




VETERANS REINTEGRATION PROGRAM • ANALYTICAL REPORT 2024



# STUDY ON VETERANS' REINTEGRATION

KEY NEEDS AND CHALLENGES  
IN ACCESSING BASIC SERVICES  
AND RIGHTS



## METHODOLOGY

The IREX Veterans Reintegration (VR) program, in collaboration with the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation and the research agency Info Sapiens, conducted a qualitative study to assess the needs and barriers veterans face in accessing key services. This study included input from veterans, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), service providers, and subject matter experts.

The fieldwork was conducted with the sociological group Rating in early 2024. The study involved three focus groups and 28 in-depth interviews. 21 respondents participated in the focus groups, including five leaders of veterans' associations and communities, and 16 representatives of veteran NGOs.

This report presents key findings from the study, which are indicative and reflect only general trends and cannot be generalized to all veterans.

## INTRODUCTION

All respondents agree that the state should be the primary entity responsible for meeting veterans' needs and providing services. However, many veterans are skeptical about the state's readiness to handle a significant increase in the veteran population, which will bring more diverse and expanded requests. Respondents highlight several organizational issues the state faces in providing services to veterans, such as limited resources and inefficient distribution, leading to reduced service quality and quantity.

Additionally, there is a noted lack of effective two-way communication between the state and veterans. Most respondents, including representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and veterans' associations, critically assess the government's efforts in tracking the needs of veterans and their families. Many believe that NGOs play a crucial compensatory role in addressing veterans' needs.



Veterans are urging the state to provide clear, orderly, and coherent policies to address their needs in areas such as medical, psychological, legal, and housing assistance, as well as educational services, social benefits, and employment opportunities. This report will further explore the main access needs and barriers for veterans in these areas.

## MEDICAL NEEDS

Assessment of Sufficiency and Quality of Medical Services. While respondents generally find the volume of basic health services satisfactory, they frequently highlight problems with the quality of these services. Beyond basic medical care, there is a strong emphasis on the need for an extended package of medical services. This extended package should include additional services such as reproductive health examinations and treatments, dental care, computed tomography (CT), and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), which are currently paid services.

Veterans also stress the urgent need to address the insufficiency and limited duration of rehabilitation. The lack of rehabilitation centers exacerbates this issue. Full recovery can sometimes require several years of continuous rehabilitation, but currently, the state and medical institutions only provide rehabilitation for a few months.

**Note:** according to the latest legislative changes as of 2023, the maximum rehabilitation period is limited to 4 months<sup>1</sup>.

One of the key issues identified is the lack of implementation or application of uniform standardized treatment protocols. Respondents highlight significant variations in the quality of services depending on the type of injury treated. For instance, there are complaints about the insufficient quality of surgical interventions, such as amputations and postoperative care.

However, the situation appears better for traumatic amputations, prosthetics, and musculoskeletal rehabilitation. Compared to previous years, more funds have been allocated for prosthetics and rehabilitation

centers. Conversely, the treatment of neurotraumas (such as mild traumatic brain injuries and contusions), injuries to reproductive organs, and urological and gynecological problems is notably worse. According to the respondents, a key issue in treating mild traumatic brain injuries (contusions) is the lack of experience and awareness among doctors regarding modern treatment protocols for these injuries.

**Common Problems with Access to Health Services.** According to leaders of veterans' organizations and service providers, a significant problem is the lack of hospitals equipped with the necessary technical resources and medical personnel. One of the most notable obstacles to accessing medical services is the difficulty in obtaining and processing the required documents due to poor coordination between military and civilian hospitals.

Veterans highlight that this problem is particularly acute for amputations and prosthetics. Veterans often receive treatment in civilian hospitals, but referrals for prosthetics can only be obtained from military hospitals. This discrepancy leads to lengthy bureaucratic procedures, delaying the transfer process needed for stump formation, prosthetics fitting, and rehabilitation, reducing the chances of complete recovery.

Additionally, some respondents describe the interaction with the medical and social expert commission as overly bureaucratic. The process requires many documents and necessitates proving medical diagnoses to receive the necessary treatment.

Another concern is that veterans often lack information about available rehabilitation services, psychological consultations, and preventive examinations. Family doctors frequently lack protocols for monitoring or treating veterans, making it difficult to detect diseases that may develop in the medium and long term due to participation in hostilities. Additionally, there is a lack of systematic health monitoring by medical professionals and social center workers.

Respondents highlight the absence or inconsistent application of unified rehabilitation protocols. The rehabilitation process often appears unclear



and lacks an evidence-based approach for both veterans and experts. Another significant concern is the ethics of treating veterans in medical institutions. Veterans, NGO leaders, and heads of veterans' associations advocate for a shift from the soviet-era "body treatment" paradigm to a "personal healing" approach, which emphasizes respect for veterans and consideration of their individual needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Transform Attitudes Towards Veterans:** shift from the soviet-era "treatment of the body" approach to one that respects the individual. This includes ensuring veterans' rights to receive information about their condition, obtaining informed consent for treatment, and showing respect for them as defenders. This change in thinking should also involve restructuring the paperwork system related to medical services for veterans, training of medical specialists (doctors and junior medical staff), reducing bureaucracy, and developing treatment and rehabilitation pathways in collaboration with military personnel and veterans who have already undergone medical treatment.
- **Increase the Number of Rehabilitation Facilities and Opportunities:** expand the number of institutions and opportunities for veterans' rehabilitation. The rehabilitation process should be streamlined, and relevant centers and medical institutions must provide consistent, high-quality services.
- **Enhance Rehabilitation Services:** establish and enforce unified, evidence-based treatment protocols across all medical facilities to ensure consistency and high-quality care for veterans. Ensure that these protocols cover a wide range of medical issues, including traumatic amputations, neurotraumas, and reproductive, urological, and gynecological problems.
- **Reform the National Rehabilitation System:** incorporate foreign expertise to improve the national rehabilitation system with the involvement of

international expertise, including involving international specialist to increase qualifications of Ukrainian doctors. This includes involving foreign specialists and promoting active exchanges of experience between more and less experienced rehabilitation doctors within Ukraine.

- **Address Disparities in Medical Infrastructure:** focus on equalizing resources and service quality between urban and regional areas to address disparities in veteran care. Increase support for infrastructure near front lines to reduce the negative experiences due to overwhelmed services.
- **Involve Military Families in Rehabilitation Programs:** engage military families in the rehabilitation process to help monitor veterans' medical needs post-service. This involves coordination between the Ministry of Health and regional TCCs, registering those who have returned to civilian life, and implementing a system for annual health examinations and comprehensive diagnostics for veterans.
- **Create Children's Rooms in Medical Institutions:** female veterans ask to establish children's rooms in medical facilities to accommodate veterans who cannot leave their young children during treatment and rehabilitation.
- **Systematize Medical Services and Diagnoses in Military Service:** amend the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine's regulations to approve a clear list of diagnoses that warrant dismissal from military service and systematize rehabilitation practices.

## 2 PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

The study participants highlight that psychological help is crucial for most veterans, and the demand for such services is expected to grow over time. Some respondents believe that veterans should undergo mandatory initial psychological screening upon discharge from military service. This is due to the high volume of psychological assistance needed and the fact that veterans are often unaware of their need for such help.



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There is a noted lack of centers and institutions where psychologists can provide assistance to veterans at their places of residence. Additionally, there is a shortage of psychologists in military units and hospitals.

Many respondents complain about the lack of psychological specialists trained to work with veterans and their families. This staffing issue is attributed to the lack of systematic training and advanced training programs tailored to the specific needs of veterans. Respondents indicate that veterans' needs are often too complex for standard psychological practices. Some believe that only individuals with similar life experiences, such as fellow veterans, can truly understand them, leading to a certain distrust of civilian psychologists and those provided by state institutions.

Another significant issue is the lack of monitoring and research on the effectiveness of psychological assistance, due to the absence of a common framework for evaluating psychological approaches and practices. Service providers and experts emphasize the need to develop criteria and standards for therapeutic approaches.

Veterans also express a desire for spiritual support from chaplains of various religious denominations. Respondents from religious minorities note that psychologists are not always able to help them due to significant differences in worldview. The study found that stigmatization of psychological assistance persists among veterans, particularly among the older generation, who often devalue both their psychological state and the work of psychologists.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Grant Monitoring Rights to NGOs:** propose granting non-governmental psychological centers and organizations the right to monitor, audit, and control the quality of psychological services. The state can provide grant support for these functions, ensuring that the evaluation of psychological services is not solely the state's responsibility.



- **Implement Mandatory Psychological Screening:** introduce mandatory psychological assessments for veterans upon discharge from military service to identify those in need of psychological support early. Additionally, develop a system for regular follow-up screenings to monitor mental health over time and address issues as they arise.
- **Expand Access to Psychological Services:** establish more centers and institutions where psychologists can provide assistance to veterans at their places of residence, particularly in underserved areas. Increase the presence of psychologists in military units and hospitals to offer immediate psychological support during and after service.
- **Destigmatize Psychological Assistance:** implement measures to destigmatize psychological help by involving veterans who have successfully received assistance. Creating hubs for socialization and communication among veterans can facilitate this process. Launch educational campaigns to reduce the stigma associated with psychological help, particularly targeting older generations and promoting the value of mental health care.
- **Cultural Sensitivity in Psychological Services:** involve psychologists and chaplains from the same cultural groups as veterans, especially for national and ethnic minorities and Indigenous peoples. For example, there is a need for more imams in the army to support Muslim veterans. Ensure that spiritual support is integrated with psychological care to address both mental and spiritual well-being.
- **Train Veterans as Psychologists:** train veterans to become psychologists, leveraging their military experience to build trust. encourage the inclusion of veteran psychologists within veteran communities to bridge gaps between veterans and civilian mental health professionals. This training should also extend to family members of veterans. Given the lengthy training period, the state should develop a long-term strategy to forecast the required number of specialists, allocate funding for their education and professional activities, and partner with NGOs and foundations to ease the financial burden.



- **Peer-to-Peer Support Groups:** promote a peer-to-peer approach to self-help by creating groups where veterans can support each other through post-traumatic stress disorder or other issues. These groups should be led by veterans with recovery experience and supported by communities to ensure their functionality.
- **Develop and Standardize Evaluation Frameworks:** create a common framework for evaluating the effectiveness of psychological assistance, including standardized criteria and benchmarks for therapeutic approaches.

## LEGAL NEEDS

Veterans' need for legal assistance is particularly crucial during their transition from military to civilian life. Most veterans lack the legal knowledge and skills to address their legal issues independently, necessitating professional legal support. Common legal needs include the registration of benefits, combatant status, disability payments, and litigation during discharge from the army. The process of drafting legal documents, corresponding with government agencies, and obtaining necessary documents from the state is often complex and challenging for veterans.

Respondents note that part of the problem stems from disorganized state legislation and policies that do not adequately address veterans' needs, often appearing chaotic.

Currently, the legal support available to veterans is limited to one-time free assistance, which usually does not fully resolve their issues. Continuous free legal support is needed both during and after military service.

**Note:** there is a system of free legal aid where veterans are entitled to all types of legal services<sup>2</sup>. This assistance is not one-time; veterans can apply for it multiple times if necessary. Also, since 2014, Ukrainian NGO Legal Hundred has been providing free legal assistance to veterans.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Simplify Legal Processes and Documentation:** work with government agencies to simplify and streamline the processes for registering benefits, verifying combatant status, and applying for disability payments. Develop and provide clear, step-by-step guides for veterans to navigate the legal processes and complete necessary documentation.
- **Expand Access to Legal Support:** develop formats to ensure legal support reaches the maximum number of veterans, such as through consultants, road maps, and digital applications.
- **Enhance Legal Training:** train and improve the skills of lawyers in military and veterans' legal procedures.
- **Unify and Digitalize Legal Services:** unify and digitalize most legal services provided to veterans. Some respondents are aware of NGOs like Pryncyp that are already working on this. They recommend that the state simplify and streamline legal procedures for the military personnel and veterans.

## 4 HOUSING ASSISTANCE

Respondents highlight the lack of transparent and reliable communication from the state regarding housing provisions. They believe the state should openly acknowledge its inability to provide free housing and land to all those in need. Such transparency would increase trust in the state. Veterans and leaders of veterans' associations note that the likelihood of receiving free housing is low, and they do not have high expectations from the state. However, the state continues to maintain these expectations, which leads to a decline in trust and is perceived as a harmful policy.

One leader of a veterans' association points out that Ukrainian legislation guarantees full-fledged housing for veterans with combatant status



within two years, but this provision is not effectively implemented. Respondents suggest developing additional criteria for obtaining free housing, prioritizing families of the fallen, followed by veterans with disabilities, and then combatants.

**Note:** housing for veterans with combatant status must be provided within 2 years from the moment they register for housing. Unfortunately, this requirement is not being met due to the insufficiency of social housing.

Veteran respondents also mention state programs like eOselya. However, there is no consensus on whether this program applies to veterans; some believe it does, while others think it does not. Veterans note that after being discharged from the Armed Forces, mortgage interest rates increase, which they perceive as unfair, especially for veterans with disabilities who struggle to find high-paying jobs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Utilize Financial Assistance Mechanisms:** respondents highlight the importance of financial assistance mechanisms such as co-financing programs, concessional loans, government programs for the gradual purchase of housing, and housing cooperatives for veterans. One potential co-financing mechanism is to attract other funds to finance part of the contribution.
- **Reform Housing Policies and Implementation:** review and reform housing policies to ensure they are realistic and achievable, taking into account the current availability of social housing and resources.
- **Collaborative Effort:** the provision of housing for veterans should be a collaborative effort involving state authorities, local governments, and local businesses.
- **Develop Prioritization Criteria:** develop and implement clear criteria for housing allocation, prioritizing families of fallen soldiers, followed by veterans with disabilities, and then combatants. This approach

ensures that those with the greatest need receive support first. Make the criteria and process for housing allocation transparent to prevent misunderstandings and ensure fair distribution.

- **Inclusive Housing:** veterans emphasize that housing for military personnel and veterans should be built and equipped according to principles of inclusivity.

## 5 EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OF VETERANS

Veterans who have recently returned from the frontlines have less articulated and formed demands for education and employment, as these needs are less immediate compared to other sectoral needs. However, it is anticipated that the urgency of education and employment needs for veterans will increase over time. The primary needs in this area are qualifications and/or retraining. Leaders of veterans' associations note that many veterans did not have an occupation when they joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and those who did cannot always return to their previous specialties, sometimes due to acquired disabilities.

Some respondents believe that employment centers offer a limited list of professions, which often do not align with veterans' specialties, and most well-paying jobs are already occupied. However, respondents are aware of numerous opportunities for education and retraining. Veterans can receive education on a preferential basis in state educational institutions and take short courses at employment centers. There are also programs from non-governmental organizations and foundations aimed at developing entrepreneurship among veterans. However, respondents find it difficult to assess the effectiveness of these programs at this time.

A crucial aspect of ensuring veterans' employment is overcoming employer bias. According to veterans, employers are often hesitant to hire individuals who return from the front, viewing them as aggressive, problematic, and unpredictable. These prejudices need to be addressed to improve veterans' employment prospects.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Overcome Veteran Bias:** develop additional measures to address biases against veterans among employers and work teams. Encourage companies to develop veteran-friendly workplace policies and practices. This includes training work teams on the ethics of interacting with veterans. Veterans' workplaces may also need additional equipment, so workspaces should be rearranged according to principles of inclusiveness.
- **Support Veteran Entrepreneurship:** veterans view entrepreneurial opportunities positively. The state, businesses, and public organizations should encourage entrepreneurial initiatives, provide business education, and establish mentoring programs for veteran businesses. Creating accounting alliances to assist veteran businesses with reporting and promoting the creation of veteran-owned businesses that hire other veterans are also important. Free business education, mentoring, and preferential access to resources are three key tools to help veteran entrepreneurship thrive.
- **Develop Comprehensive Education and Retraining Programs:** design and implement retraining programs that align with the skills and interests of veterans, including those who may have acquired disabilities or cannot return to their previous occupations.
- **Expand Employment Services and Opportunities:** Work with employment centers to expand the range of professions and job opportunities available, ensuring they align with veterans' skills and specialties.

## SOCIAL BENEFITS

Some respondents view the state policy supporting veterans as chaotic and unsystematic, with problems at the stages of development, implementation, and monitoring. While the system of benefits for veterans

is operational, not all benefits are deemed appropriate for current needs, as the system was established before the full-scale invasion and based on different veteran needs. In particular, respondents cite preferential payments for installing a wired telephone and a radio point as outdated benefits.

Respondents are also dissatisfied with the quality of benefits, citing issues like those in legal services: complex registration processes, numerous bureaucratic procedures, a lack of clarity on eligible benefits, and insufficient digitalization of document management. Consequently, the veterans express interest in having a specialist, preferably a military lawyer, at the Administrative Service Center (ASC) to handle benefit-related issues.

Veterans face additional challenges when applying for benefits due to bureaucratic hurdles and personnel shortages, leading to delays. Those living in rural areas also struggle with the lack of electronic document management, often needing to travel to a larger city to apply for benefits.

Respondents note the absence of a single location where the entire process of demobilization and veteran status registration can be completed. Currently, veterans must visit multiple offices to obtain various certificates, each taking 2-3 weeks. Veterans desire to be active participants in shaping state policies affecting them and lament the lack of collective spaces to unite, identify common issues, and engage in policy creation.

Leaders of veterans' associations and experts highlight an institutional conflict between the state, which assigns benefits, and local communities, which must fund them. Often, local communities lack the necessary funds, leading to problems such as bus drivers refusing to transport veterans and military personnel with combatant status for free, a particularly upsetting example for veterans.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Detailed Study and Review of System of Benefits:** conduct a thorough study of veterans' benefit needs and review the existing benefits



system. Respondents suggest that while there may be fewer benefits, it is crucial that they are accessible nationwide and for all veterans. The benefits system should be revised to support veterans in maintaining an active lifestyle and opening additional opportunities, rather than fostering dependence on social assistance and passivity.

- **Simplify Application Process:** allow veterans' relatives to apply for benefits on their behalf and establish a "single window" system for the registration of benefits to streamline the process. Enhance digitalization of document management and benefit applications to streamline processes and reduce the need for physical paperwork.
- **Improve Accessibility for Rural Veterans:** expand online services and support for electronic document management to improve accessibility for veterans living in remote areas. Introduce mobile benefit service units or outreach programs to provide assistance in rural areas, minimizing the need for veterans to travel long distances.
- **Engage Veterans in Policy Development:** create mechanisms for veterans to actively participate in shaping state policies that affect them, such as advisory boards or focus groups.
- **Improve Communication and Coordination:** improve communication and coordination between state and local agencies involved in veterans' benefits and services to ensure a more integrated and effective support system. Maintain transparency about changes and updates to benefit systems and gather feedback from veterans to continuously improve services.

## 7 PROBLEMS OF TRANSITION AND REINTEGRATION OF VETERANS

The primary challenge for veterans' social integration today is the stark contrast between their wartime experiences and civilian life. Veterans feel this difference acutely. Respondents note a societal divide between those who "live



by the war” and those who avoid it. Veterans sense discomfort from the latter group, which adds to their frustration. They also perceive society’s fatigue from the war and the need to adapt to it. Veterans recently returned from the front describe their experience as a “gap” between themselves and civilians.

Veterans with this sense of “void” find wartime life vivid and meaningful, while civilian life seems devoid of significant events. This perception reduces their circle of civilian acquaintances and topics for discussion, hindering rapid reintegration into civilian life. Veterans struggle to adapt to daily family routines and relationships, sometimes exhibiting aggressive behavior towards loved ones. They need assistance in re-establishing family relationships. Veterans’ families also face challenges, having endured their own traumatic experiences, such as living in a state of war, constant worry, and chronic stress.

Veterans with a sense of “void” between their military and civilian lives lack effective mechanisms for managing and organizing their lives, increasing the risk of substance abuse (alcohol, drugs).

The main needs for veterans in readapting and transitioning from war to civilian life include a sense of certainty about the future, and recognition of their military experience and respect for their military service. The state and society should create opportunities for veterans to recover and self-fulfill in civilian life, develop support practices for their readaptation, and foster a general culture of respect for veterans.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Promote a Culture of Respect for Veterans:** foster a culture of respect for veterans in society. This culture should include sincere symbolic gestures, such as words of gratitude and other acts of reverence, rather than overly formal or pretentious displays. Special respect should be given to fallen soldiers. Respondents highlight the need for a National Military Memorial Cemetery in Ukraine, as well as other military cemeteries where the fallen can be buried with due honor.



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- **Facilitate Smooth Reintegration into Civilian Life:** develop comprehensive transitional support programs that assist veterans in adjusting to civilian life. These programs should include counseling, career advice, and life skills training to help veterans navigate the shift from a wartime to a civilian context.
- **Expand Veterans' Spaces and Hubs:** increase the number of veterans' spaces and hubs in communities nationwide. These hubs would provide places for veterans to communicate, interact, share experiences, and engage in dialogue with authorities about their needs, opportunities, and requests. Such hubs can help veterans become a collective and effective voice in discussions with the state.
- **Develop a Universal Roadmap for Veterans:** create a universal roadmap for veterans, designed and implemented by the state, which is clear to all participants of the process. This roadmap should guide veterans from demobilization to their full reintegration into society. It should include general explanations of veteran policies, links to the regulatory framework, and information about the entities responsible for each area of reintegration at all levels.
- **Enhance Family Support and Relationships:** provide family counseling services to help veterans and their families navigate the complexities of reintegration and improve communication and relationships. Develop resources and support systems for families of veterans, addressing their own challenges and stress related to wartime experiences.







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