive procedures for veterans. Several other organizations working with veterans in the justice system also underlined the need for legal aid funding, psychological support, and training programs.

To address these gaps in existing institutional infrastructure and the demand for legal resources from veterans and veteran organizations, the Ministry of Social Policy is developing a program in collaboration with the Armed Forces that embeds social workers directly within battalions with the purpose of providing legal and social reintegration support. The objective is to reduce the burden of bureaucratic processes on soldiers and to ease their transition to the community.

Any initiative to support the successful reintegration of veterans into community life requires consideration of geographic context. As noted earlier, many veteran reintegration programs are in urban settings. However, according to IREX's data, a substantial percentage (60-70%) of veterans are expected to return to rural villages after their discharge – a trend attributable to factors such as a desire for a calm environment. Respondents and conference participants contend that programs and policies should be developed specifically for veterans in rural settings, ideally ensuring economic opportunities while promoting sustainable agricultural development, inclusivity, and accessibility.



## 4.9 Lack of Trust and Institutional Challenges

The data suggests that mistrust of the government and its partnering agencies at various levels can be hampering the successful implementation of reintegration efforts. While those respondents expressing feelings of mistrust have cited a variety of reasons, many critiqued the government's handling of military affairs and contended that corruption scandals and collaboration with Russian forces have led to the decline of the Ukrainian military. One respondent alleged that the Ukrainian government undermined its army due to pressure from the Russian army; others described actions Ukrainian officials allegedly had committed that compromised the Ukrainian army's capabilities.

The veracity of these assertions is important but less important for the purposes of this project than the mere fact that these perceptions exist, circulate through social media, and inform how Ukrainian veterans understand the threats and risks associated with engagement with state institutions and government officials.

Respondents express skepticism about the government's commitment to veterans' well-being. According to a respondent from the organization Veteranius, 70% of veterans fear that the state will abandon them. Some concerns center around the lack of veteran representation in government; only a small fraction of Ukraine's parliament comprises veterans.

Even the MoVA, an institution specifically dedicated to veteran interests, reputedly lacks power, financial resources, and proper management, and respondents and conference participants voiced frustrations concerning its practices. All the interviewed organizations advocated for systemic reform of the MoVA to overhaul outdated infrastructure and policy frameworks, improve communication, and facilitate work with other agencies, organizations, and institutions that address veteran needs. Both NGOs and the Public Council described significant challenges in communicating with the MoVA, leading to a sense of frustration and futility among those striving to address systemic inefficiencies in veteran support services.

Respondents specifically criticized the MoVA for its data-sharing practices. Data on veterans facilitates the creation and efficiency of support systems; however, the MoVA compartmentalizes and classifies a significant amount of veteran-related data. For example, data on veterans' distribution across Ukraine is classified, impeding the development of targeted support in regions where veterans may need it most. One respondent suggested that the Ministry uses the excuse of wartime limitations, such as a lack of capacity, to avoid sharing complete documentation and budget records. According to the Public Council, reduced oversight during the war has limited its access to needed data; despite its repeated outreach, the Council continues to receive incomplete information from the MoVA. While data sharing across governmental institutions is a challenge worldwide, the context of a wartime scenario increases the stakes for those working to support the transition of reintegrating, rehabilitating, and often gravely wounded fighters in need of services and support.

Mistrust in the government's ability to address veteran needs also stems from respondents' experiences of labyrinthine bureaucracy, challenges with resource management, and pervasive inefficiency. Many stated that the state creates unnecessary administrative obstacles for veterans accessing their grants and benefits. These obstacles include excessive documentation needs, extended periods of uncertainty, and denied applications. Fighters in the Foreign Legion face even greater challenges in accessing government programs and services due to language barriers, their lack of permanent residency or citizenship, and their unfamiliarity with Ukrainian institutional and legal processes.



Veteran families also expressed skepticism about the government and its institutions. Families of fallen soldiers have encountered bureaucratic hurdles both in accessing benefits and advocating for their deceased loved ones. The Public Council shared that the Ukrainian parliament had voted in favor of the creation of a National Military Cemetery in 2021; three years later, this cemetery has yet to be created, and the families of the fallen who wished to bury their loved ones there received a disheartening response from the MoVA, exacerbating their mistrust in government institutions.

Several respondents also voiced concerns about the political exploitation of veterans. Some recounted instances where local authorities had used veterans to promote their own agenda rather than involve those veterans meaningfully in their political work. Their actions not only undermined civilian-military unity but also fostered veteran distrust in political institutions. Respondents criticized political leaders for focusing on short-term goals during their tenure and neglecting long-term planning, which affects veterans, especially concerning budget allocations and policy reform.

Widespread corruption also fuels veteran mistrust in government institutions. Several respondents pointed to the corruption associated with military recruitment. A bribery scandal in Odessa, for example, led to the dismissal of numerous military commissars. Two veteran respondents suggested that the larger proportion of veterans in rural areas can be attributed to the prevalence of corruption in urban areas; in urban areas, they argue, wealthier individuals can bribe officers to avoid being drafted for military service, which has incentivized many veterans to leave cities to live in more rural areas. Additionally, one respondent suggested that corruption plagues military medical facilities and has led to the extortion of veterans for benefits.

Finally, respondents argued that the failure of civil society institutions to dispel stereotypes about Ukrainian veteran organizations fosters mistrust in initiatives supporting veterans, thus hampering their reintegration efforts. Specifically, respondents expressed concerns that the stereotype of Ukrainian veterans' organizations being militarized and radicalized persists both internationally and, to a lesser extent, domestically. This stereotype, they argued, prevents veteran organizations from securing sufficient financial support and impedes the successful implementation of their programs. Despite progress in securing support from international donors and reduced hesitation from government authorities and other domestic actors to work with them, veteran organizations still point out that more could be done by other civil society organizations in increasing domestic and international engagement and countering these stereotypes.

#### **4.10 Stakeholder Collaboration and Participatory Programs**

In both civil society and government, service delivery and advocacy initiatives aim to align their activity with veterans' needs closely; however, they often suffer from insufficient funding, a lack of data, convoluted legal processes, communication challenges, and bureaucratic roadblocks. Despite these challenges, conference participants emphasized that tailored social services are expanding to meet the specific, local, and situational needs of veterans.

This expansion has been facilitated by increased cross-sectoral collaboration and legislative changes that have enabled the MoVA to procure services from the non-governmental sector. This shift promises higher-quality and more responsive services with better regional coverage while also fostering healthier competitiveness among service providers going forward.



Interviews revealed significant efforts to unify veteran NGOs and establish multi-sector referral pathways for former service members. Respondents from the UWVM emphasized the “need to create effective channels of communication and coordination among NGOs working for veterans’ interests.” They recounted an instance where the Minister of Veterans Affairs hastily created a law that distinguished between individuals with veteran status before and after February 21, 2022—a categorization seen as harmful and divisive. In response, the UWVM crafted a letter to the head of parliament and quickly garnered support from other veterans’ organizations, with forty signing within an hour and over one hundred within 24 hours. This collective action prevented the law from taking effect, demonstrating the potential for NGOs to unify and influence political decisions and advocacy within civil society.

In theory, such political actions could be undertaken by the Council of Veterans, an advisory body with veterans from every region that was created to provide guidance to the MoVA. However, following a ministerial turnover and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Council’s influence has diminished. Despite this attenuation of the Council, veteran NGOs continue to actively engage in consultation efforts, both domestically and with international NGOs, with a particular focus on community-level project design and addressing local needs.

Another example of successful stakeholder collaboration is the Zahyst (“Protection”) NGO, a network of twenty veteran organizations in Khmelnytsky that formed at the onset of Russia’s full-scale invasion. This network leverages expertise across various domains, offering a comprehensive approach to veterans’ needs. They work with soldiers, rehabilitate the injured, and support war-affected civilians. With fifteen centers in the Khmelnytsky region, they effectively monitor and address requests from veterans and their families, providing tailored assistance.

Zahyst collaborates with local governments, hospitals, businesses, and other NGOs to establish and sustain their veteran centers. A public official from the Khmelnytsky region emphasized their strategic vision: “We are working to create as many possibilities for veterans as possible... [We envision] a union or alliance of organizations working in a uniform direction.” This approach aims to provide veterans with various possibilities, fostering collaboration across organizations and promoting a unified front supporting veterans’ reintegration.” Their approach focuses on starting with local projects to ensure effectiveness before scaling up, reflecting a cautious, community-driven strategy.

Respondents and conference participants cited numerous other examples of successful stakeholder collaborations. Sports tournaments organized by rehabilitation centers, like the “Invictus Games,” have helped veterans cope with physical and psychological challenges. Other veterans have benefited from a rehabilitation program led by an Israeli organization called “Equal to Equal,” which connects veterans to peers and refers potentially suicidal individuals to specialists. Another collaborative initiative focuses on building a comprehensive rehabilitation system that includes mental health and social support for veterans and their families. The lead organization partners with military centers and governments to provide a range of jobs for veterans. Legal 100, a legal support NGO, collaborates with the government to bring about legal changes that benefit veterans.

Recognizing the veterans’ diversity of experiences, respondents and conference participants favor participatory reintegration approaches that ensure the localized, context-specific design of programs and policies. Their emphasis on “nothing about us without us” underscores the importance of direct and immediate engagement with Ukrainian soldiers and veterans. Moreover, continuous engagement will enable adaptive and responsive adjustments to programs and policies based on real-time insights. Respondents and conference participants





noted that approaches that involve civilians in activities led by veterans could also lead to more profound connections and mutual support.

Participatory approaches also carry cultural and historical significance. One respondent suggested contextualizing veterans' communication challenges within the historical framework of the Soviet era, which cultivated a mindset of "ambitiousness, collectivism, and paternalism" and relying on authorities for problem-solving. The respondent emphasized the need for a shift towards more horizontal communication, prioritizing connecting with neighbors, fellow veterans, and fellow citizens. This perspective aligns with the notion shared by conference participants that NGOs and open societies play a crucial role in nurturing communication and support networks for veterans.

Conference participants stated that Ukraine's civil society provides numerous platforms with which veterans can engage. Notably, consultation and advisory bodies, including those affiliated with the MoVA, enable veterans to participate in drafting legislation. However, attendees raised concerns regarding the inclusivity of these bodies, questioning whether they adequately represent the diverse voices within the veterans' community, including families and active service members, or whether dominant groups outsize them. They also stressed that many organizations tend to have narrow scopes, focusing on either reintegration interventions or continuous political engagement, but rarely both.

Conference participants drew on their experiences in other countries to share models of participatory practices. A participant involved with reintegrating former combatants in Colombia highlighted the country's participatory practices, where local populations are deeply involved in reintegration policy and programming. However, translating advice into transformative action often falls short due to insufficient follow-through – a lesson for civil society in Ukraine. The participant, alongside others with experience from Afghanistan and Sub-Saharan Africa, argued that truly transformative participation includes implementation and evaluation, necessitating an adaptive approach for continuous improvement. Adapting to changing circumstances is crucial for the efficacy of participatory programs and policies.

One participant working in Sierra Leone offered the "ladder of participation" as a tool to assess community engagement and ensure genuine involvement in decision-making processes. On a scale of 1-8, the ladder of participation measures the extent to which communities are actively listened to and how effectively their input is translated into action. Using the ladder, the respondent explained, emphasizes the need for meaningful engagement beyond superficial consultation. The Sierra Leone case shows that increased participation leads to better outcomes and stresses the importance of inclusivity. Conference participants observed that truly participatory processes are not just a formality but empower communities and foster a sense of belonging and respect among veterans.

However, conference participants warned that integrating outside funding may compromise local autonomy and hinder genuine leadership. To mitigate undue influence, they recommended fostering an environment encouraging dissent and implementing comprehensive monitoring for transparency and accountability. Leveraging local journalism and veterans' involvement can also help maintain project integrity. Additionally, participants emphasized the need to distribute decision-making power and funds across entities to enhance their reach and representation. Identifying target areas for reintegration, assessing factors affecting government and donor support, and reducing barriers to program success are essential.


Conference participants argued that mapping out a comprehensive and sustainable strategy for reintegration in Ukraine involves questioning the allocation of funding to ensure that



veterans and their families in different locations and life situations are accommodated. They stressed the need for intermediary institutions, like IOM, to ease communication between donors and beneficiary organizations – specifically, they can present proposals in ways that resonate with donor priorities while highlighting local expertise. To support these efforts, conference participants suggested developing an official inclusion formula and priority checklist for donors.

To facilitate stakeholder collaboration and participatory programs, conference participants further emphasized the importance of a robust coalition-building process and inter-organizational coordination. Stakeholders, they argued, must acknowledge and reconcile differences to pursue their shared goals more effectively. Participants pointed to the need for a moderator institution that can coordinate all stakeholders in the sphere of veterans' affairs and facilitate the scaling up of service provision – a function currently not fulfilled by the MoVA.





# **5. Recommendations and Conclusion**

The following constitute the program and policy recommendations (in no particular order) emerging from the Corioli Institute’s data collection, analysis, and findings, complementing the proposals outlined by the existing literature in Chapter 3.6.

## 5.1 Recommendations

### 1. Integrate diverse veteran identities, personal backgrounds, and perspectives into support structures and public awareness campaigns.

There needs to be a general sensitivity to how not only going through combat impacts veterans’ lives after service but also how this experience interacts with other factors shaping their military and reintegration pathways. These include various characteristics like gender, LGBTQIA+ identity, nationality (foreign fighters), regional origin within Ukraine, socioeconomic status, the nature of their military enlistment (voluntary or conscription), and motivations behind service. Institutions engaging with veterans and the communities receiving them must cultivate consciousness and recognition of different kinds of veteran identities so that all veterans can feel accommodated by their social environment and develop a sense of belonging.

To achieve this goal, current awareness campaigns across various public domains, which shed light on the impact of veterans’ experiences on their lives, alongside media portrayals of veterans, should integrate narratives and stories that highlight the heterogeneity of the veteran community. Incorporating these narratives would involve showcasing the personal stories of often overlooked identities among veterans, thereby broadening the understanding of ingroup diversity within the veteran population. In recent years, for instance, representations of female veterans have been increasingly mainstreamed with the MoD and the MoVA, including images of female soldiers in their public relations and social media activities or the renaming of the 'Day of Male and Female Defenders of Ukraine' on October 1st to encompass both genders in the term 'defender.'<sup>386</sup>

Additionally, the MoVA and other stakeholders could conduct research to systematize knowledge on veteran backgrounds and produce materials informing about a range of identity-related service and reintegration experiences, which could be distributed to organizations and practitioners engaging with veterans and local communities. Introducing this awareness into activities aiming to bridge gaps between veterans and civilian environments is especially crucial, as this is where a broad base of understanding can be fostered and the alienation of veterans from their communities prevented. Moreover, increasing the visibility of diverse veteran populations, who are highly respected for their service, can foster a more inclusive and cohesive Ukrainian society on a broader scale.

### 2. Tailor reintegration support offers to veterans’ lifecycles.

CI’s fieldwork revealed how adjusting the reintegration policy to age cohorts is crucial, considering the differences in needs observed between older and younger generations of veterans in Ukraine. The large cohort of new veterans resulting from the full-scale invasion, often entering military service at a younger age and lacking education, established careers, and families before enlistment, face unique challenges in their post-service lives. Moreover,

<sup>386</sup> Rödgers, “Veteranka: Supporting Ukraine's Female Defenders.”



the higher frequency of conscription among these individuals and difficulties in building civilian lives from scratch may accentuate feelings of frustration and mistrust.

One way to address this issue involves integrating information about and providing direct access to education and training opportunities that are adaptable to continuous service cycles within standard pre-discharge guidance. This would need to go beyond just presenting a loose portfolio of programs, instead offering comprehensive career pathways that leave young veterans with a sense of autonomy, direction, and ownership of their lives despite the ongoing hostilities. Moreover, young veterans may require more proactive outreach by CSOs, peer support associations, and government agencies, considering their lower familiarity with the reintegration service and counseling landscape.

Moreover, intergenerational support systems involving Donbas veterans and new soldiers could play a vital role in facilitating knowledge exchange and cohesion across generational divides. Given that the young demographic is more vulnerable to isolation and political radicalization, reintegration practitioners may also need to intensify efforts that promote the active participation of young veterans in their community lives.

Meanwhile, many older veterans express the need for support that is centered on enhancing and nurturing their family relationships. Veteran families often grapple with the disruptions caused by military service and the psychological toll it exacts on returning service members. To address these challenges more effectively, reintegration assistance could make family counseling services standard practice, extending beyond individual mental health and psychosocial support.

Additionally, this demographic could benefit from greater flexibility in employment arrangements. Measures such as implementing an adjustment period of several months post-service, establishing temporary pay parity for part-time positions, and enabling remote work opportunities or incremental on-ramps to organizational life where feasible can contribute to smoother transitions and improved family well-being. Overall, the evolving composition and experiences of veterans highlight the need for updated research to understand and assess the evolving needs of different age groups to replace the current system's static approach to life cycles.<sup>387</sup> This call also extends to their families, as data collected for this project also suggests social and in- / out-group differences among family members of prior wars versus those younger spouses and siblings of the current one.

### **3. Strengthen holistic support systems for families of veterans and families of the fallen.**

Interview data and conference dialogues revealed that families of veterans and families of the fallen experience significant challenges, including emotional strain, financial instability, and insufficient institutional support. Interviews highlighted the erosion of familial bonds during service, as veterans often struggle to maintain contact with loved ones, leaving families to cope with uncertainty and anxiety. Upon reunification, veterans frequently experience difficulties reintegrating into family life, with changes in behavior and emotional distance exacerbating these challenges. Moreover, families often lack access to dedicated support services that address their specific needs, including psychological counseling, legal assistance, and employment resources.

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<sup>387</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."



Some approaches to drawing families into the transition process have been referenced in other recommendations. However, the scale of the need necessitates dedicated focus in concert with veteran-centric initiatives. For example, centralized family support hubs in partnership with local governments and organizations could offer tailored services, including legal aid, psychological counseling, employment assistance, as well as peer support networks. Developing both in-person and digital platforms would ensure accessibility regardless of geographic location.

It is also recommended that contextually appropriate programs be assessed to provide emotional support that encompasses veterans and their families. Possibilities for scaling these programs should also be explored. These can include family therapy, bereavement counseling for families of the fallen, and peer-to-peer communication channels that allow families to share experiences and coping strategies. Early intervention services should be strengthened and promoted to address the psychological impacts of war on families before they escalate into more significant issues.

Finally, direct financial aid, more easily accessible scholarships for children of veterans, and employment programs prioritizing job training and career transitions for spouses of veterans and families of the fallen could further facilitate economic stability at the household level and economic recovery at the national level. For veteran families running their own businesses, there should be reliable and straightforward support plans in place to cover periods of service-related absence of the spouse, which could include benefits such as temporary tax breaks.

In conjunction with this and the above recommendations, it would also be necessary to streamline bureaucratic support and raise awareness of these services among targeted demographics through collaboration between civil society organizations, government bodies, and veteran groups.

#### **4. Create a gender-sensitive reintegration policy at all stages and levels.**

This entails ensuring a sufficient supply of specialized healthcare tailored to women's unique needs. As highlighted in the “Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families” (2023) by Veteran Hub et al., mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) professionals should receive training to effectively respond to gender-specific service and reintegration experiences while avoiding the reinforcement of common stereotypes about female service members. Moreover, coverage of specialized physical health services for female veterans, including reproductive and maternal health care, must be enhanced in future investments into military medical examinations and the civilian healthcare system. Notably, gender-sensitive healthcare should also cover issues also concerning male veterans, including guidance on resuming sexual activity after injury or while taking medications like antidepressants and painkillers, as provided by the materials of Veteran Hub's "Resex" initiative. As another aspect, public awareness campaigns akin to those described in Recommendation 2 are crucial to actively dispel the remaining prejudice, stereotypes, and myths surrounding female veterans.<sup>388</sup>

As emphasized by the UWVM during CI's fieldwork, truly inclusive policies towards female service members precede the reintegration stage; the defense budget needs to accommodate appropriately fitted uniforms, equipment, boots, and body armor to prevent serious injury and trauma. A gender-sensitive reintegration policy also means recognizing and supporting women's roles beyond frontline duties, including their vital roles in care work,

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<sup>388</sup> Veteran Hub; Veteran Hub, “RESEX – About Sexual Life for Soldiers Who Have Been Injured.”



essential services, the management of family businesses during their partner's deployment, and the broader defense efforts. IREX and others have highlighted the need for collaboration with women's veteran organizations, for instance, to address issues such as gender-specific challenges faced by female veterans in the job market.<sup>389</sup> However, it is also important to support these organizations and other women-led CSOs in scaling up their initiatives promoting female leadership, community peace, and resilience building, particularly those involving vulnerable groups such as IDPs.

As findings from the interviews and the conference have demonstrated, it is crucial to understand the empowerment of female veterans not as an isolated goal but as an opportunity to boost women's constructive participation in public life and the recognition of the manifold contributions and sacrifices they make during this state of crisis. Several of these imperatives find the substantive definition in Ukraine's National Action Plan (NAP) on the WPS agenda, including participation in decision-making processes, building resilience to security challenges, supporting post-conflict recovery, and combatting gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>390</sup> However, its implementation remains sluggish: For instance, it wasn't until December 2023—22 months into the full-scale invasion and over 3 years since the plan's adoption—that the MoD finally approved specially designed body armor for women, as outlined in the NAP.<sup>391</sup> In this context, it is beneficial to establish accountability mechanisms to the WPS agenda within public institutions and to explicitly incorporate its strategic objectives into the veterans' reintegration policy framework.

## **5. Build well-prepared and trusted mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services.**

The most essential step to effectively address the complex array of mental health challenges faced by veterans upon their return from conflict zones is to enhance their readiness to seek help in the first place. This study confirms previous research to highlight a dual acknowledgment of the importance of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) alongside a reluctance among veterans to view treatment as a viable option for themselves, coupled with low levels of trust in mental health providers. Both the existing literature and CI's fieldwork insights have stressed destigmatizing care through communicative strategies and community engagement, as well as the meaningful role of referrals by other veterans.

Looking at the developments in Ukraine and comparative cases<sup>392</sup>, peer-to-peer structures will likely be instrumental in normalizing MHPSS and increasing its utilization. Given the rich tapestry of veteran-related CSOs and the strong bonds within the veteran community, ample opportunity exists to expand peer-to-peer MHPSS initiatives, drawing upon successful models already in place. In this context, the lay mental health counselor training to reduce access barriers proposed in one of the IOM reports could be applied to veterans in these support spaces.<sup>393</sup>

Beyond that, offering comprehensive mental health professional training to veterans can provide a valuable pathway for economic reintegration while simultaneously fulfilling common

<sup>389</sup> IREX, "Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Female Veterans in Ukraine."

<sup>390</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, On the Approval of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security for the period until 2025.

<sup>391</sup> Court, "Defense Ministry Approves First Body Armor for Female Soldiers."

<sup>392</sup> Jain et al., "Peer Support and Outcome for Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in a Residential Rehabilitation Program."

<sup>393</sup> Kinsella and Aras, "The Social Reintegration of Veterans in Ukraine."



desires for alternative ways of serving their brothers and sisters in arms. Not only would this alleviate the strain on the understaffed civilian and military mental healthcare system, but it would also enhance veterans' trust in and perceived approachability of the system.

Another cornerstone to adjust MHPSS support better to veteran needs is rendering it sensitive to veteran profiles (e.g. foreign legion members, conscripts, volunteers, former POWs, veterans with disabilities) and local circumstances (e.g. urban vs. rural areas), as the mental health outcomes related to service, and reintegration may vary between them.

The data collected by CI also indicates the imperative to address moral injury, an emerging concept in psychology and psychiatry, which recent studies have shown to be associated with PTSD symptoms in Ukrainian service members.<sup>394</sup> The evidence of mental health needs among veterans also points to the necessity to conduct research on the compound effects and interaction of different stressors such as PTSD, unemployment, stigma, and the prospect of remobilization to inform MHPSS services for veterans better. Expanding and adjusting these capacities will likely yield a high return on investment. A 2013 study in the UK underscored the economic burden on health and social services resulting from inadequate military-to-civilian transitions concerning the psychological well-being of service leavers. The study estimated that within a single year, approximately GBP 80.9 million was expended on addressing issues like alcohol and substance abuse, PTSD, neurotic disorders, and family breakdowns.<sup>395</sup>

Moreover, CI's data suggests that there is a range of therapies that can be instrumental in addressing the complex mental health needs of veterans. Beyond conventional psychological counseling and medication, art-based therapies such as drawing, clay modeling, and theater have shown promising outcomes in facilitating emotional expression and community bonding. Initiatives like painting classes conducted by local artists have not only helped veterans articulate their experiences but have also fostered a sense of solidarity and understanding within communities. These art-based approaches complement traditional therapies by providing alternative psychological recovery pathways while facilitating a collective process of emotional healing, narrative building, and social integration. The interconnected nature of wartime mental health impacts among the population highlights the need for an integrated therapy approach that encompasses not just veterans but also their families, communities, and civil institutions. Furthermore, the exploration of innovative treatments such as psychedelic-assisted therapy and medical cannabis represents a forward-thinking approach to veteran MHPSS. These therapies, currently facing legal and societal hurdles, require more extensive clinical research and robust advocacy to become viable options.

## 6. Enact comprehensive reform of veteran medical care.

Ukraine's military healthcare system requires a substantial overhaul to address the multifaceted challenges of providing wounded soldiers with medical care. First and foremost, the modernization of military hospitals is essential. These facilities must be equipped with state-of-the-art medical technologies and maintained to the highest standards. Forming partnerships with international medical institutions will be critical in acquiring the latest equipment and technology. Additionally, enhanced training programs for military medical personnel are required. These programs should focus on advanced surgical techniques and comprehensive care beyond amputations. Continuous professional development programs

<sup>394</sup> Zasiakina et al., "War Trauma Impacts in Ukrainian Combat and Civilian Populations."

<sup>395</sup> UNDP, "Review of International Practice in the Reintegration of Veterans: Considerations for Ukraine in the War and Post-War Context."





must be implemented, providing medical professionals with competitive salaries and career advancement opportunities to retain their expertise in Ukraine.

On the front lines, insufficient medical care poses significant risks. It is imperative to increase the supply and distribution of high-quality medical kits for combat medics and provide specialized training for paramedics to handle complex battlefield injuries effectively. Moreover, the Ministry of Defense should reevaluate and regulate the medications used for pain management to mitigate addiction risks.

The bureaucratic processes for securing disability status and benefits for veterans require substantial reform. Streamlining and humanizing medical commissions is crucial to eliminating corruption and inefficiencies. A user-friendly, human-centered approach should be adopted to ensure veterans receive timely and respectful assessments. Establishing a transparent appeals process for veterans dissatisfied with their evaluations is also recommended. Decentralizing services by creating regional disability evaluation centers will reduce travel burdens on veterans from rural areas. Integrating digital platforms for remote consultations and applications will expedite the process, increase accessibility, and reduce costs to the state and the veterans.

Expanding the capacity of the civilian healthcare system is another critical element. Incentives such as tax breaks and housing benefits can help attract and retain civilian doctors within Ukraine. Developing international cooperation programs to bring in foreign medical experts temporarily can fill gaps and provide training for local staff. Additionally, programs to facilitate and finance medical treatment abroad for injuries that cannot be treated domestically are also needed. Forming alliances with international healthcare institutions will support the continuity of treatment and rehabilitation for Ukrainian soldiers abroad.

Support for veterans with disabilities must be significantly enhanced to ensure their successful reintegration into civilian life. Investing in inclusive infrastructure projects in both rural and urban areas will accommodate veterans with disabilities, ensuring accessibility to public facilities, transportation, and housing. Community awareness programs should be promoted to foster understanding and support for veterans' reintegration. Comprehensive economic support programs, including job training, employment assistance, and small business grants for disabled veterans, are essential. Enhancing psychosocial support services and providing access to counseling, peer support groups, and mental health care tailored to veterans' unique needs will further support these processes.

Non-Ukrainian soldiers face additional hurdles in accessing medical care and compensation. Extending eligibility for medical care and compensation to these soldiers recognizes their contributions and sacrifices. Simplifying the process for non-Ukrainian soldiers to access healthcare services and benefits within Ukraine can be one step toward this recognition. Providing legal assistance to non-Ukrainian soldiers navigating the Ukrainian healthcare system and establishing a financial assistance fund to cover their medical expenses will address these challenges.

The implementation and monitoring of these comprehensive reforms necessitate cross-sector collaboration. A task force comprising government officials, military representatives, healthcare professionals, and veteran organizations should oversee the implementation of these reforms. Partnerships with international organizations and (i)NGOs will leverage expertise and resources. Regular assessments and audits of the military healthcare system, disability evaluation processes, and veteran support programs will ensure continuous



improvement and accountability. Implementing a feedback mechanism for veterans to voice their concerns and suggestions will ensure that policies remain responsive to their needs.

## **7. Implement a strengths-based approach to social and economic reintegration.**

The existing literature and CI's Ukrainian partner organizations consistently emphasized that veterans are often framed as problems to be fixed by existing policy rather than assets to be developed. This perspective fosters paternalistic attitudes within both the state and broader society toward veteran livelihoods. To optimize the socioeconomic reintegration of veterans, it is critical to adopt a strengths-based approach that shifts focus from dependency on state-provided social benefits to emphasizing and leveraging the intrinsic capabilities and potential of veterans.<sup>396</sup> Such an approach acknowledges the socio-demographic profile of veterans, predominantly consisting of individuals who are young, active, of working age or older, and with professional experience, and encourages their full participation in economic life.<sup>397</sup>

As highlighted by the literature, during CI's fieldwork and the "Out of War" conference, a strengths-based reintegration strategy should begin by recognizing the diverse skills that veterans possess beyond direct combat roles. Many veterans return to civilian life with experience as technicians, engineers, logisticians, and IT specialists, among other highly valuable capacities in the civilian workforce. Moreover, they embody various relational and subjective competencies such as leadership, adaptability, and resilience. Reintegration programs can more effectively align veterans with suitable employment opportunities by systematically identifying their transferable skills and strengths, effectively communicating these to employers, and simultaneously equipping employers with strategies to recognize and leverage these assets. In this context, it is pertinent to tailor retraining opportunities to these individual assets and initiate this process before discharge, smoothing the transition to civilian employment and boosting veterans' confidence in their adequacy for the civilian labor market well in advance.

Moreover, veterans' special expertise can be used to fill gaps in their support policy, similar to the MHPSS training proposed in Recommendation 4. For instance, as piloted by the NGO Coalition of Veterans' Spaces, veterans and their family members can be trained to become case managers at the local level, assisting other veteran families in administrative centers to access benefits and facilitate their connection with services necessary for their economic, social, and political reintegration.

As another aspect of strength-based reintegration, it is also vital to encourage community integration through the civic engagement of veterans on a broader scale, which helps transform societal perceptions of veterans from dependents to contributors and leaders. Policies and programs can leverage veterans' leadership capabilities to this end by providing civic education and development opportunities for participating in electoral processes and integrating them into decision-making in local authorities and institutions.

Veterans have the potential to significantly reshape Ukraine's political landscape, infusing both national and local politics with qualities such as patriotism, pragmatism, accountability, and a keen awareness of the costs of corruption. Importantly, veterans are also distinguished by their exceptionally high levels of trust among fellow Ukrainians compared to the low trust they hold in politicians.<sup>398</sup> For instance, they can influence community life by initiating and

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<sup>396</sup> Röders and McFee, "Research Brief."

<sup>397</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."

<sup>398</sup> Odarchenko, "Ukraine's Veterans Can Transform the Country's Postwar Political Landscape."



participating in collective action, cultivating social capital between them and their fellow community members through cultural activities, helping out vulnerable populations such as IDPs and people with disabilities, or beautifying parks and townscapes. Fostering meaningful connections across the civilian-veteran divide, which can be achieved on multiple levels of society and governance, is instrumental in establishing a culture of trust and reciprocity. This gives veterans a sense of purpose in civilian life and helps civilians set realistic and understanding expectations toward them. Moreover, shaping community life and local or even national politics enables veterans to integrate their ideas and perspectives into the public sphere, rendering decision-making in mechanisms like service provision more accountable to them and responsive to their needs on a systemic level.

#### **8. Offer concrete, time-efficient, and streamlined training and education opportunities aligned with Ukraine's labor demand.**

The observation of low education benefit uptake among veterans highlights a significant issue<sup>399</sup>: the availability of programs alone is insufficient if they are not tailored to veterans' needs and circumstances and do not provide a clear and immediate pathway into employment. To effectively support veterans' transition into civilian roles and complement a strengths-based approach in this process, it is crucial to provide training and educational opportunities that are both time-efficient and closely aligned with the current demands of Ukraine's labor market.

The National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy sets a strong example in this regard, offering tailored educational programs specifically designed for veterans. These include specialized short certificate courses and master's degrees offered through the School of Public Administration, which are designed to harness the skills that veterans acquired before and during military service and apply them to critical areas such as infrastructure development and cybersecurity. These programs are developed to ensure that veterans can translate their military experience into valuable skills for Ukraine's workforce, directly contributing to the nation's rebuilding, recovery, and ongoing defense efforts. Incorporating fast-track courses as a priority can provide veterans with a rapid means to "catch up" with civilian capital that they could not develop during their service. Streamlining programs to reduce the time commitment required can prevent prolonged periods away from the workforce, which is often a barrier for veterans seeking to re-establish themselves economically. These accelerated courses are crucial for quickly equipping veterans with the certifications and skills that are in high demand in the labor market, effectively bridging the gap between military and civilian careers.

For those who desire occupational independence, comprehensive entrepreneurship courses can be deployed to offer step-by-step guidance on starting and managing businesses, covering essentials such as market analysis, financial management, and operations. These courses must emphasize business planning, risk management, and sustainability, with a strong mentorship component from experienced business leaders, including veterans, to provide guidance and networking opportunities. Integrating family members, offering mini-grants and tax incentives, and prioritizing veteran-owned businesses in public procurement processes are crucial, as are partnerships with educational institutions and NGOs to ensure accessibility and relevance to local high-growth sectors. Developing structured incubation programs and supportive ecosystems with resources like seed funding, workspace, legal advice, mentorship, and collaborative platforms will further enhance veterans' entrepreneurial

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<sup>399</sup> Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF), "Portrait of a Veteran in Russian-Ukrainian War."



success and integration into the broader economy, given the challenges of achieving successful entrepreneurship more generally.

A model of demand-sensitive and cost-efficient training could also be implemented by the public sector, where the government finances training programs for veterans. In this model, the government covers the costs of obtaining professional licenses or completing training courses. In return, veterans commit to a service period in government roles, thereby repaying their educational investment through public service. After fulfilling this commitment, they receive assistance in transitioning to private-sector employment, potentially with government contractors. A scheme like this could effectively address severe labor shortages in the public sector, particularly in response to the MoVA's increased administrative demands due to the influx of new veterans. Integrating veterans into public sector roles through direct channels provides immediate relief and facilitates their sustainable transition into future private-sector employment.

### **9. Coordinate “combat to commerce” approaches that seamlessly integrate reconstruction, rehabilitation, reintegration, and income generation as a part of broader societal rebuilding.**

Based on the data collected for this study, it is recommended to develop a comprehensive “combat to commerce” approach – i.e., a comprehensive framework aimed at the economic reintegration of veterans through seamless integration of reconstruction, rehabilitation, reintegration, and income generation. This multi-sector strategy should comprise technical education, on-the-job skills training, community-beneficial initiatives, psychosocial and disability support, and the development of transferable skill sets. Coordinating with the private sector ensures the relevance of training programs to local labor markets and improves logistical support and buyers for the products and services developed.

The first component of this approach is focused on reconstruction and demining, which is essential for rebuilding war-torn areas and ensuring safety for subsequent development. Activities under this component include clearing landmines and unexploded ordnance, repairing infrastructure, and restoring essential services such as water, electricity, and transportation. Key stakeholders in these efforts are government agencies, international NGOs, specialized demining organizations, and engineering firms.

Rehabilitation and psychosocial support constitute the second pillar of this strategy. Addressing the physical, psychological, and social needs of veterans and affected civilians is paramount. This involves providing medical and psychological care, establishing support groups, and facilitating community healing processes. Stakeholders include healthcare providers, mental health professionals, social workers, and community organizations working together to ensure comprehensive care.

Reintegration and income generation are crucial for integrating veterans into the local economy and ensuring sustainable livelihoods. Key activities include developing small businesses, cooperatives, and social enterprises, promoting entrepreneurship when appropriate, pooling resources to achieve economies of scale in other instances, and facilitating access to financing and investment. Local businesses, financial institutions, government economic development programs, and international development agencies can support these efforts. Related to this, technical education and on-the-job training are essential for equipping participants with relevant skills and knowledge for the labor market. This includes vocational training programs, apprenticeships, certification courses, and continuous



professional development. Educational institutions, vocational training centers, industry experts, and private sector partners play vital roles in delivering these programs.

Community-beneficial initiatives improve resources and living conditions while fostering social cohesion. Public works projects, enhancement of public spaces, and environmental sustainability initiatives are among the activities that contribute to this goal. These initiatives are typically implemented by local governments, community-based organizations, environmental groups, and civil society. Focusing on initiatives that improve the commons not only mitigates the risk of resentment and disenchantment for those population groups excluded from the beneficiary profile, but it also supports the integration and inclusion of diverse individuals and backgrounds.

Ensuring disability access and support is critical to making the programs inclusive. This involves providing assistive technologies, adapting training programs, ensuring physical accessibility, and offering tailored support services. Stakeholders such as disability advocacy organizations, rehabilitation specialists, accessibility experts, and inclusive design consultants are instrumental in these efforts.

Coordination with the private sector should also occur to align training programs with market needs and secure market access for products and services. Engaging with private sector companies to identify skill gaps, develop curricula, offer internships and job placements, and create supply chain linkages ensures that the training is relevant and that there are buyers for the produced goods. Industry associations, chambers of commerce, large corporations, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are all potential stakeholders within this framework.

Implementing this approach begins with a comprehensive needs assessment to identify local challenges and opportunities. Strategic plans are then developed, outlining specific objectives, timelines, and responsibilities. Multi-stakeholder partnerships involving government, private sector, civil society, and international organizations are established to ensure broad representation and input. Securing funding and resources from diverse sources, including government budgets, international aid, private sector investment, and philanthropic contributions, is also necessary.

The phased implementation starts with immediate needs such as demining, reconstruction, and weapon and defense system development, gradually integrating longer-term initiatives like education and income generation. Continuous monitoring and evaluation ensure that objectives are met, and strategies are adjusted as needed. Developing exit strategies that ensure the sustainability of initiatives beyond the initial implementation phase and scaling successful models to other regions or sectors are key to maximizing impact.

Expected outcomes of the “Combat to Commerce” approach include enhanced safety and infrastructure, improved health and well-being, economic empowerment, social cohesion, inclusive development, and market relevance. Rebuilt communities will be secure and free from landmines, with improved physical and mental health outcomes for veterans and civilians. New businesses and skilled jobs will increase employment and income opportunities, contributing to sustainable livelihoods. Strengthened community ties will reduce tensions between veterans and civilians, while programs that accommodate the needs of all participants, including those with disabilities, will ensure inclusive development. Training programs aligned with local labor market demands will guarantee employability and economic integration, creating a holistic and sustainable pathway for the economic reintegration of veterans and contributing to broader societal rebuilding and long-term stability.



## 10. Design and implement reintegration policies and programs in a participatory, grassroots-led, and community-based fashion.

Veterans, CSOs, and other stakeholders during CI's fieldwork and at the "Out of War" conference have consistently favored participatory reintegration strategies that ensure programs and policies are localized, context-specific, and correspond to actual needs on the ground. The guiding principle of "nothing for us without us" emphasizes the importance of involving Ukrainian veterans, their families, and communities directly and immediately in developing these programs. Continuous engagement facilitates valuable feedback loops, allowing for adaptive and responsive adjustments based on real-time insights.

Research from other settings has shown that meaningfully incorporating beneficiaries in designing and implementing programming is not just a formality but is associated with better and more sustainable reintegration outcomes.<sup>400</sup> Moreover, representatives from international organizations suggest that future support should increasingly be decentralized and directed toward diverse and local organizations established to operate in the interests of veterans within their own communities.<sup>401</sup> Integrating civilians in veteran-led activities can significantly enhance mutual understanding and support, laying the groundwork for a community-driven support system.

Insights from international experiences shared at the conference highlighted the necessity of extending participatory practices beyond initial planning to include robust implementation oversight and ongoing evaluation feedback. This ensures that programs are not only designed with direct input from those affected but also adaptable to changing circumstances, enhancing the overall efficacy of the policies.

The introduction of tools like Jules Pretty's "ladder of participation" can be instrumental in assessing the depth of community engagement. This tool provides a structured way to measure how actively communities are involved and how effectively their contributions influence decision-making processes. Pretty's ladder of participation outlines a spectrum of community engagement levels in developmental projects, ranging from the least effective to the most empowered forms of participation. At the lowest end is "passive participation," where individuals merely receive information about decisions made externally without any opportunity for input or feedback. This approach involves unilateral announcements from authorities without considering community responses, limiting the information flow to that controlled by external professionals. Conversely, at the highest end of the scale, "self-mobilization" marks a scenario where communities not only engage in self-directed analysis and agenda-setting but also independently access and control external resources. This typology crucially examines who controls the agenda, resource access, and power dynamics within participatory processes.<sup>402</sup>

The ubiquitous presence of external funding necessitates organized input from below to maintain local autonomy and genuine representation. Implementing monitoring mechanisms and grassroots checks on funding integrity, transparency, and accountability can ensure that projects align with their intended goals. Establishing formal guidelines and priority checklists for donors can also aid this process. Robust and inclusive coalition building in civil society could strengthen capacities and knowledge transfers in this area. Pooling expertise and coordinating advocacy efforts could also enhance the representation of, for instance,

<sup>400</sup> Kilroy, *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants After Conflict*.

<sup>401</sup> Zhmurko, Yakushko, and Zakotyuk, "Analytical Report on the Results of Study: Civil Society Organizations Working in the Veteran Sphere 2023."

<sup>402</sup> Kilroy, "From Conflict to Ownership."



vulnerable groups such as female veterans and veterans with disabilities. Furthermore, the current reintegration landscape requires more intermediary institutions like IOM, which are vital for effectively navigating donor complexities, lowering funding access barriers to grassroots CSOs, and ensuring that allocations are both need-based and impactful.

### 11. Develop and implement comprehensive trust-building initiatives.

The Ukrainian government, along with third-party multi-sector partners, should develop and implement comprehensive trust-building initiatives aimed at bridging the gap between veteran populations and civilian communities. Participation and transparency were mentioned in the previous recommendation. Trust-building can additionally be achieved through the establishment of veteran-civilian advisory councils at local and regional levels. These councils would facilitate open dialogue, foster mutual understanding, and address grievances collaboratively. By involving both veterans and civilians in decision-making processes, these councils would ensure that reintegration programs are tailored to the needs of both groups, thereby enhancing social cohesion and reducing mistrust.

Establish transparency and accountability initiatives to address mistrust in institutions, organizations, healthcare providers, and the state. This includes regular public forums where veterans can voice concerns directly to government and institutional representatives, independent oversight bodies to monitor the quality and accessibility of veteran services, and enhanced communication strategies to ensure veterans are informed about their rights and available resources. It is also critical to ensure that the newly established military ombudsman office of the Ukrainian government provides a functioning channel for addressing grievances and ensuring fair treatment within institutional frameworks.<sup>403</sup>

Fulfilling promises and managing expectations are critical for rebuilding trust in the state and its affiliated actors and institutions.<sup>404</sup> With this in mind, it is critical that the Ukrainian government and the constellation of international actors collaborating with it effectively manage expectations and execute what they promise to veterans. In the context of existing ruptures of trust and deep cynicism, failures to deliver can exponentially compound the damage done and foment a sense of disenfranchisement, contributing to risks of insecurity and instability over the long term.

As the face of the state, the “street-level bureaucrats”<sup>405</sup> (those responsible for interacting with the general public on a day-to-day basis) – critical and often overlooked actors – are responsible for (re)constructing the relationship to the state in war-to-peace transitions.<sup>406</sup> They are also often the last considered for investments in professionalization and institutional strengthening. It is thus recommended to develop training for street-level bureaucrats on professional behavior, trauma-informed, and conflict-sensitive approaches. This training should also integrate corruption controls to ensure that veterans' interactions with bureaucrats are respectful, supportive, and transparent. Implementing these measures can significantly improve the quality of service delivery, enhance trust in public institutions, and ensure that veterans receive fair and effective support. Given the high incidence of mentions of mistrust among fieldwork interlocutors, interview participants, and conference attendees, and the vital importance of trust to security and social cohesion in everyday life, research should

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<sup>403</sup> Ukrinform, “Ukraine’s Defense Ministry Initiates Creation of Military Ombudsman, New Institution for Protection of Rights of Military Personnel.”

<sup>404</sup> McFee, “An Ambivalent Peace: Mistrust, Reconciliation, and the Intervention Encounter in Colombia.”

<sup>405</sup> Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*.

<sup>406</sup> Burnyeat, *The Face of Peace*.



accompany these initiatives to establish robust baseline assessments to measure improvements in these domains.

**12. Develop a comprehensive framework for the legal and justice system to be better trained and equipped to address the unique needs of veterans, ensuring their effective reintegration into society and the protection of their rights.**

Based on the insights from the attached report, the Ukrainian legal and justice system faces significant challenges in addressing the specific needs of veterans. Veterans often encounter legal and institutional barriers such as complex bureaucracy, limited access to veteran-specific legal support, and a general lack of understanding of their unique circumstances. To address these challenges, it is essential to develop a comprehensive framework that includes specialized training, enhanced resources, and the development of veteran-focused legal services.

Specialized training for legal and justice personnel is crucial. Equipping judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and other legal personnel with the knowledge and skills necessary to address the specific legal needs of veterans is fundamental. This can be achieved by developing and implementing mandatory training programs that cover military culture, common legal issues faced by veterans, mental health awareness, and trauma-informed approaches. Partnering with veteran organizations and mental health professionals can provide comprehensive and relevant training to legal professionals.

Furthermore, ensuring veterans have access to legal services that are specifically tailored to their needs is paramount. Establishing dedicated legal aid clinics for veterans within existing legal aid frameworks and staffing them with professionals trained in veteran-specific legal issues would be a significant step forward. Outreach programs to inform veterans about available legal resources and their rights, along with creating a network of pro bono lawyers specializing in veteran affairs, would provide additional support and enhance access to justice for veterans.

An integrated support system that fosters collaboration between various sectors can provide holistic support to veterans. Implementing a case management system coordinating legal, psychological, and social services ensures a seamless veteran-centered approach. Facilitating partnerships between legal aid organizations, veteran support groups, healthcare providers, and social services is essential to address the multifaceted needs of veterans. Developing protocols for the legal system to work closely with veteran support organizations can ensure that veterans' legal issues are addressed in the context of their overall well-being.

Enhancing access to justice by simplifying legal processes and reducing barriers for veterans seeking justice is also critical. Streamlining administrative procedures for veterans to access legal services and benefits, implementing measures to reduce the burden of legal documentation, and establishing veteran-friendly court procedures, including veteran courts or specialized dockets focused on veteran issues, would make the legal system more accessible and responsive to veterans' needs. Diversionary or restorative justice initiatives, combined with relevant rehabilitation programs for substance abuse-related charges, could not only better serve the veterans but also reduce the demands and expenses on the legal system.

Data collection and research are vital to understanding the legal challenges faced by veterans and evaluating the effectiveness of implemented policies. Conducting regular surveys and studies on the legal needs and experiences of veterans, using the data to inform policy development, identifying gaps in services, and measuring the impact of legal support





programs are necessary steps. Publishing annual reports on the state of veteran legal affairs would ensure transparency and continuous improvement in addressing veterans' needs.

Public awareness and advocacy are also crucial components. Launching public awareness campaigns to highlight the legal challenges veterans face and the available support services can raise awareness. Advocating for policy changes at the national and local levels to enhance legal protections for veterans and encouraging the inclusion of veteran issues in broader legal reform discussions and initiatives would lead to more inclusive and effective policies. By addressing these challenges, the Ukrainian legal and justice system can become more adept at addressing the unique needs of veterans, facilitating their successful reintegration into civilian life, and ensuring their contributions to society are recognized and supported.

### **13. Improve and expand the existing empirical basis for program and policy development to ensure relevant, cost-efficient, and coordinated action.**

Engage in comprehensive data collection, continuous research, and systematic evaluation of existing initiatives to inform and optimize policy decisions. Facilitate and strengthen inter-institutional data sharing and promote a culture of information sharing among implicated institutions and stakeholders.

Firstly, establish a centralized data repository that consolidates information from various sources, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions. This repository should be regularly updated with data on veteran demographics, service profiles, health status, economic conditions, and legal issues. Ensuring data accuracy and accessibility will facilitate informed decision-making and enable stakeholders to track progress and identify emerging needs.

Conduct regular surveys and studies focusing on the diverse experiences and challenges faced by veterans. These surveys should capture detailed information on physical and mental health, employment, education, social integration, and legal concerns. Incorporating qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus groups, can provide deeper insights into veterans' lived experiences and highlight areas requiring targeted intervention.

Address the growing research fatigue observed among Ukrainian veteran communities, ensuring that research efforts are conducted efficiently and in a way that avoids duplication. Streamlining studies and coordinating between different organizations can help prevent overburdening veteran respondents while maintaining the quality of data collection. Genuine engagement with veterans and managing their expectations throughout the research process are essential elements of conflict sensitivity and trust-building. While national-level research is often comprehensive, there is a significant gap in understanding the needs of veterans in rural communities. These communities frequently lack the tools or knowledge to accurately identify their veterans' challenges, which renders as local-level studies essential for ensuring that veterans in underserved areas receive the attention they need.

Invest in the development of advanced analytical tools and technologies to enhance data analysis and visualization. Utilizing tools such as geographic information systems (GIS), data mining, and machine learning can uncover patterns and trends that inform more targeted and effective interventions. Training programs for researchers and policymakers on these technologies will further enhance their capacity to utilize data effectively. Data and methods should be designed to capture diverse experiences and be disaggregated by age, gender, ethnicity, and geography. Ensure transparency and public dissemination of research findings.



Develop robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks for all veteran support programs. These frameworks should include clear indicators of success, timelines for assessment, and mechanisms for feedback from veterans and service providers. By systematically evaluating program outcomes, it will be possible to identify best practices, address gaps in service delivery, and ensure that resources are allocated effectively.

Encourage collaboration between government bodies, academic institutions, and veteran organizations to conduct interdisciplinary research on veteran issues. Joint research initiatives can leverage diverse expertise and perspectives, leading to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the factors influencing veteran reintegration. Additionally, fostering partnerships with international organizations can facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices from other contexts.

## 5.2 Conclusion

This project report has delved into a wide range of literature and original research to synthesize an assessment of the pressing challenges and needs of Ukrainian veterans and their families. It identified persisting systemic shortfalls and a comprehensive plan of action to address them, recognizing that continuing with the existing system of veterans' reintegration, particularly amidst both unprecedented strain and responsibility, would entail numerous detrimental outcomes. These include the government's failure to uphold established guarantees, the marginalization of veterans within society, a loss of their human capital, an increased burden on budgets at all levels, and a deterioration of the state's defense capability, among other social and political risks.<sup>407</sup>

Most importantly, however, the transformation proposed in this study is crucial to fulfilling the moral duty of providing the Ukrainian veteran community and their families with appropriate care, livelihood security, and opportunities for empowerment and growth, thereby acknowledging their sacrifices in defending their homeland and their contributions to the region's broader stability and security. The approaches and strategies outlined in this paper address both immediate needs and the long-term goal of fostering a prepared, responsive, understanding, and inclusive society for the millions of veterans and veteran family members emerging from the conflict going forward.

As it has surfaced during this study, the reintegration policy in Ukraine is a multi-stakeholder effort involving the central and local *hromada* governments, civil society, communities, and families. Drawing on their combined capacities and expertise while optimizing their cooperation and coordination will build a more efficient and resilient veteran policy response in the future. Notably, this process needs to be conceived from the bottom up – through the participatory incorporation of veterans in policy programming and the promotion of local civil society initiatives that are closest to their beneficiaries. Although capturing all the nuances of current veteran experiences and prescribing precise solutions for a complex array of actors and circumstances is difficult to realize in this format, the policy paper provides guidance and recommendations to steer this multi-sectoral agenda in a promising direction.

Effective and adequate veterans' reintegration in Ukraine remains critical for the country's future. It requires sustained international attention and funding – a reality increasingly recognized by Ukraine's international allies and backers. Recently, for example, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU)

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<sup>407</sup> Veteran Hub, "Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families: Expert Guidelines for Developing the Updated State Policy for Veterans and Their Families."



signed an agreement to improve the financial sector's accessibility for war veterans. This initiative builds on the EBRD's ongoing efforts to bolster human capital resilience, addressing the significant challenges of Ukraine's skilled workforce depletion due to displacement and military service. Additionally, the EBRD has initiated the Veterans Reintegration Program, partnering with two major Ukrainian banks to unlock €250 million for the private sector, particularly aimed at supporting veterans' business ventures and promoting companies with veteran-friendly policies. The program also focuses on aiding financial institutions in reintegrating veterans, especially within small and medium-sized enterprises.<sup>408</sup>

This policy paper outlines strategic recommendations for optimally allocating such funds, channeling them into the right initiatives, and drawing on a robust portfolio of best practices and first-hand insights from those directly impacted by these issues. This aligns the study with the evolving landscape of funding and capacities, ensuring that related policies are both relevant and adaptable to the changing needs and resources available for veterans' reintegration efforts.

The Corioli Institute will continue to closely monitor the developments in the field, aiming to realize projects directly with Ukrainian veterans and their families on the ground and to follow up on and refine the proposals outlined in this policy paper with further research. CI seeks to continue bridging the gap between local needs, policy recommendations, and their practical application as a key conduit for information on Ukrainian veterans' policy. By fostering dialogue, engaging stakeholders at all levels, facilitating partnerships, and providing ongoing analysis and feedback, CI is dedicated to supporting a comprehensive and adaptive framework for veterans' reintegration in the future. Veterans are not only the country's backbone at the frontline but also embody its diversity and strength in their civilian roles, contributing pivotally to its social and economic resilience. Developing effective reintegration policies involves potentiating this strength and removing all contextual and systemic obstacles that impede leveraging its full potential – an effort that is sustained by foregrounding the perspectives of Ukraine's defenders themselves and equipping them with the required ownership over the process.

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<sup>408</sup> Bennett, "EBRD and National Bank of Ukraine Pledge Support for War Veterans."



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## Appendix A: Interview List

Date	Location	Individual/Group	Gender	Role(s)	Organization	Sector
23. Aug 23	Warsaw	I	M	Sector Official	Independent	Defense and Security
24. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Comms/ Former CEO	International Legion, Battlebuddy	Military
24. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Advisor	Prostir Mozhlyvostei	Government / NGO
25. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	President	Pislya Sluzhby	NGO
25. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	F	Volunteer	Pislya Sluzhby	NGO
25. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Case Worker (Employment and Education)	Pislya Sluzhby	NGO
25. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	F	Case Worker (Psychosocial counselling)	Pislya Sluzhby	NGO
25. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	DDR-Lead	IOM	International Development
25. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Lead	Freedom of Russia Legion	Military
25. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Veteran in Rehabilitation	Rehabilitation Center	Individual
25. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Veteran in Rehabilitation	Rehabilitation Center	Individual
26. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	F	Project Manager: Demining & Documentation of War Crimes	ICC	Humanitarian Aid
26. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Program Director	IOM	International Development
26. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	F	Cash Transfers	Humanitarian Response	Humanitarian Aid
26. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Disaster Relief Reduction	Mercy Corps	Humanitarian Aid
28. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	F	Staff	Legal NGO & Women's Veterans Network	NGO
28. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	F	Director	Women's Veterans Network	NGO
28. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	F	Ex-Minister for Veterans Affairs, Coordination Group	Coalition of Veterans' Spaces	Government / NGO
28. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	F	Program Manager	International Renaissance Foundation	NGO
29. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	F	Public Council Member; Leader	Public Council - Ministry of Veterans Affairs; Vesta	Government / NGO
29. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	F	Research & Analysis	Ukraine Veterans Foundation	Government
29. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	F	Translator; Projects	Ukraine Veterans Foundation	Government



29. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Veteran; Projects; Agriculture	Ukraine Veterans Foundation	Government
30. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Veteran in Rehabilitation	Pislya Sluzhby	Individual
19. Sep 23	Kalush	I	M	Deputy Mayor	Kalush City Government	Government
19. Sep 23	Kalush	I	F	Mother of soldier on frontlines	Brattia Z Prykarpottia	NGO
19. Sep 23	Kalush	I	M	War Priest (still serving/voluntee ring)	Formerly MoD, now volunteers for frontlines through church	Military/NGO (Planned)
19. Sep 23	Kalush	G	M, F	Participants in Brattia Z Prykarpottia (Volunteers)	All veterans but all volunteered after the full-scale invasion began, were not military- affiliated before that	Military/NGO
19. Sep 23	Kalush	G	M	Members, Veterans	Anti-Terrorist Operation Union of Veterans	Military/NGO
20. Sep 23	Kalush	G	M, F	Leaders; one is a veteran	Brattia Z Prykarpottia	NGO
21. Sep 23	Kalush	I	F	Founder & Leader	Protection (Or Defense, depending on translation)	NGO
10. Aug 23	Kostiantynivka	I	M	Active Foreign Legion Fighter (German)	N/A	Special operations
07. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Active Foreign Legion Fighter	N/A	Foreign Legion
07. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Documentarian	Independent	Media
11. Aug 23	Kostiantynivka	I	M	Active Foreign Legion Fighter	N/A	Special operations
11. Aug 23	Kostiantynivka	I	M	Active Foreign Legion Fighter legion	N/A	Foreign Legion
11. Aug 23	Kostiantynivka	I	M	Active Foreign Legion Fighter	N/A	Foreign Legion
11. Aug 23	Kostiantynivka	I	M	Active Foreign Legion Fighter	N/A	Foreign Legion
11. Aug 23	Kostiantynivka	I	M	Active Foreign Legion Fighter legion	N/A	Foreign Legion
13. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	M	Active Foreign Legion Fighter (U.S.)	N/A	Foreign Legion
13. Aug 23	Kyiv	I	F	Planning to open a theater company in Kyiv	U.S. State Department	Arts



## Appendix B: Conference and Fieldwork Methodology

### Background

On October 13th and 14th, the Corioli Institute hosted the first annual "Out of War" conference, titled "Global Insights to Support Strategies for the Reintegration of Ukraine's Frontline Returnees," at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). The conference convened academics, practitioners, policymakers, and formerly armed actors from 18 countries to elaborate on a plan of action addressing many of the existing social, economic, and psychological challenges Ukrainian veterans face when returning from the frontlines.

"Out of War" was conceived in the spirit of a global comparative perspective guided by the overarching, cross-boundary formerly armed actor (FAA) terminology. The term refers to all individuals who previously participated in the production of organized armed violence, including members of militias, gangs, criminal organizations, guerrillas, insurgents, and state militaries, among others. The conceptualization of FAAs expands beyond limited labels such as "ex-insurgent", "ex-cartel member", or "military veteran", allowing for a metalevel analysis of shared social, economic and psychological challenges among FAAs across armed group categories and geographies while acknowledging the contextual peculiarities of the situation of Ukrainian veterans. This approach made the debates accessible to those less familiar with the war in Ukraine and synchronised all participants' reasoning along a unifying theme.

The conference's framing enabled invited academics and practitioners working with distinct agents and settings of organized violence to have a common conceptual denominator that grounded the conference's generative exchanges. It facilitated a synthesis of expertise and epistemes from many walks of organized violence research to inform proposals aimed at helping Ukrainian veterans and their families. These proposals will be formulated in a policy paper drawing on insights from the conference's discussion sessions, which will be circulated to relevant stakeholders in government, international organizations, and civil society. By identifying the immediate and long-term needs of veterans highlighted by the Ukrainian partners present at the conference and developing recommendations grounded in the innovative convergence of ideas from multi-sited expertise, the paper aims to materialize the event's objective by providing concise yet comprehensive information on this complex field of action and effectively influencing policy priorities within it.

### Event Structure

The first day of the conference, October 13<sup>th</sup>, commenced with an inaugural Roundtable Discussion featuring Ganna Demydenko from the Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement, Yuliia Kirillova from the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation (UVF), and Kostiantyn Tatarkin from the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) who joined remotely. Dr. Marnie Howlett, Departmental Lecturer in Russian and East European Politics at the University of Oxford, moderated the discussion, providing an overview of current reintegration provisions, challenges, and priorities in Ukraine. Topics of particular interest included reintegration programs for veterans residing abroad, the involvement of veterans' families in the integration process, the impact on veterans' children, and the readiness of Ukrainian society to welcome returning veterans. The day ended with a networking dinner at LSE.

The second day began with a speech by Aiden Aslin, a British veteran who served in the Ukrainian Marines, sharing his experiences from the early stages of the war, including his five-month captivity by Russian forces before being released in a prisoners exchange. Participants then engaged in six different breakout room sessions throughout the day (one AM and one PM session per person), discussing the topics "Identity-Based Challenges," "The Invisible Wounds of War," "The Long Shadow of War," "The Women of War," "Community-Based (Re)integration," and "Participatory Programme and Policy Design." Plenary reports following each session block ensured that the different groups could share their



findings with one another, facilitated by a summary provided by the note-taker, allowing for the exchange of feedback and comments. After some closing remarks, the conference concluded with a dinner in the historic “Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese” London pub.

## Concept and Methodology

The conference methodology was based on a comprehensive participatory approach, placing the guidance for its planning and execution in the hands of Ukrainian veterans, who were the subjects of the encounter, as well as the practitioners and policymakers involved in their support. The rationale behind employing a participatory methodology is that FAAs and those working directly with them are best suited to identify the issues impacting their proper context and hence determine the priorities and themes discussed during the conference. This was meant to put the agency of Ukrainian veterans at the heart of the format that incorporates a multitude of stakeholders generating ideas on provisions immediately concerning them, following the principle of “nothing about us without us”.<sup>409</sup>

The conceptual framework of the conference, along with the themes and questions for the Saturday breakout room sessions, was informed by 33 interviews conducted in Ukraine by Corioli Institute researchers between August 23rd and September 23rd, 2023. These interviews involved veterans, reintegration program directors, caseworkers, civil society professionals, volunteers, and policymakers, among other actors (**Annex A**). The Corioli Institute’s Research and Action approach adheres to the paradigm that research is not conducted merely “on” individuals. Instead, CI engages with local stakeholders in a collaborative group, defining the issue to be investigated and collectively plan and execute the subsequent processes.<sup>410</sup> The preparatory work for the conference was hence done in close coordination with veteran and practitioner representatives of the Ukrainian partner organization that facilitated the fieldwork process and were attending the event – The Ukrainian Veterans Foundation of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA), the Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement and the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX).

The experiences, perspectives and focal points revealed in the interviews were then systematically coded, through which six salient themes informing the Saturday breakout room sessions, the methodological core of the conference, could be inductively identified:

1. **“The Long Shadow of War”, i.e. reintegration in the context of ongoing violence**, as hostilities have been going on since Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and a decisive and clear end to armed actions in Ukraine is unlikely in the near future. The interviews revealed that veterans and their families face a range of challenges including infrastructure issues, data gaps on veterans’ locations, and intergenerational disparities. These are compounded by bureaucratic hurdles and extended front-line duty, particularly after the Russian invasion. It’s crucial to differentiate peacebuilding and reintegration from “post-conflict” contexts, as ongoing instability is anticipated for years to come.
2. **“Identity-Based Challenges”, i.e. the heterogeneity of veteran social and political identities like parent, professional, religious or community leader etc.** The interviews highlighted how these individuals move between multiple identities simultaneously, raising important questions about self-image, expectations, political alignments, and competing understandings of how war-related and reintegration experiences inform current life trajectories.
3. **“The Invisible Wounds of War”, i.e. the psychosocial challenges of reintegration.** In the context of an intense and brutal war, mental health challenges particularly related to PTSD and

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<sup>409</sup> Kilroy, *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants After Conflict*.



moral injury, are expected to be a major concern after basic livelihood. Neglecting these issues may lead to various risks including violence, radicalization, and substance abuse. The results from the fieldwork suggest that mistrust in institutions, institutional service gaps, and resistance to internationally developed models of psychosocial support among veteran populations will present challenges for importing approaches that are not sufficiently aligned with cultural understandings of mental health and wellbeing.

4. **“The Women of War”, i.e. the relevance of gendered reintegration experiences. Women experience distinct challenges, physically, psychologically, and socially, before and after leaving the conflict.** Exploratory interviews suggest that there is a lack of specialized medical and mental health care and a significant dissonance between how female fighters understand themselves (patriotic, involved in missions, occupying assault positions) and harmful stereotypes that have been applied to them (only in support roles, joining the military to find husbands). Additionally, wives, widows, and sisters play vital roles in supporting reintegration efforts through various leadership positions.
5. **“Community-Based Reintegration”, i.e. social and economic reintegration utilizing the resources, support, and connections within local communities.** This approach emphasizes community involvement as a crucial aspect of the reintegration process. In the Ukrainian context, it allows for local funding to be more flexible and responsive to veterans' needs, separate from national strategies. Key elements of this approach encompass local support networks, mental health services, employment and education support, housing assistance, peer mentoring, legal and financial aid, recreational activities, community engagement, and family support.
6. **“Participatory Program and Policy Design”, i.e. active participation, collaboration, and involvement of intended reintegration “beneficiaries”.** Given that this was the methodological rationale behind the conference planning process, its execution was also discussed for the broader realm of programming aimed at Ukrainian veterans. It refers to a holistic and inclusive approach that emphasizes active participation, collaboration, and involvement of intended “beneficiaries”, as well as the families, communities, and organizations in which they embed. The goal of participatory formerly armed actor reintegration is to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among ex-combatants while promoting social cohesion and stability in transitioning societies. The interviews revealed challenges to participatory programming including marginalization by the public sector, in part due to war-time priorities, and in part due to the opacity of the state along multiple axes.

The breakout room session prompts and the related discussion questions grounded in the same data were adjusted and approved in close collaboration with the aforementioned Ukrainian partners involved in the fieldwork. The same applied for the conference framing document sent to invitees, any preparatory readings and materials distributed to them (many of which were issued by these organizations directly) as well as general consideration about the conference’s formats, which besides the breakout room sessions encompassed two plenary report backs and an inaugural roundtable on the first day. Moreover, the organizers made sure that there was a balanced representation of Ukrainians in every breakout room session who were explicitly encouraged by the moderators to take the lead in the discussion and speak up if participants veered towards less relevant topics or if something would be misrepresented.

The breakout room discussions were carried out in a horizontal, conversational style, loosely structured around the guiding questions for each theme. The moderators let the conversation develop organically but ensured equal participation of all attendees across areas of regional expertise to fully engage the diversity in the room. Participants discussed the topics drawing from their diverse range of knowledge, while also integrating comparative perspectives on formerly armed actors in other regions of the world with the Ukrainian case while critically recognizing the peculiar nature of the latter. The aim of each



session was to collaboratively devise fitting policy or program recommendations that address the challenges identified by the prompt and set adequate priorities.

As an extension of the participatory logic applied to the Ukrainian leadership of the conference design, all participants were given the opportunity to comment on the drafted breakout session outlines before the event. Moreover pre- and post-conference surveys have served as a mechanism to evaluate the epistemic impact of the discussions and incorporate feedback on format, logistics and communication into future iterations of the “Our of War” franchise. Additionally, the event included two dinners to facilitate a blend of both structured and casual interactions among participants. This allowed for additional informal learning opportunities and encouraged intensive networking.<sup>411</sup>

The detailed notes taken during the Saturday breakout rooms, which accommodate a wide range of ideas and proposals for reintegration provisions in Ukraine across various governance and sectoral levels, as well as comparative empirical examples from diverse global contexts, serve as the foundation for the final policy paper resulting from the conference and the recommendations it puts forth. Similar to the process employed in conference planning, this paper will undergo multiple rounds of editing and review, all conducted by Ukrainian veterans and reintegration professionals. By deducting the core recommendations of the policy paper from a multinational and interdisciplinary encounter designed and executed in a profoundly participatory manner, it will be dedicated to the most immediate priorities and challenges shaping the experience of Ukraine’s frontline returnees.

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<sup>411</sup> Kilroy, *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants After Conflict*.

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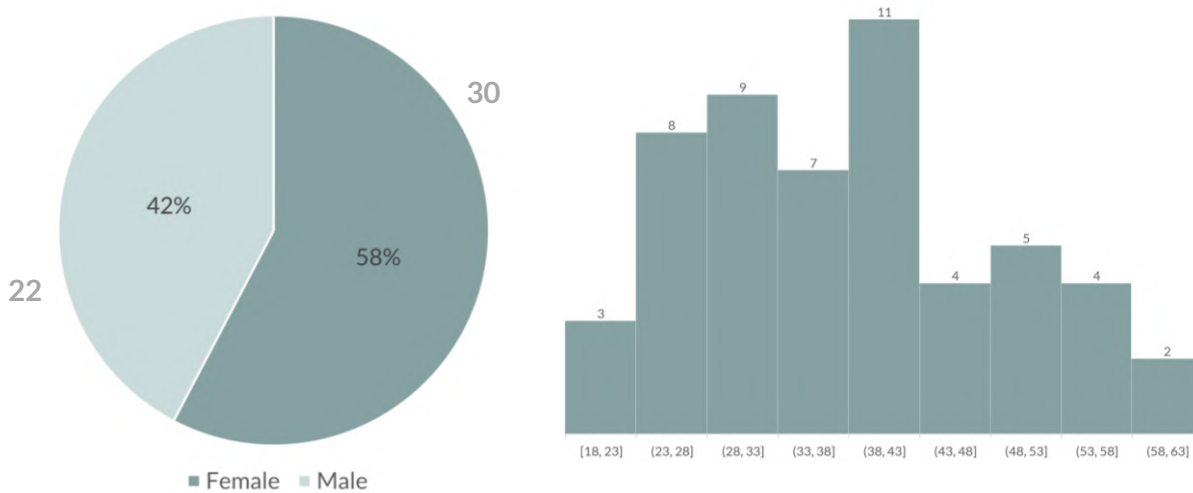


## Appendix C: Conference Statistics

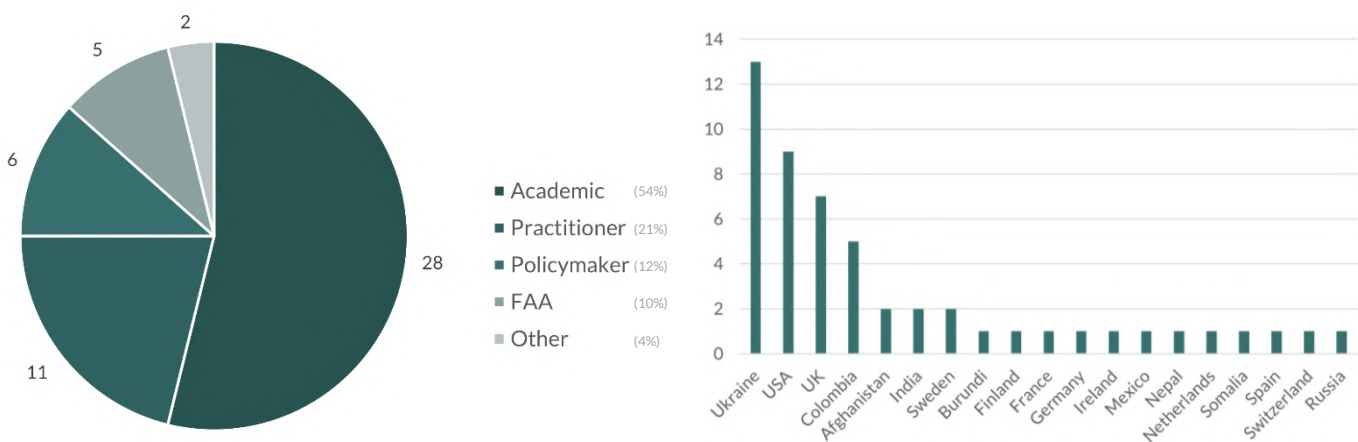
### Demographics

The “Out of War” conference was attended by 52 people from 19 countries, 30 (58%) of which were women and 22 (42%) men with an approximate average age of 39 years. The most prominent nationalities present by number of attendees were Ukraine (13), USA (9), UK (7) and Colombia (5). Most participants were academics (28 [54%]), followed by practitioners (11 [21%]), policymakers (6 [12%]), formerly armed actors (5 [10%]) and other (2 [4%]) (see figures below). Conference participants were mostly existing contacts of the Corioli Institute network and their recommended candidates or invited through online searches on people active in pertinent subject areas. Besides Ukrainian practitioners from the abovementioned veteran-related organizations, the conference was joined by representatives currently or formerly affiliated with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), Institute for International Conflict Resolution & Reconstruction (IICRR), Inclusive Peace, the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), Fundación Coppel, among others. Academic attendance included faculty members from LSE, the University of Oxford, King’s College London (KCL), the University of Chicago, the Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University and the Universidad de los Andes.

**Figures 1 and 2: Participant Age and Gender Composition**



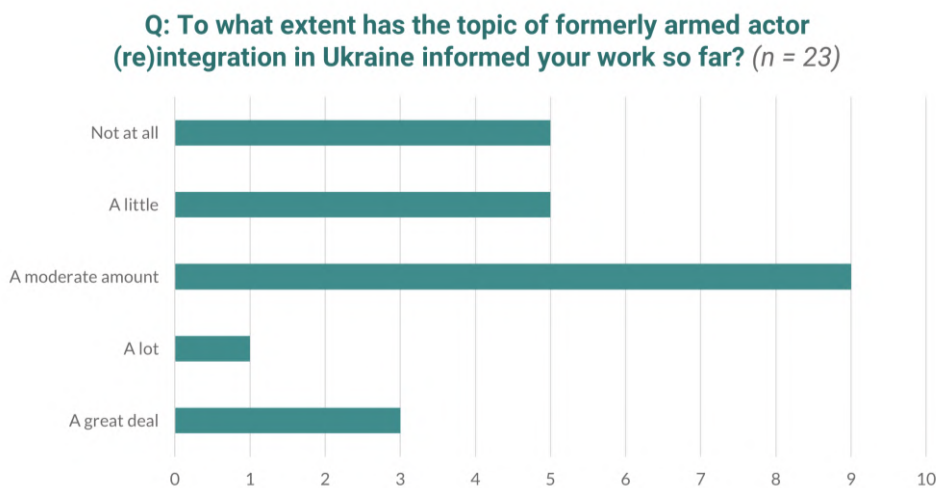
**Figures 3 and 4: Participant Backgrounds and Countries of Origin**



## Pre-Conference Survey

While the overwhelming majority of conference participants had a background in peacebuilding practice, peace and conflict studies or organized violence research, not everyone was actively dedicated in their work to the particular subject of formerly armed actor (FAA) reintegration. Out of 23 respondents, 10 (37%) stated that their work had been informed little or not at all by concerns of FAA reintegration thus far. Most answers (9 [32%]) indicated “a moderate amount” of influence with only one person answering “a lot” and three individuals stating that it had informed their work “a great deal” (figure 5). The purpose of the conference was to equally open up the discussion to individuals with lower degrees of involvement with FAA reintegration, to draw their attention to its importance in Ukraine and elsewhere and encourage them to consider it more frequently in their future research/practice.

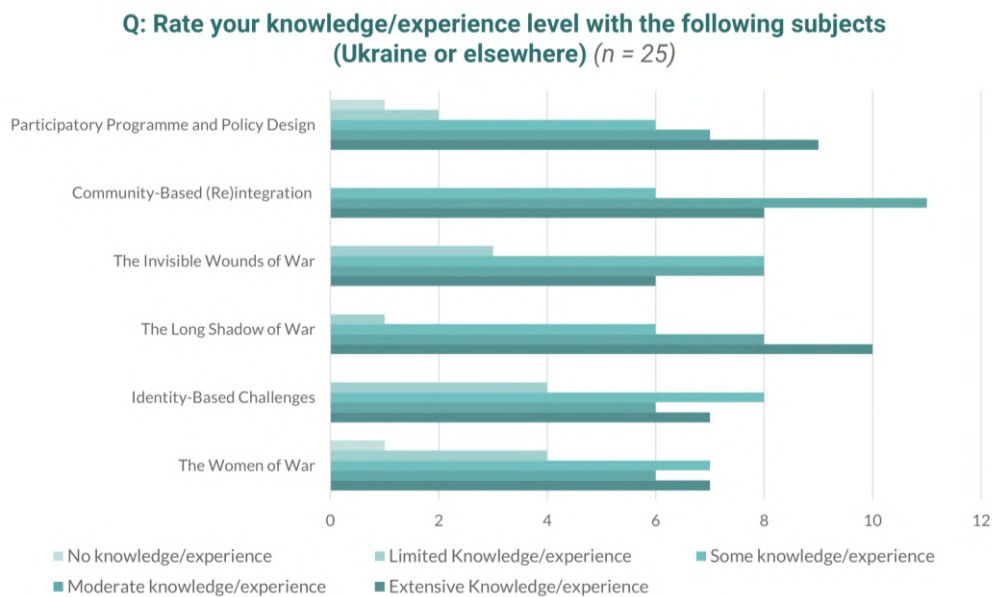
Figure 5



Participants indicated a high intermediate level of prior knowledge/experience with the six breakout room themes of the conference (Out of 25 responses, an average of 3.81 points on a scale from 1 [lowest] to 5 [highest]) (figure 6). Throughout the themes, “extensive knowledge/experience” was most frequently selected (47 times), followed by “moderate knowledge/experience” (46 times), “some knowledge/experience” (41 times), “limited knowledge/experience” (14 times), while “no knowledge/experience” about a given theme was indicated only twice overall. Respondents were most familiar with the topics of “The Long Shadow of War” and “Community-Based Reintegration,” both averaging 4.08 points. Among these, the former received the highest number of “extensive” responses (10), while the latter had the highest count of “moderate” responses (11) in the section. Likewise, “Participatory Program and Policy Design” scored an average of 3.84, “The Invisible Wounds of War” of 3.68 and “Identity-Based Challenges” of 3.64 while participants were least familiar with the topic of “The Women of War” (3.56 average). “The Women of War” was also the theme with the most evenly distributed or “leveled” degree of knowledge/experience among participants (1.47 standard deviations [SDs] from the mean), followed by “Identity-Based Challenges” (2.11 SDs) and “Participatory Policy and Program Design” (2.14 SDs). Despite participants only participating in their two assigned breakout rooms, the conference facilitated knowledge spillovers across groups with the plenary report backs adjacent to the sessions and the informal social events of the conference. The general increase in familiarity with the conference themes among attendees was captured by the post survey.



Figure 6



Participants expressed various motivations and objectives for attending the conference, including wanting to help Ukrainian veterans and their families while having the opportunity to gain new insights, build academic and professional connections, and share their relevant thoughts, knowledge, and experiences with peers. Understanding the Ukrainian reintegration situation served as a key driver for many, with a specific interest in directly learning from the involved stakeholders and veterans present. Participants also appreciated the policy-oriented format of the conference and were keen on contributing to the design of practical solutions that address immediate necessities on the ground. One respondent formulated their objectives as follows:

*“Learning to understand what the main challenges are at the moment, what has been done in the past and what Ukrainians with should be done going forward, how we can translate urgent proposals into concrete policy.”*

Moreover, attendees signaled interest in the international, cross-sectoral, and comparative nature of the event and the possibility of learning about other reintegration contexts to inform their own work. Their objectives were to better conceptualize common challenges faced by formerly armed actors globally, debate reintegration practices and policies applicable in Ukraine and beyond while strengthening their global networks with academics, policymakers, and practitioners in the field. Additionally, the objective to apply bottom-up, participatory approaches when elaborating on policy for Ukrainian veterans was emphasized. As one candidate, incorporating several of these motivations, put it:

*“I see the challenges of successfully reintegrating ex-combatants as fundamental to a society’s ability to make the transition from war to peace, to prevent a return to war, and to deal with its aftermath. I have not studied reintegration in a context such as Ukraine but feel that important lessons can be learned from each context, which will help for better planning. While an end to war in Ukraine sadly still looks very far away, it’s never too soon to start planning for reintegration and the other connected tasks in peacebuilding. I am particularly interested in participatory approaches to planning and reintegration; to understanding the many interconnected processes of reintegration through the lens of social capital (norms, networks, and trust); and the links between reintegration and transitional justice. I very much welcome the opportunity to take part in a conversation about all these issues, and to make connections and build relationships with others working in this area.”*

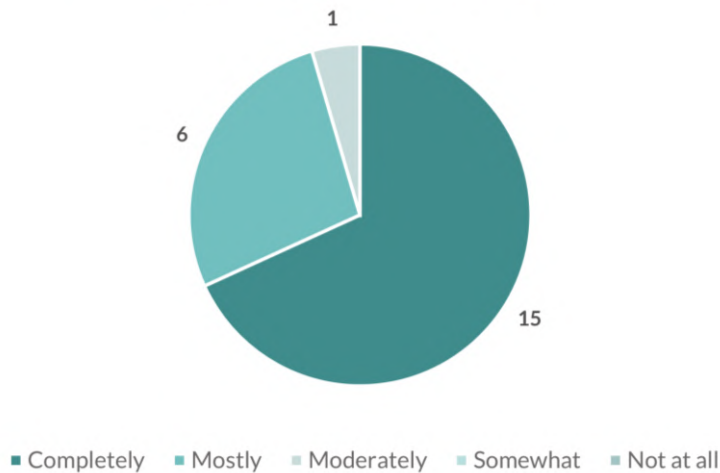


## Post-Conference Survey

Out of 22 respondents, 15 (68%) indicated that they “completely” accomplished their goals for this conference. Meanwhile 6 people (27%) stated they had accomplished them “mostly” and one person “moderately” (5%) (**figure 7**). This reveals an overall high satisfaction with the diverse outcomes of the conference with regards to the initial goals and motivations of rigorous learning, experiential contribution, peer-to-peer intellectual exchange, and international networking, among others.

**Figure 7**

**Q: To what extent did you accomplish your goals for attending this conference?**

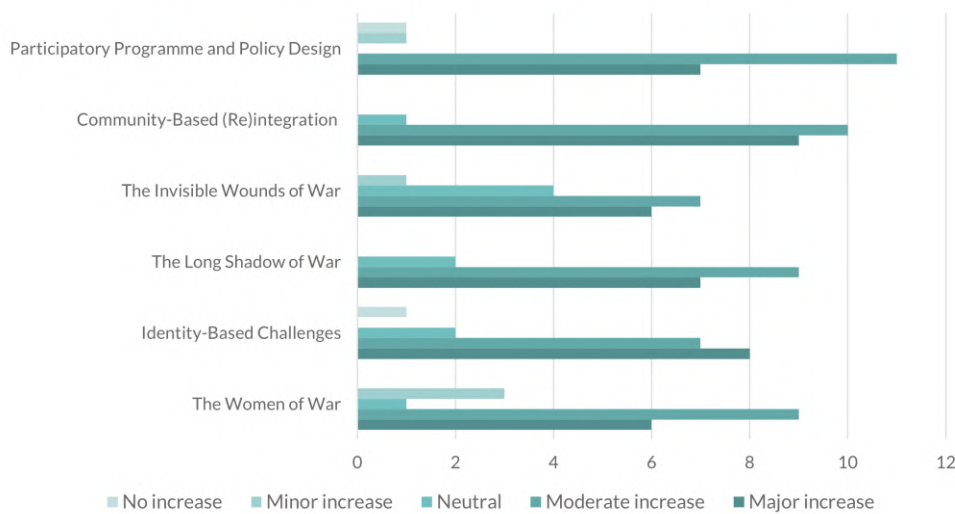


In the post-survey, participants could indicate an increase in familiarity with the six conference themes where they deemed relevant (**figure 8**). Across themes, a “moderate increase” in familiarity was selected 53 times, a “major increase” 43 times, “neutral” 10 times, and a “minor increase” and “no increase” just 5 and 2 times respectively. The most significant increase in familiarity was associated with “Community-Based reintegration” (average of 4.4 points, 20 respondents), followed by “The Long Shadow of War” (4.27 average, 18 respondents), “Identity-Based Challenges” (4.16 average, 18 respondents), “Participatory Program and Policy Design” (4.1 average, 20 respondents) and “The Invisible Wounds of War” (4.0 average, 18 respondents). Only “The Women of War” scored marginally below 4 with an average of 3.94 (19 respondents). Notably, this order correlates with the sequence of prior knowledge/experience averages captured in the pre-conference survey with a comparable margin (0.46 vs 0.52 points), which implies the enhancement of preexisting expertise in a consistent manner among participants. This association is based on a common cognitive tendency and reinforced by the fact that the breakout rooms were assigned partly based on attendees’ preferences and personal backgrounds. The distribution of responses beyond just participants’ corresponding breakout rooms, however, evidence the aforementioned intra-group knowledge spillovers during the conference. Overall, a mean increase in familiarity of 4.14 points across themes suggests that the event was highly successful in developing participants’ expertise in the diverse subtopics it covered – with the slight caveat that solely progress perceived relevant to attendees was captured, omitting a portion of less significant/non-existent changes in familiarity.



**Figure 8**

**Q: To what extent did participation in the conference increase your familiarity with the following themes? (n = 23)\***

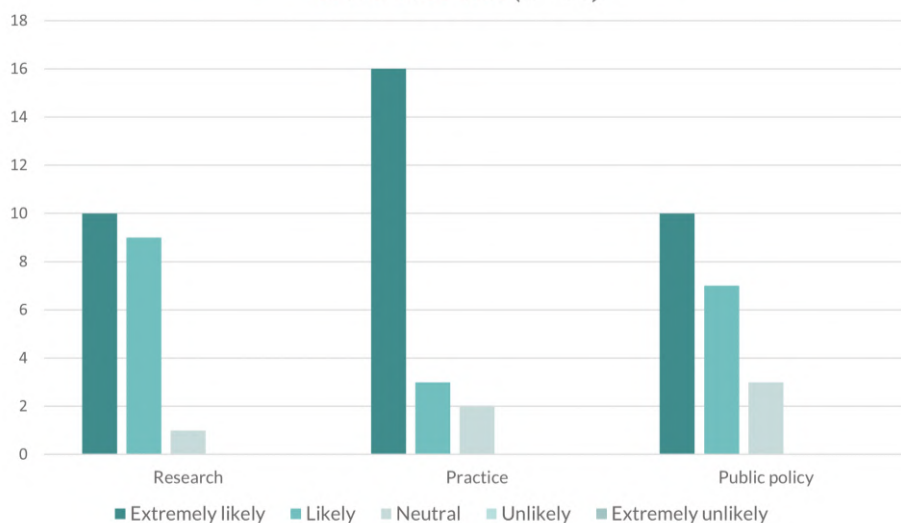


\*Overall respondents; responses on individual themes varied between 18 and 20.

The majority of 21 respondents reported it to be “extremely likely” that they would apply their experiences from the “Out of War” conference to research (10 [47%]), practice (16 [76%]) and public policy (10 [47%]) while 9 (42%), 3 (14%) and 7 (33%) respectively considered it “likely”. Only 6 candidates responded neutrally overall, and none fell below this category (figure 9). This illustrates how the conference successfully inspired attendees to integrate this new knowledge into their own work or cross-sectoral areas of interaction, whether related to the Ukrainian case, comparative FAA reintegration, or settings of organized violence in general. “Out of War’s” impact is thus expected to catalyze novel meaningful engagements with these topics in the future and promote innovative approaches and informed decision-making across attendees’ diverse professional domains. Participants’ notable emphasis on applying the insights from the event to practice reflects the action-oriented and hands-on nature of the conference, aligning with the intentional design of its formats by the organizers.

**Figure 9**

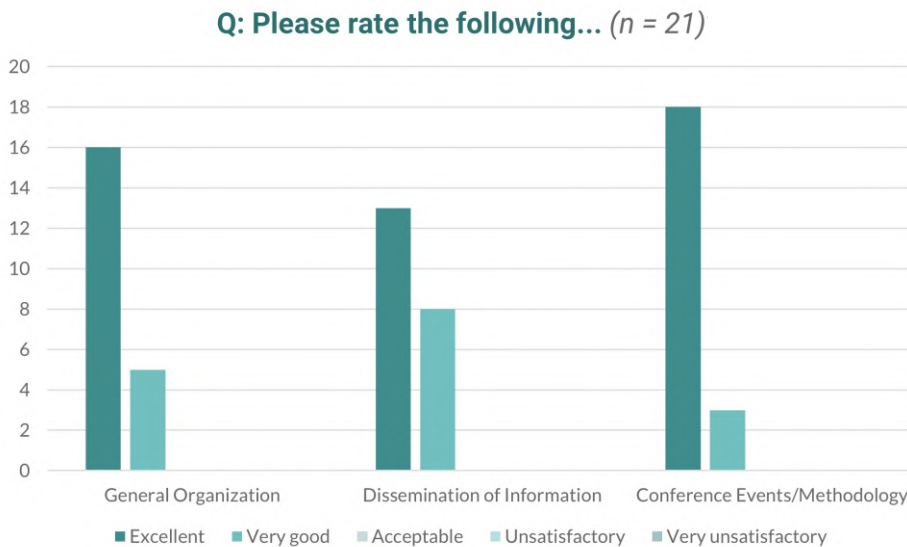
**Q: How likely are you to apply your experiences in this conference to... (n = 21)\***



\*Category “I do not work in this sector” with two responses hidden for legibility purposes.

Participants also provided outstanding feedback on the execution of the conference by rating it either “excellent” (74.6%) or “very good” (25.4%) across general organization, dissemination of information and conference events/methodology (figure 10). The latter category, arguably the most important aspect of the conference, stood out as the most highly acclaimed one with 18 respondents (86 %) rating it “excellent” and 3 respondents (14%) “very good”. “Dissemination of Information” had the most balanced rating (62% “excellent” vs. 38% “very good”), which highlights the necessary focus on refining the communication strategy in future conferences organized by the Corioli Institute.

**Figure 10**



In the written remarks on the strengths of this encounter, participants commended the conferences’ global and inter-disciplinary approach, enabling creative solutions to emerge from exchanges between individuals facing similar challenges but within different contexts. The smooth and carefully planned organization of the event also received praise for its effective use of time and scope and the incorporation of diverse informal networking opportunities in comfortable venues with good catering. Moreover, attendees appreciated the diverse, well-balanced, and majority female mix of attendees, representing policymakers, practitioners, veterans, and researchers offering a vast range of experiences and expertise. The Ukrainian-led nature of the event was also positively pointed out:

*“The conference was an exceptional confluence of individuals who care deeply about impact and research, and it was a wonderful experience to engage with researchers and practitioners with varied experiences who were open to sharing lessons learned while also listening to the voices from Ukraine, trying to truly understand the situation. It was great to have perspectives from Ukraine present both to understand the current situation as well as to understand their responses to researchers’ perspectives particularly with respect to reintegration.”*

*“The wide range of academics, practitioners, and those directly affected by the war allowed for substantive discussion beyond theoretical framing and allowed each group to dig deep into the shortfalls and solutions of veteran reintegration in Ukraine.”*

Additionally, participants underscored the suitability of the conference’s discussion formats with small breakout rooms allowing for more profound and focused exchanges, facilitated by the provision of preparatory materials and a moderation that would guide and catalyze the conversations appropriately. Overall, the strengths outlined in the survey feedback reflect the success of the conference in fostering dynamic exchanges and meaningful connections among diverse participants while engaging them in a holistic and comparative perspective on the issue of Ukrainian veterans’ reintegration. The most salient



objective of the conference, that attendees take fruitful and valuable experiences home, has been accomplished according to numerous testimonials:

*“After learning the challenges that the veterans are facing, this will change in the way I used to misinterpret their behaviors. I will develop an understanding spirit and commit myself to their support instead of judging them. I say that because I used to criticize many of my veteran acquaintances, and I used to consider them as irresponsible, careless, and things like that.”*

*“A very valuable event. Lots of food for thought; discussion and debate has sparked several ideas that I will run with and actively look to build into project design and implementation in my day-to-day role. I met several people whom I will be continuing to speak and meet with, including in Ukraine, to progress ideas, collaboration, and coordination. To have such a breadth and depth of knowledge and experience in one relatively small group (i.e. small enough to be conducive to discussion, to foster professional relationships etc.) was really impressive. Thank you very much!”*

Participants also provided valuable feedback on how the conference experience could be enhanced. Several suggestions revolved around the need for more time with a desire for more/longer breakout room sessions and additional opportunities for networking interaction. The idea of extending the conference to cover two full days instead of one and a half was frequently suggested, also highlighting concerns about feeling fatigued by the busy schedule. Additional time, as one participant pointed out, would also provide the opportunity to create more tangible outputs on the spot, such as plenary reports following breakout sessions. Attendees also expressed a desire for more in-depth coverage of specific topics such as employment and retraining, educational programs, and family reintegration and to involve additional experts in the breakout rooms, possibly through online participation. The Corioli Institute will plan its next “Out of War” conference to take place on two entire days, to add more discussion formats, networking opportunities and to spread out instances of intense deliberation over a longer time period. This would maximize the benefits for participants taking the time to arrive from all over the world at a just marginally higher cost.





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