



A Strategic Blueprint for Strengthening U.S.-Ukraine Cooperation in Assisting Ukrainian Veterans

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This paper is based on the Ukraine's Strategy for a Military Service to Civilian Life Transition until 2032 and Ukrainian veterans' opinion surveys, on the one hand, and expertise of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), including VA's 2018-2024 Strategic Plan and Veteran's journey map, on the other hand. The aim is to facilitate building bridges between official agencies, veterans, veteran families, media, NGOs, and service providers playing an important role in veterans' reintegration on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Framework addresses activities that may be undertaken both at the state and community levels by a variety of stakeholders with assistance and guidance of the U.S. It may serve as a useful tool for honoring those who protected not only Ukraine's national interests but its very existence and democratic world as a whole.

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¹ The Framework excludes veterans of the Second World War living on the territory of Ukraine or any other conflicts other than the Russian aggression against Ukraine launched in 2014.

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Executive Summary

As Ukraine looks ahead to a future post-war period, it faces an unprecedented challenge in reintegrating a projected 3-5 million veterans and their families, comprising up to 15% of its population. The United States, with its long history of implementing effective veteran support policies and programs, is uniquely positioned to assist Ukraine in this critical undertaking. The Strategic Framework for Enhancing U.S.-Ukraine Collaboration in Supporting Ukrainian Veterans outlines key issues and actionable opportunities for the two countries to work together across 11 crucial areas.

1. Development of state veteran policy and social guarantees
2. Employment, education, training, and re-qualification
3. Medical care and rehabilitation
4. Psychological assistance
5. Community-based veteran support
6. Protection of veterans' rights
7. Designing accessible spaces
8. Political participation of veterans
9. Memory policy to honor veterans
10. Positive portrayal of veterans in media
11. Veteran and family-focused NGOs

For each area, the framework compares current policies and programs in the U.S. and Ukraine, identifies gaps and needs, and proposes specific initiatives for bilateral collaboration. Key recommendations include:

- Adapting U.S. models for comprehensive, human-centric veteran support services.
- Joint programs for veteran employment, entrepreneurship, and career transition.
- Exchanges to build capacity in medical care, rehabilitation, and mental health.
- Training for communities to better understand and support veterans.
- Advocacy for inclusive policies and positive media representation of veterans.
- Partnerships between U.S. and Ukrainian veteran-focused NGOs.

By implementing these initiatives, the U.S. and Ukraine have an opportunity to transform the lives of millions of Ukrainian veterans and their families, while deepening the strategic partnership between the two countries. The framework aims to inform and inspire policymakers, organizations, and individuals to take action in supporting Ukraine's veteran population at this critical juncture in history. Swift, coordinated efforts are needed to translate these recommendations into real programs and services on the ground. With the right collaboration and resources, Ukrainian veterans can thrive as vital contributors to their communities and the country's future.

Context

The United States is home to over 18 million living veterans, comprising approximately 6% of the nation's adult population. Approximately 200,000 service members transition out of the military each year, with many facing significant challenges upon reintegration into civilian life. Tragically, one-third of veterans face chronic physical health issues, half grapple with mental health issues, half struggle with friendships, relationships, and readjusting to civilian life, and far too many die by suicide, according to VA's Center to Improve Veterans Involvement in Care (CIVIC).

The U.S. has a long-standing history of implementing systemic policies and programs aimed at assisting American veterans, caregivers, survivors, and their families. The VA mission comes from the 16th U.S. President, Abraham Lincoln, "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan." These initiatives are also informed by numerous studies highlighting significant post-war readjustment challenges and provide strategies for overcoming or preventing them. The families of both veterans and deceased military personnel are also the focus of research and national policies.

Ukraine's victory is in the U.S. strategic interest and enhancing the exchange of experience between American and Ukrainian stakeholders will provide a valuable source of information for Ukrainian authorities, veterans, and civil society facing an unprecedented scope of challenges with reintegration, social and economic protection, and support to veterans' families.

Since the invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and especially after the full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine's veteran community has significantly increased. As of January 1, 2022, Ukraine had approximately 500,000 combatants. Given the prolonged nature of the war and its intensity, the projected number of veterans, their family members, and the families of fallen soldiers after the victory is estimated to be around 3-5 million people in a country with a total population of less than 40 million.

Categories of population covered by the Ukrainian state socio-economic protection efforts as a result of Russian aggression launched in 2014 (as of March 2024)



Source: Analytical information based on data from the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine.

Ukraine has already made significant progress in designing and implementing a state veteran development policy. The goal of which is to provide veterans with comprehensive opportunities for fulfillment and active participation in society when they return, while also implementing policies to ensure their social protection guarantees. However, there is still work to be done.

U.S.-Ukrainian cooperation in this field may play a significant role in strengthening Ukraine as a bastion to oppose forces willing to reestablish an outdated, colonial world order and contribute to shrinking of democratic space.

The scope of the Strategic Framework for Enhancing U.S.-Ukraine Collaboration in Supporting Ukrainian Veterans

The Strategic Framework encompasses a broad spectrum of measures, to be implemented at both the state and community levels in Ukraine, across various sectors crucial for establishing favorable conditions for veteran reintegration. Each section offers a brief overview of a particular issue, compares the current situations in the U.S. and Ukraine to provide a potential cooperation framework, and concludes with recommendations for bilateral collaboration.

This document is complementary to Ukraine's Strategy for a Military Service to Civilian Life Transition until 2032. The topics addressing veteran challenges outlined in this document are not exhaustive and there is still a vast potential for expanded collaboration in support of veterans in the near future

The scope of the Strategic Framework for Enhancing U.S.-Ukraine Collaboration in Supporting Ukrainian Veterans



Development of state policy and social guarantees

“As Americans, it’s our sacred obligation to serve Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors — just like they’ve served us...We won’t rest until every Veteran gets the care and benefits they deserve.”
VA Secretary Denis McDonough.

The United States Veteran reintegration policy is designed to provide comprehensive support to veterans transitioning to civilian life. It is underpinned by a robust legislative framework, including landmark laws such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act, and most recently, the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act.

Central to the implementation of these policies are key agencies such as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) which is responsible for administering various benefits and healthcare services, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which oversees housing assistance programs for veterans, and the Department of Justice (DOJ) which protects veterans rights.

Through initiatives like the Post-9/11 GI Bill, veterans are entitled to educational benefits, including tuition assistance, housing stipends, and funding for vocational training and certification programs. VA's healthcare system offers a range of medical services tailored to veterans' needs, including primary care, mental health counseling, and specialized care for service-related injuries.

Housing support is provided through programs like the Housing Choice Voucher program, which assists veterans in securing affordable housing in the private rental market. Approximately 13% of homeless adults are veterans, per the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. Additionally, HUD's Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program combines HUD's housing vouchers with VA's supportive services to help homeless veterans find and sustain permanent housing. Veteran-run NGOs, like U.S.VETS and Swords to Plowshares, support veterans' successful transition by providing housing, counseling, career development, and comprehensive support.

The transition from military service to civilian employment is facilitated by programs like the Department of Defense (DOD)'s Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which offers counseling, job search assistance, and resume writing workshops for transitioning service members. Additionally, DOD partners with private industry as part of the SkillBridge program, allowing service members to receive specific industry training, apprenticeships, or internships during the last 180 days of their service. Veterans also have access to career counseling services and job placement assistance through American Job Centers nationwide. Recognizing the importance of family support, many of the government benefits and services are extended to spouses and dependents of veterans, including educational assistance and healthcare coverage.

To ensure easy access to information and services, online platforms such as VA's eBenefits portal and DOD's Military OneSource website provide veterans and their families with a centralized resource for exploring benefits, locating healthcare providers, and accessing community support programs. These online tools enhance the efficiency of veteran reintegration efforts and empower individuals to navigate the transition process successfully.

Since 2020, the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv has collaborated with civil society leaders, researchers, and implementers to facilitate the reintegration of Ukraine's courageous veterans into society. The Veterans Reintegration Program was created to use data-driven insights to equip Ukraine with tools aimed at enhancing services for the care of Donbas veterans. After the full-scale invasion, the scope of this task has grown enormously.

Recently, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine has initiated the "Transition" project, aimed at creating a comprehensive roadmap for the effective reintegration of veterans into civilian life. This ambitious endeavor involves the collaboration of 23 government agencies, including the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Each has been tasked with specific responsibilities within their respective domain. Some agreements are already in place for specific American-Ukrainian projects, like those for adaptive sports and psychological rehabilitation.

The Ukrainian Veterans Foundation, functioning under the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, serves as an instrument in facilitating state support for veterans and their families. The Foundation is a guide for veterans in life, a creator of opportunities, an advocate for the interests of Ukrainian veterans, an expert on veterans' issues, and a generator of solutions for veterans' policy.

The Government has already established the Institute for Veterans' Assistants, a peer-to-peer support program, to provide individual support to defenders on issues of vital importance to them. According to the Prime Minister, special structural units will operate under the regional military administrations, and service offices for veterans' affairs will be established on the ground. Their role will be to coordinate the implementation of state, regional and local support programmes.

Currently, Ukraine offers a range of social benefits – from free healthcare services, loans for housing, free transportation for veterans with limited mobility to assistance with education and employment.

The E-Veteran information portal (eveteran.gov.ua) offers comprehensive information on social protection issues and services in 21 categories.

Ukrainian NGOs are playing an important role in shaping veteran state policy. Drawing on their collective experience, research, and insights from other nations, civil society organizations like "Princip," Veteran Hub, "Legal Hundred," "Space of Opportunities," and the VETERANKA movement have put forward a conceptual framework for shaping state policies concerning veterans, female veterans, and their families. They underline that veterans and their families are entitled to dignified services and support.

The state must identify and understand vets' needs, ensuring they have a lifelong support network, recognizing that the consequences of war, both physical and psychological, endure indefinitely.

Window for cooperation opportunities

- ➡ • To facilitate the modernization of Ukraine's veteran policy, ensuring it is human-centric and comprehensive, providing transparent and timely services tailored to veterans' needs and easily accessible. It should cover all stages of life, having short, medium, and long-term horizons;
- ➡ • To assist in developing coordinated routes for veteran reintegration within a comprehensive roadmap outlining the journey of veterans. This entails aligning various support services and resources to ensure a holistic approach to the veteran's recovery path;
- ➡ • To help elaborate qualitative and quantitative indicators for assessment of the implementation of state veteran policy, which would cover a wide range of issues and veteran groups;
- ➡ • To support studies and alternative reports on the state of affairs with implementation of the state veteran policy;
- ➡ • To ensuring the effective operation of the Unified State Registry of War Veterans, vital for proper functioning and seamless identification of veterans across all state registries and systems, especially concerning social protection and healthcare;
- ➡ • To help ensure that e-services for veterans allow access to information for individuals with sensory impairments is crucial. Common barriers include inaccessible websites, limited use of Braille, sign language, and subtitles, and a lack of socially significant information in easy-to-understand language. These challenges were exacerbated during the full-scale invasion, highlighting the need for improved accessibility measures.

Employment, Education and Training, Re-qualification

The U.S. has a multitude of veterans' employment, education and training, and re-qualification programs run by a variety of stakeholders – from government agencies like the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Office of Veterans Employment at the U.S. Department of the Interior, the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service, and the Department of Defense to private businesses and a large ecosystem of NGOs.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for U.S. veterans is 2.8%, which is lower than the rate for non-veterans. However, American veterans consistently cite "finding employment" as their most significant challenge during the transition process, often struggling to translate their military skills into a civilian context. They also report the need for support with networking skills.

By contrast, the unemployment rate among Ukrainian veterans has risen to 30.95%, according to the 2024 Ukrainian Veterans Foundation's research on current needs and opportunities for career and professional growth among veterans. It also shows that only 12% of Ukrainian veterans have their own business, while more than 50% would like to have one.

The Ukrainian Government has already elaborated measures like launching the G2VEI online platform to support veteran entrepreneurial initiatives and employment; introducing the "Created by Defenders" trademark to promote veteran businesses nationally and internationally; highlighting success stories to raise awareness of products and services offered by Ukrainian veteran entrepreneurs; organizing annual large-scale events, facilitated by the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, to promote entrepreneurial initiatives and foster new business relationships; hosting an annual business forum for veteran business people; an annual ranking competition titled "Veteran Entrepreneur of the Year", etc.

Considering that numerous current servicemen joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine in 2022 after the full-scale invasion, having already obtained education and professional experience, many veterans may choose to pursue additional training in their respective occupations, rather than requalification. Nonetheless, opportunities should be available for those who either lacked the opportunity to acquire desired education and qualifications, aspire to change career paths, or become self-employed. Six Veterans Development Centres have already been opened at the country's leading universities.

State programs, private grants and international programs should be in place to offer veterans free pre-tertiary and tertiary education, including doctoral and post-doc programs. The IT sector stands out as one of the most promising fields, benefiting from Ukraine's reputation for producing highly skilled IT specialists. Implementing programs tailored for veterans in this sector can facilitate their international employment in an increasingly technology-driven world and provide opportunities for engagement, particularly for those with limited mobility.

Ukraine has ambitions to become the largest arms producer in Europe. Investing in Ukraine's defense sector and involving qualified veterans in R&D and production could be a viable option.

Ukraine should boost the development of a qualification assessment system and establishment of qualification centers offering special discounts for veterans or provision of requalification assessment services free of charge. This initiative would expedite veterans' access to better job opportunities. Condominium management is one of the professions that could be promptly acquired as a result of professional qualification.

Another avenue for engagement could involve veterans transitioning into roles as professional trainers for diverse groups such as civil servants, NGOs, police, media personnel, HR managers, and business owners. There has been a longstanding demand for enhanced competencies in positions involving interaction with veterans, presenting opportunities for veterans to bolster engagement in the third sector and foster cooperation with international organizations.

Ukraine could explore the implementation of quotas or a degree of preference for hiring veterans in public service positions, and introduce target incentive mechanisms for businesses to actively recruit more veterans and mentor those aspiring to start their own businesses. The state vision is described in the Strategy for the Development of Entrepreneurial Initiatives for War Veterans for the Period up to 2030. It states that veterans' main focus is on the development of policies on tax benefits, mechanisms of financial support, education (including internships), advisory support (particularly mentoring), creation of a unified information portal, and establishment of veteran business associations.

96% of Ukrainians feel positive about veterans as their co-workers. More initiatives are necessary to educate businesses and hiring professionals about employment strategies tailored to veterans. Moreover, substantial endeavors are required to create online platforms and offline programs to guide veterans in shaping their post-military career trajectories, as well as coordinate businesses to submit data about openings for veterans into joint jobs databases.

Ukraine should actively engage with international companies to participate in programs aimed at providing opportunities for Ukrainian veterans, both in-office and through remote work. Especially in view of future investments in the reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine, the government should incentivize incoming international businesses to hire veterans and involve them in various training programs and projects.

Window for cooperation opportunities

- ➡ • To foster cooperation of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Office of Veterans Employment at the The U.S. Department of the Interior, the Department of Defense and other relevant agencies with Ukrainian Ministry of Veteran Affairs, Ministry of social policy, Employment service and other relevant agencies for adaptation of American experience of veterans' training, retraining and employment. In particular, to support analytical research to support changes to the legislative framework on entrepreneurial activities in Ukraine, including the Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection";
- ➡ • To assist Ukraine in elaboration and implementation of methodology and instruments for systemic data collection on veterans' unemployment rate, skill gap, opportunities for training and retraining;
- ➡ • To assist Ukraine in elaboration and implementation of methodology and instruments for systemic data collection on veterans' challenges they face with regards to employment and labor rights protection, as well as recommendations to come with strategies to overcome challenges;
- ➡ • To provide help with elaboration and launch of an analogues of The SkillBridge Program. It collaborates with numerous industry partners across various fields to provide service members with 180 days or fewer remaining before their military discharge with real-world training and work experience in high-demand sectors;
- ➡ • To help adapt experience of The Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program to the existing in Ukraine dual education options among Ukrainian veterans. These are pre-tertiary and tertiary education programs based on educational establishment-business cooperation, which significantly increases chances of employment after graduation;
- ➡ • To jointly discover opportunities for international academic exchange of Ukrainian veterans enrolled into pre-doctoral, doctoral and post-doctoral programs;
- ➡ • To help Ukraine develop an analogue of the Military Skills Translator, which helps match military experience to civilian jobs, or My Next Move job search engine;
- ➡ • To assist with elaboration and implementation of initiatives aimed at engaging Ukrainian and international employers into training and hiring Ukrainian veterans. For example, grants or adoption of the legislation motivating businesses to organize training programs and paid internships for veterans with possible further employment;

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- ➡ • To foster trips of experience exchange trips, especially on running businesses and mechanisms of effective management;
 - ➡ • To consult on drafting information materials for veterans on such programs and opportunities like the SkillBridge materials, and more comprehensive guidelines for post-military life planning like the Veteran's Journey Map;
 - ➡ • To support the development of an analogue of the Toolkit for Managers and HR Professionals or the Department of Labor's toolkit America's Heroes at Work, to assist hiring professionals with addressing inquiries related to veteran hiring/employment, and building a network of veteran employment partners. It dissemination may require raising awareness events like seminars for managers and HR professionals. This may help identify and hire qualified veterans through non-competitive means;
 - ➡ • To pay special attention to adaptation of the The Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) and Local Veteran Employment Representatives and Operation Warfighter Federal internship program for wounded, ill, and injured Service-members. ;
 - ➡ • Rather than providing generic entrepreneurship training, consider allocating grants to established business owners willing to mentor veterans seeking to enter specific industries and start their own businesses;
 - ➡ • To share perspectives of employers who not just provide employment but support veterans' transition to civilian life and accommodate any health challenges they might be facing. Such knowledge may be translated into a larger systemic awareness-rising campaign among employers on customized for veterans employment and integration practices;
 - ➡ • Increase the share of international aid allocated to support veteran-owned businesses and provide tailored training by professionals based on the specific business needs;
 - ➡ • To foster American-Ukrainian business cooperation of veterans through online and offline networking events;
 - ➡ • To foster cooperation of veterans' business associations (to be created) and U.S. organizations like the National Veteran-Owned Business Association or American Veteran Owned Business Association;
 - ➡ • To help develop and run awareness raising campaign for veterans on existing and new opportunities and instruments.
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Medical care and rehabilitation

“To care for him who shall have borne the battle
and for his widow, and his orphan”
President Abraham Lincoln

Veterans encounter specialized health and well-being challenges attributed to their military background. Thus, medical care is an essential component of their reintegration.

A comprehensive legal framework is in place to ensure that U.S. veterans have access to necessary medical care and rehabilitation services. Laws such as the PACT Act, the Veterans Health Care Eligibility Reform Act, Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act, MISSION Act, and Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act address various aspects of veterans' healthcare needs, eligibility criteria, and access to services. These laws aim to improve veterans' access to healthcare, expand options for receiving care outside the Department of Veterans Affairs system, and enhance services for specific issues like substance abuse. Additionally, organizations like the VA, Veterans Health Administration, Wounded Warrior Project, Disabled American Veterans, and Veterans of Foreign Wars work alongside legislation to provide comprehensive healthcare, rehabilitation, and support services to veterans across the country.

The Department of Veterans Affairs oversee a vast network of 1,321 health care facilities, including 172 VA medical centers, with over 410,000 individuals involved in the veteran benefits and rehabilitation system in the country.

Veterans and their families may qualify for health benefits and medical assistance, including the fundamental Medical Benefits Package for Veterans, which encompasses eligibility for dental and mental health benefits, as well as care for dependents and family through programs like the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Tele-rehabilitation offers essential rehabilitation treatment to Veteran patients, improving care continuity and minimizing travel time, especially for those facing long distances to access care at a Veterans Health Administration medical facility.

The existing Ukrainian medical system must expand its capacity to accommodate the increasing number of veterans in need of rehabilitation services, the severity of their injuries, and the quality of management necessary. Ukraine's Prime-Minister announced the establishment of a network of modern rehabilitation centers throughout Ukraine that will provide comprehensive assistance: physical rehabilitation, post-traumatic stress disorder treatment, and support for the families of the defenders.

The government aims to create an inclusive, convenient, non-bureaucratic, and transparent system, implementing the principle of "documents follow the military personnel." This may require legislation changes, as the Law of Ukraine "On Rehabilitation in the Healthcare Sector" (2020) and Resolution No. 1268 "Organization of Rehabilitation in the Healthcare Sector" (2021) were adopted before the full-scale invasion.

Ukrainian veterans are entitled to a range of free medical services including rehabilitation assessment, individualized therapy plans, neurorehabilitation, orthopedic and cardio-respiratory rehabilitation, pain management in hospitals, and psychological support.

Approximately 50,000 Ukrainian military personnel have undergone amputations due to injuries. The Ministry of Social Policy has an algorithm to help apply for free prosthetics. If an individual is still hospitalized, they may seek assistance from an officially designated social worker who can aid in processing the necessary paperwork. Some hospitals have social workers integrated into multidisciplinary rehabilitation teams as part of an official pilot project. Otherwise, the individual should either request assistance from a specialist through the territorial branch of the Fund for Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities, or use an electronic cabinet for people with disabilities– a MSP service that enables the safe online submission of documents to obtain rehabilitation aids free of charge.

Previous efforts allowed equipping 21 Ukrainian experts with knowledge in modern prosthetic technologies and rehabilitation in accordance with the standards of the International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics. American-Ukrainian collaboration in prosthetics is vital for expanding veterans' opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration.

In the first half of 2023, doctors in Ukraine diagnosed more than 19,000 people with vision loss or impairment, some of whom are civilians. The "Modern View" public association has launched the "Life After War" project to rehabilitate veterans who lost their vision while serving Ukraine. Through field training and rehabilitation camps, the project supports service members and their families affected by sight loss, facilitating their transition to independent living.

Window for cooperation opportunities

- ➡ • To promote collaboration between the U.S. and Ukraine in transitioning to the patient-centered care model, which moves away from a "disease-based" approach to healthcare. Instead, it focuses on addressing various determinants of health, including physical, emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and environmental factors. The system should be sensitive to gender diversity following the example of the VA that has expanded medical services by including maternity care, breast cancer screenings, and reproductive care for veterans;
- ➡ • To foster international cooperation and the implementation of innovative rehabilitation techniques and approaches like telerehabilitation;
- ➡ • To aid in the establishment of collaborative American-Ukrainian enterprises specializing in prosthetic solutions;
- ➡ • To continue training and certification of Ukrainian specialists in prosthetics;
- ➡ • To exchange experience on approaches to assisting family caregivers approved as providers of personal care services for an eligible veteran;
- ➡ • To help increase military cultural competence of healthcare professionals through cooperation with organizations like the Center for Deployment Psychology;
- ➡ • To assist Ukraine's plans to introduce a medical insurance scheme for veterans. Drawing on successful international models, this proposal aims to provide comprehensive medical coverage tailored to the unique needs of veterans as a distinct population category.

Psychological assistance

“*However hard it may have been for us, we will definitely never be ashamed.*”
General Valery Zaluzhny

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Psychological assistance is an important part of medical care and the veteran reintegration process. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, nearly 1 in 4 active-duty members in the U.S. exhibit signs of a mental health condition, including PTSD, depression, suicidality, and traumatic brain injury. Substance use among veterans is another issue that poses a significant challenge to their reintegration into civilian life causing antisocial behavior.

The United States' comprehensive framework of laws, regulations, programs, and facilities supporting veterans can offer valuable insights for Ukraine in addressing its growing population of veterans.

The Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine oversees primary psychological assistance, while cases beyond the psychologist's scope are referred to the psychiatric system under the Ministry of Health. As of 2023, a total of 9,349 healthcare providers in 1,425 medical facilities, operating under contract(s) with the National Health Service of Ukraine, offer free psychological and psychiatric assistance across 3,816 service locations. All of these providers are listed on the [electronic map](#) of healthcare providers under the direction of "Psychological and Psychiatric Assistance."

The MVA is also enhancing MARTA, an online system for assessing mental health, which enables veterans and their families to anonymously and remotely test their psychological needs and access recommended materials without stigma.

Moreover, a significant share of psychological support is provided by private clinics or individual healthcare specialists on voluntary basis or due to international support programs.

In the 2023 state budget, 540 million UAH (almost 14 million U.S. dollars) was allocated for the implementation of the MVA programs for psychological rehabilitation, professional adaptation, and sanatorium-resort treatment of military personnel. The Register of Providers of Psychological Rehabilitation Services for Veterans and their Families was launched. Psychologists and other specialists in psychological health who wish to engage in the rehabilitation of military personnel can apply electronically to be included in the Register.

Furthermore, Ukraine is developing a National Program for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, which includes training for psychologists, social workers, educators, and rapid methods of psychological support. The Ministry of Health of Ukraine is particularly focusing on training family doctors to enable them to conduct early diagnosis and provide necessary assistance. The main target groups are individuals with PTSD, military families, and affected civilians.

Suicide among veterans is an enormous challenge to combat, it is VA's #1 clinical priority. U.S. veterans facing acute suicidal crises can now receive emergency healthcare at any VA

The suicide rate among Ukrainian veterans is unknown. There used to be several suicide prevention campaigns like “Just Live”. Lifeline Ukraine operates as a national helpline for suicide prevention and mental health support, available 24/7. Established to address the alarming suicide rates among veterans, it now serves all residents of Ukraine, supported by the Veterans Reintegration Program in collaboration with IREX and Lifeline Ukraine, funded by the U.S. Department of State. The Ukrainian Veteran Foundation has also launched a crisis support hotline to provide assistance and support for veterans and their families.

The connection between combat exposure, service injuries, military sexual trauma, mental health issues such as PTSD, and addiction among veterans, is widely recognized, with substance use often initiated as a form of self-medication to alleviate symptoms. However, this coping mechanism can rapidly evolve into addiction, resulting in a complex dual-diagnosis situation where both conditions exacerbate each other.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, approximately 10% of veterans who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are believed to struggle with substance use disorder. A study published in JAMA Network Open revealed that veterans are often prescribed opioids for pain management, heightening the risk of opioid addiction. Furthermore, veterans diagnosed with PTSD face a considerably elevated risk of opioid overdose.

Ukraine will benefit from studying the diverse U.S. treatment methods for PTSD and substance abuse, ranging from conventional medical protocols to innovative approaches like psychedelic-assisted therapy and the use of virtual reality technologies to manage adrenaline dependence.

Research indicates that social connections play a pivotal role in enhancing mental well-being, highlighting the crucial need to address social isolation among veterans. A veteran community feels as a safe space for vets and serves as a supportive environment for those grappling with mental health challenges like PTSD and substance abuse, often as coping mechanisms for trauma. Additionally, certain veteran communities provide skill-building opportunities to assist veterans in securing employment upon their return from deployment.

Psychological support for families of veterans, often facilitated by community organizations and international donors, plays a crucial role in their socialization and adjustment post-war, addressing both the understanding of veterans' challenges and the management of related issues within the family unit. One of many Ukrainian NGOs dedicated to supporting veterans and their families, facilitates support groups for veterans' spouses and provides individual counseling sessions for veterans and their families, is "Brothers in Arms."

In the rehabilitation journey of veterans, sports play a dual role—not just as a tool for physical recovery, but also as a vital component in fostering psychological well-being. This interplay between physical activity and mental health is pivotal in the recovery process, serving as a conduit to achieve psychological equilibrium and emotional stability. It also contributes to networking and social reintegration.

Changes to the "Law on Physical Culture and Sports" have already established a separate category of sporting activity known as veteran sports. National and international initiatives are ongoing like the "United States Air Force Trials 2024" program. Thirty Ukrainian veterans attended the United States Air Force Trials in Las Vegas in March 2024 to offer new exchange opportunities with fellow veterans, enhancing professional development and fostering a sense of global community. The event, organized in Ukraine by the Ministry of

Veterans Affairs along with partners such as the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation and "Return Alive!", promotes understanding and support among veterans. Shakhtar football club (Ukraine) is launching a sports-based rehabilitation program and forming a team specifically for military personnel who have undergone amputations due to combat injuries.

Overall, Ukraine faces two major challenges - the lack of well-equipped healthcare facilities and qualified specialists trained to work war-related disorders is a significant challenge in providing adequate support for veterans and their mental health needs; and lack of funding to enlarge the network of healthcare centers, training of specialists and ensuring their fair remuneration.

Window for cooperation opportunities

- ➡ • To assist Ukraine in ensuring access of veterans to quality psychological services in all regions of the country;
- ➡ • To facilitate the collaboration between the Ministry of Veterans Affairs and the Ministry of Healthcare of Ukraine with relevant American authorities, institutions, and experts in adapting international protocols for psychological rehabilitation services. Due to the lack of approved standards and protocols for psychological rehabilitation, the provision of such services for Ukrainian veterans was in many cases limited to physical therapy in sanatoriums and health resorts;
- ➡ • To support exchange of experience of healthcare professionals providing veterans psychological and psychiatric services on healthcare protocols, pain management, innovative approaches like psychedelic-assisted therapy, the use of virtual reality technologies to manage adrenaline dependence;
- ➡ • To facilitate the exchange of experience among healthcare professionals who specialize in providing services to veterans, particularly in addressing substance addiction;
- ➡ • To help further develop effective online-based self-guided support for veterans in crisis, which is especially beneficial for veterans residing in remote areas;
- ➡ • To assist with the development of information materials on vets' struggle for family members of veterans, healthcare and public servants providing services to veterans and general public like those developed by Centers for Excellence for Substance Abuse Treatment and Education;
- ➡ • To foster cooperation on state and community-level efforts on domestic violence prevention and managing such cases in vets' families, including trainings for the police;

- ➡ • To foster cooperation of U.S. and Ukraine authorities, NGOs and media for elaboration and running of programs and campaigns for suicide prevention. For example, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Suicide Prevention Program and REACH VET program, or the Ad Council's national campaign: "Don't Wait. Reach Out";
- ➡ • To support exchange of experience on state and military policies concerning the confidentiality of protected health information;
- ➡ • To support exchange of experience for people working on crisis lines in U.S. and Ukraine, healthcare professionals, and veteran support specialists with the right training and knowledge in facilitating trauma groups and consultants of vets' families;
- ➡ • To promote cooperation in developing adaptive sports and joint U.S. – Ukraine vets' competitions like the U.S. – Ukraine veteran's golf tournament organized by Borderlands Ukraine or United States Air Force Trials 2024;

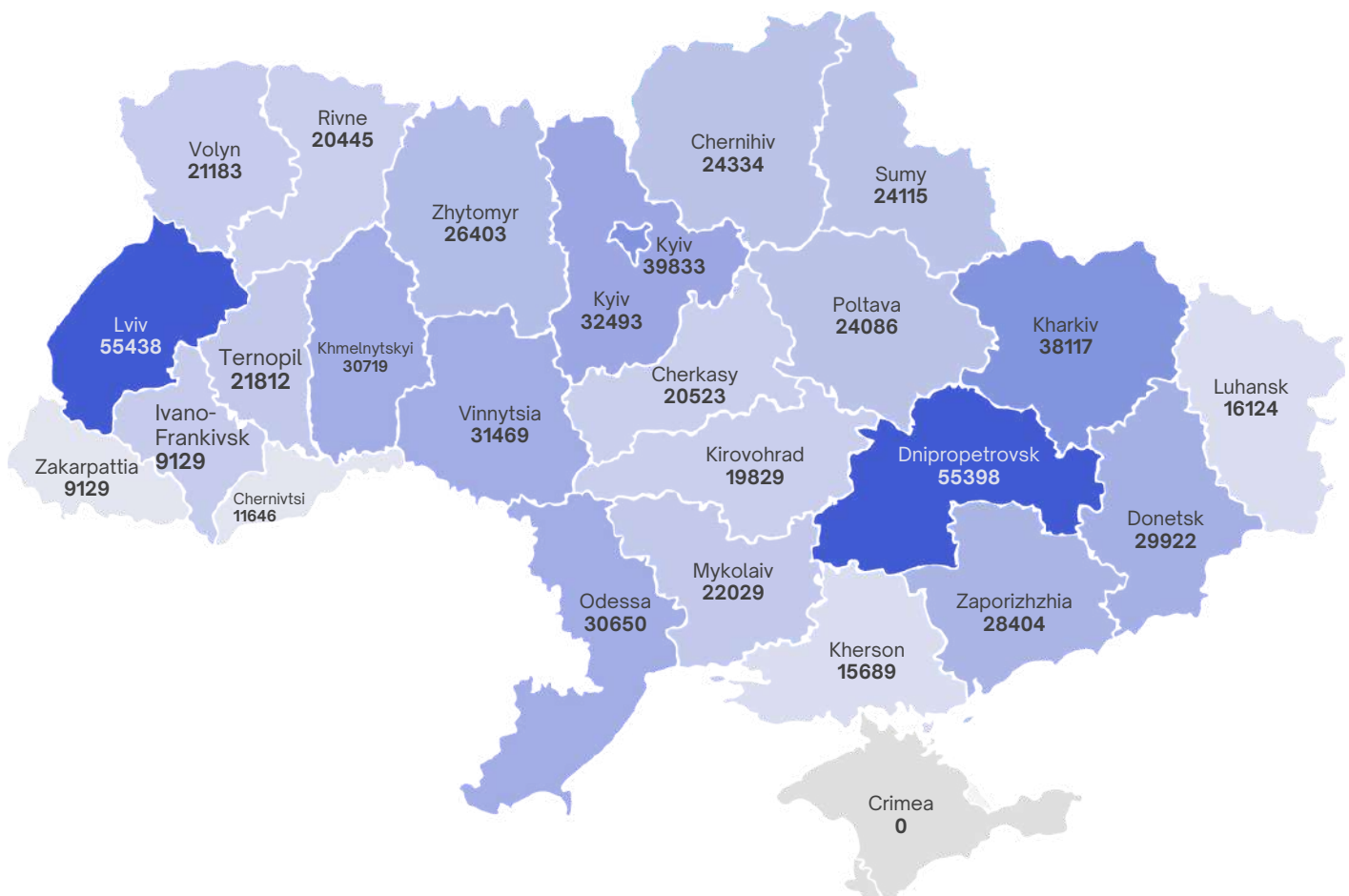
Community-based approach

“Veterans, by nature and training, are deeply committed to helping others - and that means they often put service before self”
Heidi Arthur, chief campaign development officer at the Ad Council.

Feeling needed gives many people a sense of purpose and belonging, keeping them engaged, alive and even thriving. Communities can play a crucial role in creating an environment for veterans that fosters a sense of purpose and belonging.

Embracing a community-based approach is important for improving veterans' reintegration. Communities must recognize the challenges veterans have endured, including life-threatening situations and the loss of comrades, which is essential for fostering understanding and support within the community. Thus, preventive measures should be taken for overcoming any potential gaps in understanding of military and civilians.

Ukraine's Combatants and War participants



Source: Analytical information based on data from the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine

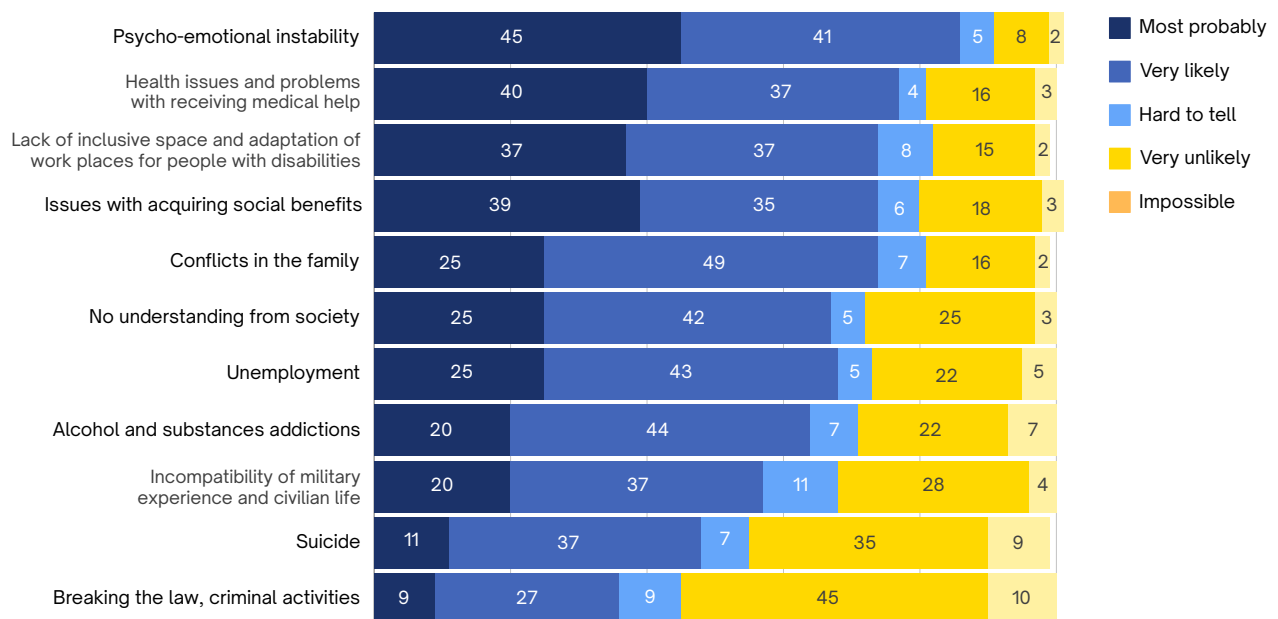
In August 2022, the Ministry of Veteran Affairs signed an agreement with local authorities in Ukrainian cities to improve the provision of services. Ukrainian local authorities may provide significant support to veterans by being responsive to veterans' needs on the closest to them level. This may include a variety of steps from provision of benefits, housing, healthcare, veterans' rights protection to providing free space and organizing socials and other activities to strengthen veteran's local communities, facilitate their networking with business, schools, engagement to important community-building initiatives, events etc.

However, the assessment of the current situation has shown that many local communities, including authorities, lack capacity and leadership to provide assistance. They lack knowledge on psychological support (such as psychological support centers, mobile teams, hotlines, veteran spaces, etc.), as well as the specific needs of veterans and their families. These needs range from psychological and/or social support, immediate crisis intervention, participation in support groups, peer counseling, grief counseling, trauma recovery assistance, and more. Serious issues also include the absence of quality criteria for provided services, supervision systems, and methodological support for both professionals and organizers of psychosocial assistance in communities.

The civic engagement of veterans and their impact on decision-making processes can provide opportunities for veterans to discover new goals and evolve into community opinion leaders or elected officials. Participation in civil society councils advising to and controlling local authorities can also serve as a supportive step towards veterans' reintegration, bringing the sense of control and purpose.

Veterans often encounter stigma, even though not all return with "combatant syndrome" or other mental and psychological issues. The 2024 study among the Ukrainian population revealed problems that veterans are expected to have.

Public Perception of Risks Faced by Returning Veterans from the Russo-Ukraine War



Source: THE TWENTY-SEVENTH NATIONWIDE SURVEY "THE IMAGE OF VETERANS IN UKRAINIAN SOCIETY" (MARCH 2-5, 2024), Ukrainian Veteran Foundation

Certain communities extend caregiver and family support services to aid military families in understanding how to effectively support their service members upon their return from active duty.

Window for cooperation opportunities

- ➡ • To facilitate the development, revision, and execution of regional programs tailored to veterans, encompassing diverse areas such as benefits provision, housing, healthcare, education, and entrepreneurial initiatives, with an emphasis on maximizing the resource potential of every region in Ukraine;
- ➡ • To foster exchange of experience of veteran-to-veteran supportive services on the local level;
- ➡ • To develop support services for vets' families and o assist with creation of information materials on Military and Veteran Families developed by the VA, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network and others.;
- ➡ • To help increase military cultural competence through adaptation of resources like those developed by SAMHSA's Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Technical Assistance Center, PsychArmor's course 15 Things Veterans Want You to Know;
- ➡ • To develop recommendations for local authorities, local media and communities on a variety of activities aimed at vet's reintegration.

Protection of veterans' rights

“Veterans are citizens who have paid more than just taxes.”

Dmytro Kozatsky

”

American veterans' rights protection encompasses a wide range of legislative measures, government agencies, and non-profit organizations dedicated to supporting those who have served in the military.

The United States has several laws aimed at protecting veterans' rights, including the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act. The Department of Veterans Affairs is the primary federal agency responsible for providing benefits and services to veterans. It offers healthcare, disability compensation, pension programs, housing assistance, and other services to eligible veterans. If dissatisfied or in disagreement with a decision rendered by the VA, individuals possess the right to lodge an appeal directly with the Board of Veterans' Appeals, the designated authority responsible for reviewing such matters.

The Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice upholds many laws aimed at safeguarding the rights of military personnel.

Numerous non-profit organizations complement the efforts of government agencies in supporting veterans. Organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, the American Legion, and Wounded Warrior Project and many others provide a range of services, including advocacy, financial assistance, counseling, and community outreach. While organizations like American Red Cross has divisions dedicated to support and advocacy for veterans.

When facing legal challenges related to benefits claims, disability appeals, or other issues, veterans may find various legal aid organizations that offer pro bono legal services to veterans through the Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program and other forms of medical-legal partnerships.

Organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and Vietnam Veterans of America actively lobby Congress and engage in public education campaigns to address veterans' concerns.

Ukraine also has a wide legislative framework for protection of veterans' rights, including the law on the status of war veterans, guarantees of their social protection. The system of free legal aid was established in Ukraine over 10 years ago. Changes to the Law of Ukraine "On Free Legal Aid" came into force in 2017, significantly expanding the rights of war veterans regarding access to free secondary legal aid.

In 2023, nearly 11.4 thousand war veterans, combatants, and military personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine sought assistance: about 7.9 thousand received consultations and explanations, while nearly 3.5 thousand required secondary legal aid, including representation in courts, drafting lawsuits, and more.

Top Legal Issues Addressed by Servicemen at Centers for Free Secondary Legal Aid

Violations of the labor law

Challenging decisions, actions, and inaction of state authorities and local self-government bodies

State aid, payments, compensation

Marriage and divorce, alimony etc.

Source: [the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine](#), 2020.

Moreover, NGOs, human rights organizations and lawyers taking pro bono cases also help veterans protect their rights.

Window for cooperation opportunities

- ➡ • To assist cooperation for conducting a comprehensive review of the veterans' social support system, as well as developing a "needs map" and practical solutions on how to address them;
- ➡ • To enhance exchange of experience of U.S. and Ukraine official authorities and NGOs on veterans' rights protection mechanisms and practices;
- ➡ • To foresee a priority of supporting veterans' initiatives on their rights protection and advocacy in the international aid programs;
- ➡ • To assist with collection of a database of NGOs and human rights organizations providing support to veterans in Ukraine by regions;
- ➡ • To foster collaboration on planning and implementation of awareness raising campaigns on veterans' rights, mechanisms of rights protection and organizations that veterans may address.

Designing accessible space

“The willingness of America's veterans to sacrifice for our country has earned them our lasting gratitude.”
Jeff Miller

Unfortunately, many veterans have experienced life-changing injuries, which demands the whole country to become an accessible space. Accessibility of public spaces and facilities like hospitals, educational institutions, recreation spaces are an essential part of reintegration to everyday life of communities.

Moreover, other community members, like parents with babies, the elderly, non-combatants with disabilities, will greatly benefit from such efforts. Before the full-scale invasion, Ukraine had 2.7 million people with disabilities, 163,900 children among them.

As part of their reintegration efforts, veterans may participate in developing architectural solutions for city planning and housing development, aiming to create accessible spaces for all community members. While Ukraine has already adopted a National Strategy for Barrier-Free Space and accessible construction norms, the focus lies more on overseeing and controlling their implementation before buildings are accepted for use.

Some projects have been already implemented. The Ukraine University has a long-standing program for veterans. Following the latest U.S. concepts, an inclusive space - Veterans Service Center - was opened on the premises of Lviv Polytechnic National University, with the support of SoftServe Open Eyes Fund. The organization Dostupno.UA has initiated a project aimed at facilitating inclusive reconstruction efforts in Ukraine, both during and after the war.

Overall, this work encompasses not only guaranteeing rights to justice, political participation, education, and medical care, but also addressing essential needs like access to bomb shelters, transportation, and humanitarian aid.

Window for cooperation opportunities

- ➡ To coordinate inclusion of veterans into facilitation of inclusive reconstruction efforts in Ukraine, including development of normative framework and ensuring its implementation, and toolkits for decision-makers the state and local levels and architects;
- ➡ To foster U.S.-Ukraine exchange of experience on accessible public space solutions, especially for veterans' facilities;
- ➡ To foster collaborations on design and implementation of accessible space projects;
- ➡ To facilitate efforts on fundraising for implementation of such projects.

Political participation

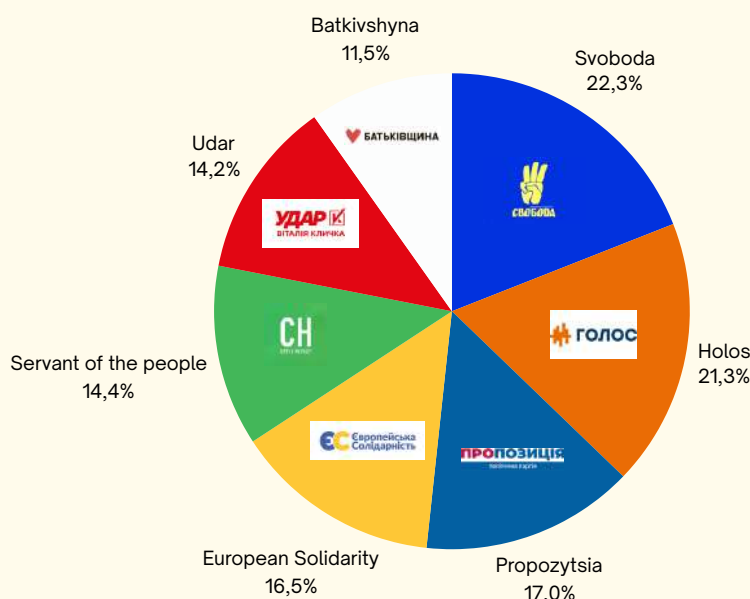
“We receive children's drawings and understand whom we are protecting.”
Fighter of the 81st Separate Airborne Brigade
Ruslan "Bumblebee" (Ukrainian veteran)

Veterans have always been represented in American decision-making with the peak of 81 % of Congress members in the 1970s. In the current Congress, 18% of representatives and 17 % of senators are veterans.

Since the launch of the full-scale invasion some current and former Ukrainian MPs and local deputies joined the Armed forces of Ukraine, territorial defense units or voluntary formation of a territorial community. Political parties already reported losses of their members as a result of the Russian aggression. Some MPs lost family members in the war.

Share of Ukrainian MPs and local deputies in the Armed Forces and other defense units

Source: Chesno Movement Study as of November 2022
(<https://tsn.ua/exclusive/chomu-politiki-ne-voyuyut-hto-z-vidomih-ukrayinciv-kinuv-vse-i-pishov-na-viynu-2433298.html>)



It is anticipated that Ukrainian veterans will emerge as a new political elite, likely forming their own party to contest the upcoming parliamentary elections. Additionally, the possibility of a veteran presidential candidate arises whenever elections can be held in Ukraine.

Thus, capacity building of veterans as local and state level politicians is another way to honor the sacrifice made by the servicemen for preservation of Ukraine's very sovereignty. Currently, as part of civil control veterans should play a more active role in state veteran policy shaping, control over its implementation, overseeing the allocation of funds for veteran policy, particularly in monitoring construction tenders for rehabilitation centers and the distribution of funds for medical and psychological assistance provision.

Window for cooperation opportunities

- ➔ • To anticipate international aid programs and grants aimed at bolstering veterans' political engagement across various levels, encompassing trainings on party building, campaigning, fundraising, legislative drafting, and advocacy. Experience of organizations like Veterans Campaign may become a valuable source of knowledge;
- ➔ • To endorse initiatives fostering the exchange of political experiences between veterans from the United States and Ukraine, thereby fortifying bilateral political relations.

Memory policy

“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but to live by them.”
John F. Kennedy in his 1963 Thanksgiving proclamation, issued before his death.”

It is essential for every country to properly honor the memory of the fallen defenders, celebrate the living veterans and show respectful treatment towards their family members.

The United States has a rich history of celebrating its veterans and maintaining well-established traditions to honor them. Veterans Day is dedicated to honoring the service of all U.S. veterans, Memorial Day commemorates those who have died while serving in the military, and Armed Forces Day celebrates current members of the U.S. military. Additionally, a growing number of U.S. states observe Women Veterans Day to specifically honor women who have served in the military.

The veteran's day (October 1) was introduced in Ukraine back in 2004 but has never been widely commemorated. More important with regards to paying tribute to veterans is the Independence Day (August 24) and the Day of the armed forces of Ukraine (December 6).

Ukraine's Prime-Minister named the National Military Memorial Cemetery the central symbol of the commemoration of veterans. The Ukrainian Government has already introduced the free burial (compensation for burial expenses) of deceased (fallen) individuals who have special merits and special labor merits to the Motherland, participants of hostilities, victims of the Revolution of Dignity, and persons with disabilities as a result of war.

The memory of veterans can be honored in movies, literature, monuments, by renaming streets after heroes, particularly in their hometowns and villages etc. The feat of the veterans will be part of the national and patriotic education of young people – in kindergartens, schools and universities.

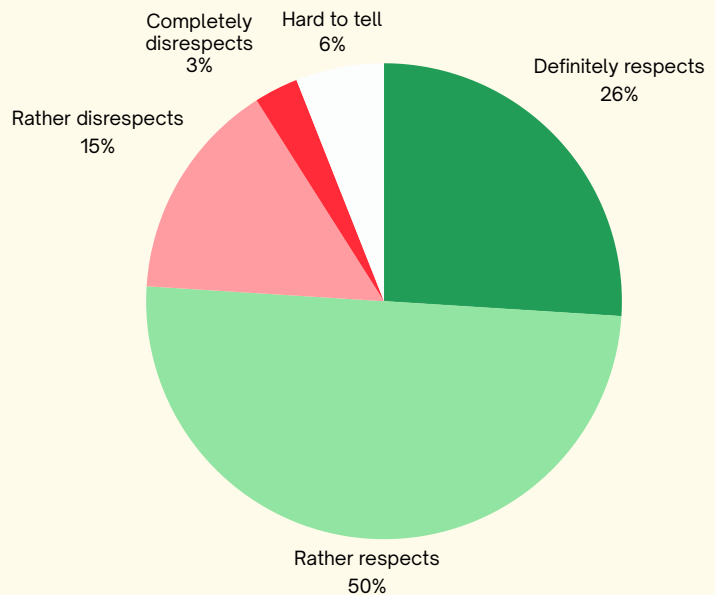
Currently, certain Ukrainian cities have implemented a minute of silence, announced through municipal communication channels, to honor veterans. Additionally, some towns have erected displays featuring posters of deceased local veterans in prominent locations such as main town squares or billboards.

However, it's imperative that all commemorative rituals align with the veterans and their families' perspectives. Their insights should be gathered and unified to ensure that these ceremonies are genuine discussions rather than obligatory formalities.

Overall, veterans are trusted and respected in Ukrainian society.

Does Ukrainian society respect veterans of the Russo-Ukraine war?

Source: THE TWENTY-SEVENTH NATIONWIDE SURVEY "THE IMAGE OF VETERANS IN UKRAINIAN SOCIETY" (MARCH 2-5, 2024), Ukrainian Veteran Foundation
https://ratinggroup.ua/en/research/ukraine/dvadcyat_some_zagalnonacionalne_opituvanny_obraz_veteraniv_v_ukrainskomu_suspilstvi2-5_bereznaya_2024.html



Window for cooperation opportunities

- ➡ Foster the transatlantic exchange of experiences of authorities, NGOs, veterans and their families regarding state policies for commemorating and honoring veterans;
- ➡ Facilitate collaboration with officials from the Arlington National Cemetery and other national cemeteries to exchange expertise in managing national memorial cemetery of state significance;
- ➡ Facilitate exchange of experience on planning and installing modern and appealing monuments to commemorate veterans;
- ➡ Foster creating of an analogue of the Veterans Legacy Memorial, the nation's first digital platform dedicated to the memory of Veterans and service members, which now has individual commemorative pages of 10 million of the nation's heroes;
- ➡ Foster collaboration between American and Ukrainian production companies to produce films (documentary, educational and feature ones) based on the stories of Ukrainian veterans of the Russia-Ukraine war;
- ➡ Facilitate partnerships between Western publishing houses and Ukrainian veteran authors to make their firsthand experiences available in foreign languages for Western audiences.

Portrayal of a veteran

“A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles”
Christopher Reeve

Accurate portrayal of veterans in the media plays a crucial role in their reintegration efforts. Influenced heavily by movies, advertising, and media, societal perceptions can either hinder or enhance the process of veterans' reintegration.

It is believed that Hollywood has two main ways of depicting veterans - super-heroic soldiers who conquer impossible odds and PTSD-afflicted veterans who struggle with addiction, homelessness, and psychological fragility.

For over a decade, the U.S. GI Film Festival has aimed at correcting the one-dimensional portrayals. Shows depicting former military vets such as the former army medics on NBC's The Night Shift or even Ed O'Neil's character "Jay" on Modern Family in everyday situations are more accurate portrayals of veterans than the Mark Wahlbergs and Bradley Coopers of the world.

While heroism and sacrifice remain integral to the perception of Ukrainian defenders, the reintegration process demands veterans to accept their vulnerabilities and seek assistance during challenging times. By portraying veterans in a more human light, we can also accurately represent the diverse composition of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, which includes individuals from backgrounds as varied as historians, coders, farmers, musicians, and beyond.

Ukrainian film-makers have already produced a number of sincere and hopeful films about veterans. Shown world-wide posters from the “Call-sign Ukraine” project feature Ukrainian soldiers from all walks of life. Ukrainian Veteran Foundation has issued a comprehensive toolkit for journalists with recommendations on how to depict the diverse experiences of Ukrainian veterans, including specific guidance on portraying the experiences of female veterans and discussing disabilities.

It is important to show the role of women in the military. As of January 2024, there are 45,587 servicewomen in the Ukrainian army, 13,487 have the status of combatants. The role of the LGBTQ community is perceived as a sensitive topic.

Commercial and social advertising should also observe similar recommendations.

Window for cooperation opportunities

- ➡ • To foster engagement of veteran community into the transatlantic dialogue with content creators on veteran portrayal;
- ➡ • Foster collaboration between American and Ukrainian production companies to produce films (documentary, educational and feature ones), organize exhibitions and other artistic events to tell the stories of American and Ukrainian veterans;
- ➡ • To support training of veterans as trainers for journalists and advertising agencies;
- ➡ • Make the care for Ukrainian veterans a visible and tangible societal norm.

NGOs of Veterans, for Veterans and their Families

A multitude of nonprofit organizations continue to do outstanding work to support Ukrainian veterans, particularly in the areas of psychological support, physical therapy, adaptive sports therapy, transition assistance, and entrepreneurial training. These organizations play a vital role in supporting veterans and their families and have direct parallels to impactful organizations in the United States. By being hyper-focused, these organizations can provide targeted support directly to individual veterans or family members.

However, there is another type of organization that can be a force-multiplier in the support ecosystem - nonprofit organizations that are veteran-organized and veteran-led. In the United States, these are called Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and they are typically founded by veterans of a particular conflict or affinity group, though they are often inclusive. VSOs play a crucial role in ensuring that veterans, survivors, caregivers, and their families receive the benefits, services, rights, and recognition they deserve for their service to the nation. Examples of VSOs include the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA).

VSOs are typically member organizations that operate chapters, or posts, in hundreds of cities and counties across the country. Because they operate throughout the country, they can standardize processes and gather a great amount of veteran feedback. They offer a wide range of services and support, specifically: advocacy, benefits assistance, and peer support and camaraderie.

One of the key services VSOs provide is the advocacy for veterans' rights and needs to government agencies, policymakers, and the public. They lobby, or directly contact legislators, for policies that support veterans' interests and work to improve access to healthcare, education, employment, and other benefits. They conduct surveys of their members to understand what the most important issues are and then communicate those issues to the government or the public.

Additionally, VSOs help veterans navigate the often complex processes of applying for and accessing benefits from the government. In the U.S. in particular, veterans sometimes struggle to navigate the processes of DVA, such as those for disability claims, healthcare, education benefits, pensions, housing assistance, and employment support. Veterans that have successfully navigated the processes are able to share their experiences with fellow VSO members, oftentimes as officially recognized benefits claims assistants.

Furthermore, VSOs provide opportunities for veterans to connect with one another, share experiences, and offer mutual support. They organize social activities, support groups, and networking events to foster a sense of camaraderie among veterans and combat feelings of isolation or alienation. They also form partnerships with local communities like schools and other nonprofits. Veterans know better than most how to organize themselves for their own support and for the greater good.

American organizations, like the US-Ukraine Veterans Bridge, seek to share the lessons learned from decades of U.S. VSO operations to support Ukrainian veteran groups as they self-organize across the country in tandem with the vibrant and growing nonprofit ecosystem in Ukraine.

In conclusion, VSOs stand as pillars of support within the veteran community, offering invaluable assistance to those who have served their nation, and can be value-additive to the nonprofit community. Their tireless efforts not only ensure that veterans receive the benefits and recognition they deserve but also contribute to the broader societal understanding and appreciation of the sacrifices made by those who have served. There is an immense opportunity for American and Ukrainian veterans to continue to collaborate and learn from each other, in the service of both nations.

Window for cooperation opportunities

- ➡ • To boost cooperation of U.S. and Ukrainian veteran NGOs and their joint projects and activities;
- ➡ • To facilitate U.S. veteran NGOs and Ukrainian veterans' cooperation;
- ➡ • To support creation of an online map of Ukraine with the database of NGOs supporting veterans by regions and by profile, as well as a database of U.S. NGOs cooperating with Ukrainian veterans;
- ➡ • To foster grant writing skills of veterans and raise their awareness on existing funding opportunities.

Profiles of partnering NGOs and initiatives



Institute For Democracy and Development “Polita”
(2015, Ukraine; 2023, USA)

A non-profit registered in Ukraine and 501(c)3 in the United States that conducts analytical and educational work;



The US-Ukraine Veterans Bridge
(2023, USA)

A coalition of leading US veteran organizations and advocates united in common cause to support the emerging veteran population of Ukraine.



White Ribbon Ukraine
(2014, Ukraine)

An international movement against domestic violence over 90 countries, numerous awarded from the Kyiv City Administration for volunteerism as Top Organizations of the Year and receiving numerous gratitudes from military units.

Resources

- 1 America's Heroes at Work Toolkit
- 2 CAREGIVERS AND VETERANS OMNIBUS HEALTH SERVICES ACT OF 2010
- 3 Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service
- 4 Department of Veterans Affairs Compensated Work Therapy
- 5 Department of Veterans Affairs VetSuccess
- 6 Disabled Veteran Outreach Program and Local Veteran Employment Representatives Locator
- 7 DOD SKILLBRIDGE PROGRAM
- 8 Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Statement of Support (September 2023)
- 9 EMPLOYMENT SITUATION OF VETERANS — 2023
- 10 Feds Hire Vets: Information for Hiring Managers
- 11 National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide 2018–2028
- 12 Operation Warfighter
- 13 Operational Plan for Veterans' Employment by the U.S. Department of the Interior
- 14 Plan for Reducing Military and Veteran Suicide
- 15 The PACT Act
- 16 The changing face of America's veteran population, Pew Research Center
- 17 Understanding Your Employment Rights Under the Americans with Disabilities Act: A Guide for Veterans
- 18 VA 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report
- 19 VA Veteran's Journey Map
- 20 VA's 10-year National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide
- 21 Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program
- 22 Veterans Hiring Toolkit
- 23 VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH AND OTHER CARE IMPROVEMENTS ACT OF 2008
- 24 Veterans' employment Challenges Perceptions and experiences of transitioning from military to civilian life
- 25 "Concept of Veterans and Their Families Policy: Expert Recommendations for Formulating an Updated State Policy Regarding Veterans and Their Families"
- 26 Decree of the President of Ukraine dated June 2, 2021, No. 225 "On the Decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine dated May 14, 2021, 'On the Human Development Strategy'"
- 27 Decree of the President of Ukraine dated March 24, 2021, No. 119 "On the National Human Rights Strategy"
- 28 Decree of the President of Ukraine dated September 17, 2021, No. 473 "On the Decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine dated August 20, 2021, 'On the Strategic Defense Bulletin of Ukraine'"
- 29 Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine Regarding the Construction and Operation of the National Military Memorial Cemetery"
- 30 Law of Ukraine "On Employment of the Population"
- 31 Law of Ukraine "On Military Duty and Military Service"
- 32 Law of Ukraine "On National Security of Ukraine"
- 33 Law of Ukraine "On Pension Provision for Persons Discharged from Military Service and Certain Other Persons"
- 34 Law of Ukraine "On Social Protection of Servicemen and Members of Their Families"

- 35 Law of Ukraine "On Social Services"
- 36 Law of Ukraine "On State Guarantees of Social Protection for Servicemen Released from Service due to the Reform of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Their Families"
- 37 Law of Ukraine "On the Armed Forces of Ukraine"
- 38 Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances"
- 39 Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection"
- 40 Materials of the conference "Creating an Effective Veteran Policy in Ukraine", Kyiv-Washington, 29 February 2024
- 41 Nationwide Survey #24: Image of Veterans in Ukrainian Society
- 42 Organization of psychosocial support for war veterans and their families. Recommendations for local authorities.
- 43 Report "Rights of persons with disabilities during the war in Ukraine"
- 44 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated August 5, 2020, No. 695 "On Approval of the State Strategy for Regional Development for 2021–2027"
- 45 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated July 12, 2017, No. 497 "On Approval of the Procedure for the Use of Funds Provided in the State Budget for Measures to Provide Psychological Assistance to War Veterans, Persons with Special Merits to the Motherland, Members of Their Families, Participants in the Revolution of Dignity, Members of Families of Deceased (Deceased) War Veterans, Members of Families of Deceased (Deceased) Defenders of Ukraine"
- 46 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated June 1, 2020, No. 587 "On the Organization of Provision of Social Services"
- 47 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated June 21, 2017, No. 432 "On Approval of the Procedure and Conditions for Ensuring Social and Vocational Adaptation of Persons Discharged or Released from Military Service, War Veterans, Persons with Special Merits to the Motherland, Members of Their Families, Participants in the Revolution of Dignity, Members of Families of Deceased (Deceased) War Veterans, Members of Families of Deceased (Deceased) Defenders of Ukraine"
- 48 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated November 29, 2022, No. 1338 "On Some Issues of Providing Free Psychological Assistance to Persons Discharged or Released from Military Service, War Veterans, Persons with Special Merits to the Motherland, Members of Their Families, and Members of Families of Deceased (Deceased) War Veterans and Members of Families of Deceased (Deceased) Defenders of Ukraine in Accordance with the Law of Ukraine 'On the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection'"
- 49 The Constitution of Ukraine
- 50 The results of the "Veteran Reintegration" study regarding current employment conditions.
- 51 The Strategy for the Development of Entrepreneurial Initiatives for War Veterans for the Period up to 2030
- 52 The Ukrainian Veterans Foundation study "Current Needs and Perceptions of Opportunities for Career and Professional Growth Among Veterans in Ukraine"
- 53 Trends in the Social and Legal Protection of Veterans in Ukraine after February 24, 2022
- 54 Wartime Ukraine's Election Dilemma, Wilson Center

Abbreviations

AFU - Armed Forces of Ukraine

CIVIC - Center to Improve Veteran Involvement in Care

DOD - U.S. Department of Defense

DOL - U.S. Department of Labor

DOJ - U.S. Department of Justice

DVOP - Disabled Veteran Outreach Program

HUD - U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

LVER - Local Veteran Employment Representatives

MP – Member of Parliament

MSP – Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine

MVA - Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

PTSD – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

R&D - Research and Development

SAMHSA - U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

TAP - Transition Assistance Program

U.S. – The United States of America

VA - U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

VR&E - U.S. Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program

VSO - Veteran Service Organization

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Olga Yushkovska	Professor and head of the Department of Sports Medicine, Physical Rehabilitation, Valeology, and Physical Education at the Odessa National Medical University
Peter Quinn	U.S. army veteran, aircraft combat survivability analysts
Phillips Douglas	Producer at “Ukraine Story,” documentary filmmaker, attorney, journalist
Pihulia Viktor	Chairman of the Vinnytsia Regional Organization “Vilni ta Virni” (“Free and Faithful,” volunteer
Roman Trokhymets	Soldier of the Armed Forces of Ukraine
Ruslan Pryhodko	Director of the department of social work in the Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine
Ryan Hendrickson	Owner and founder of “Tip of the Spear Landmine Removal Inc,” retired special forces engineer
Scott Douglas	Veteran of the United States Navy, global business development executive at Hui Huliau
Tristan Ruark	Retired combat veteran, writer

Valentyna Shults

Deputy head of the NGO “Vilni ta Virni” (“Free and Faithful”), member of the Odessa District Council

Vincent Holman

Former U.S Embassy Kyiv Ministry of Defense Advisor for Medical and Veterans Affairs, the acting program director at the Honolulu-Pacific Federal Executive Board

Vladyslav Klochkov

Distinguished military leader and strategist, holding the rank of the Major General in the Armed Forces of Ukraine

Volodymyr Tarabara

Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Michigan State University

Yulia Osmolovskaya

Director of the Kyiv office of GLOBSEC, the leader of the GLOBSEC team of the experts of the report “Scars on Thier Souls: PTSD and Veterans of Ukraine”

