

# INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF WAR VETERANS' REINTEGRATION

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**Annotation.** The article examines the international experience of war veterans' reintegration as a comprehensive public policy framework that combines social guarantees, medical and psychosocial rehabilitation, education, employment, support for entrepreneurship, and family-oriented programmes. It is emphasized that leading states build specialized institutional models: from extensive systems of healthcare, education, and benefits in the United States to integrated schemes of professional readaptation and "civilian bridges" in EU countries, Canada, Israel, and France, where key elements include personalized support, interagency coordination, and the long-term responsibility of the state for wounded veterans and the families of the fallen. The article underlines that effective models combine universal social programmes with targeted services for veterans with disabilities, post-traumatic disorders, and complex family and economic circumstances, and are based on the principles of a "single window" approach, case management, public-private partnership, and the active involvement of veterans' organizations. Special attention is devoted to approaches that recognize military experience as a resource for leadership, public service, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement, thereby counteracting the marginalisation of veterans. It is demonstrated that for Ukraine, it is particularly relevant to adopt the systemic elements of these models: clear legal definition of veteran status, a continuous "service – demobilisation – reintegration" pathway, integrated e-services, family-centred programmes, and independent monitoring of service quality, while at the same time being critically aware of the risks of fragmentation, bureaucratisation, and a merely formal benefits-based approach that fails to ensure genuine socio-economic adaptation.

**Key words:** reintegration, public administration, post-conflict development, state policy, social stability, institutional reforms, strategic planning, national reconciliation, infrastructure restoration, sustainable development.

## 1. Introduction.

The study of international experience in the reintegration of war veterans is critically important in the current context, as Ukraine faces unprecedented challenges related to the return of a large number of military personnel to civilian life. Veterans' reintegration is a multi-level process that includes medical and psychological rehabilitation, social adaptation, professional retraining, economic support, and legal protection. Examining best international practices makes it possible to avoid systemic mistakes and to adapt effective mechanisms to national realities.

For the effective reintegration of Ukrainian veterans, it is necessary to adopt leading global approaches while taking into account national specificities and challenges. Priority measures include: the development of a comprehensive state reintegration programme based on international experience; the expansion of psychological rehabilitation centres and support programmes; the introduction of digital services for veterans to simplify access to social benefits; the development of professional retraining and entrepreneurship support schemes; and the strengthening of legal safeguards for veterans and their families.

The study and implementation of international experience in the reintegration of war veterans is crucial for Ukraine, especially under present circumstances. A comprehensive approach that combines medical, psychological, economic, and social support will help establish an effective system that ensures decent living conditions for veterans and facilitates their successful adaptation to civilian life. Ukraine has a unique opportunity to make use of global best practices, adapt them to its own context, and build a progressive veteran policy that will become an integral element of the country's sustainable development.

## **2. Analysis of scientific publications.**

Certain aspects of this topic have been examined by Ye. Hordiienko, I. Bilokinna, S. Shvydiuk, I. Zhurba, O. Yakushev, L. Ternova, N. Samara, Yu. Prysiashnenko, P. Bohutskyi, A. Borovyk, V. Halunko and others.

## **3. The aim of the work.**

The purpose of this article is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of international models of war veterans' reintegration, identifying effective institutional, legal, medical, psychosocial, educational, and economic mechanisms applied in leading countries, and to assess their adaptability to the Ukrainian context. The study aims to systematize best practices of state and non-state support for veterans and their families, including case management, "one-stop shop" services, vocational retraining, mental health programmes, entrepreneurship support, and long-term social protection, in order to develop evidence-based recommendations for shaping an integrated, human-centred, and sustainable national reintegration policy for Ukrainian veterans.

## **4. Review and discussion.**

To effectively use international experience in the reintegration of war veterans, Ukraine should carefully select countries that have successful practices in this area. The choice should be based on a number of key criteria that will allow adapting the best approaches to Ukrainian realities: countries that have experienced protracted wars (USA, Israel, Great Britain, France); countries that have had experience of military conflicts on their territory (countries of the former Yugoslavia); states that actively participate in peacekeeping operations and have a developed system of adaptation of the military after missions (Canada, Germany, Australia). The first country whose experience we would like to study is the United States of America. The USA uses a unique, exclusive approach to the implementation of veteran policy, separating veteran support programs from general social initiatives for the population. All services, from medical care to retirement benefits, are coordinated by the US Department of Veterans Affairs, which performs four key functions:

first, the Veterans Health Administration provides comprehensive health services through an extensive network of more than 1,700 medical institutions;

second, the Veterans Benefits Administration provides a wide range of social guarantees, including educational programs, housing loans and life insurance;

third, the National Cemeteries Administration is responsible for maintaining more than 150 national cemeteries and memorial complexes, as well as for developing digital platforms to honor the memory of veterans;

fourth, the mission of the Department is aimed at improving the overall preparedness of the state for emergencies, where veterans are involved in crisis management, health care and ensuring national security at all levels - from local to federal.

In addition to the national federal level, there are Veterans Affairs Offices in all states in the United States. The range of services provided by each varies considerably by state, but they generally offer support and advice to veterans on benefits and assistance in accessing health care, social security, and through relationships with public and private sector providers. Examples include offices in Maine and Oklahoma.

All veterans have access to subsidized health care. However, the level of access and benefits depends on the assessment of criteria related to income, combat experience and its duration, and service-related injuries or disabilities. Veterans who apply for health care will receive one of 8 priority groups based on the assessment of these factors. Pensions are paid to veterans who meet the criteria listed above and whose income falls within certain limits. Other service-related criteria also apply, including: (a) active duty before September 8, 1980, and at least 90 months of service and at least 1 day of wartime service; or (b) active duty as a military member after September 7, 1980, and at least

24 months of service or the full period of service for which he was drafted or contracted (with some exceptions) and at least 1 day of wartime service.

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides physical and mental health care to veterans through an extensive network of over 1,700 health care facilities. These include Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics, telehealth clinics, and veterans centers. Some of these facilities are directly under the Department of Veterans Affairs, while others are accredited organizations that provide coordinated services with government funding. Services are coordinated through state Veterans Affairs offices and networks of veterans' representatives, whose functions and names may vary by region. In addition to traditional service methods, much of the support is available online or electronically through the Department of Veterans Affairs. There are also hotlines, including the Crisis Helpline and the Mentoring Program, that provide counseling and support to veterans' families. These programs are designed to protect veterans' rights and interests, assist them in the process of obtaining social benefits, and motivate them to contact the Department of Veterans Affairs to obtain the services they are entitled to.

Charitable and private sector support. Several Veterans Service Organizations have been established. They help veterans, their families, etc. navigate benefit programs and file disability claims, etc. These organizations – accessible, officially recognized by either the Department of Veterans Affairs, Congress, or neither – provide a range of targeted services, including employment, family, financial, health, legal, mental health, social networking, and social services.

It should also be noted that the USA is a good example of a country where the veteran employment system is well developed. One of the key initiatives is the Transition Assistance Program. According to the US Department of Labor, the unemployment rate among veterans in 2022 was approximately 3%. This was achieved thanks to the active cooperation of the state, the private sector and non-profit organizations that provide veterans with opportunities for professional growth, retraining and adaptation to new professions.

The study by A. O. Simakhova focuses on the positive experience of the United States of America in developing a system for the reintegration of war veterans, which combines state support, public initiatives, educational programs and social entrepreneurship mechanisms. The author proposes to summarize this experience in several conceptual areas that can be adapted in Ukrainian practice.

First of all, the emphasis is on institutional support from the state, which is implemented through financial incentives for veterans, the development of social entrepreneurship and the creation of specialized support centers. Veterans receive access to grant programs, preferential lending, tax breaks and advisory services to start or develop their own business. This system of state incentives combines financial instruments with vocational training programs, which increases the economic independence of veterans.

The second direction is related to the partnership between the state, the public sector and private structures. In the USA, networks of cooperation between government agencies, business and non-governmental organizations are actively developing, which support social enterprises focused on the integration of veterans into society. Such organizations not only provide financial and advisory support, but also form a social culture of respect for veterans as active participants in economic life.

The third direction is reintegration through the education system. Universities in the United States play an important role in supporting veterans by providing them with opportunities for learning, mentoring, career development, and psychological adjustment.[1] Educational institutions are creating specialized support centers that combine educational, social, and counseling functions. In particular, the University of Florida has a Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation and a Veterans Success Center that provides access to educational and social resources, creating a favorable environment for the military community. The University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) has a Veterans Resource Center and a network of military alumni that support veterans' educational and career initiatives.[2] The University of Southern California has a Center for Research and Support for Veterans and Military Families, which aims to develop the academic potential and well-being of veterans through educational programs, counseling, and career planning.[3] The fourth direction includes the creation of business incubators and innovation platforms for veterans, allowing them to start their own businesses in a safe environment, receiving technical, legal and educational support. These

institutions contribute to the development of social entrepreneurship, exchange of experience and professional adaptation of the military to the conditions of the market economy.

The next element is the integration of veterans into the labor market, which occurs through the activities of social enterprises founded by the veterans themselves[4]. Such enterprises not only create jobs for veterans, but also form internal corporate programs of psychological support, professional development and mentoring[5].

A separate direction is the support of veterans' mental health, which in the USA is implemented through a network of social enterprises and public initiatives. They provide psychological consultations, conduct group therapy, organize programs of social rehabilitation and prevention of post-traumatic stress disorder. Psychological support is considered not as a separate measure, but as an integrated component of the system of social and professional reintegration[6].

Thus, having studied the US experience in the field of reintegration of war veterans, we note that in Ukraine there are already certain initiatives to support veterans, however, some effective US practices have not yet been implemented or require significant improvement.

We propose to introduce the following practices in Ukraine based on the experience of the United States:

- 1) separation of veteran support programs from general social initiatives. In the United States, veteran policy has an exclusive status, and all services for veterans are coordinated by the Department of Veterans Affairs separately from general social programs. Ukraine also needs a centralized and independent mechanism for providing services to veterans, which will operate separately from general social security systems to ensure a prompt response to the needs of veterans and their families;
- 2) a system of priority access to medical services. In the United States, all veterans have access to subsidized medical care, but the level of benefits is determined by 8 priority levels, which depends on income level, combat experience, and the presence of injuries. In Ukraine, the priority system in the field of medical care is not yet structured, which complicates the prompt provision of services to veterans with the highest needs;
- 3) integration of veterans into the emergency management system. One of the key missions of the US Department of Veterans Affairs is to involve veterans in crisis management and ensuring national security. In Ukraine, veterans are a powerful resource that can be actively involved in civil defense, rescue services, and crisis management;
- 4) a system of employment for veterans and support for their economic adaptation. The Transition Assistance Program in the US helps veterans adapt to civilian life through educational programs, professional retraining, and job search. As a result, the unemployment rate among American veterans in 2022 was only 3%. It should be noted that in Ukraine, the problem of employment for veterans remains serious, as many of them do not have civilian professional training or face discrimination in the labor market;
- 5) activation of charitable organizations and cooperation with the private sector. In the US, there is a wide network of veteran service organizations (VSOs) that help veterans find jobs, social adaptation, medical care, and legal support. The Ukrainian veterans' sector needs more coordination and government support to operate effectively;
- 6) improving digital services for veterans. In the United States, there is an online access system for veterans' services, where they can apply for assistance, make an appointment with a doctor, apply for social benefits, or get legal advice. In Ukraine, veterans' services are still not fully digitalized, which makes it difficult to obtain them.

In France, a specialized retraining agency operates within the Ministry of Defense, which provides free consultations, support, and training courses to veterans, as well as spouses of those discharged from service; these services can be used within four years of the date of discharge. In order for the National Administration for Veterans and War Victims to recognize a person as a veteran, at least 90 days of service in a recognized combat unit and documentary evidence of one of the following criteria are required: a) participation of the unit in a firefight or combat; b) personal participation in

a firefight or combat; c) at least four months of service in the war in Algeria or during campaigns in Morocco or Tunisia, or four months of OPEX status (foreign operations of the French Armed Forces - in particular UN peacekeeping missions or other special operations defined by the Ministry of Defense). The status and card of «participant in hostilities» are automatically granted to those wounded in the war and to persons with the corresponding «cross» award.

In France, the status of “Death in the Service of the Nation” was introduced in 2012. It is granted to both military and civilian personnel if their death is related to national security or the fight against terrorism, starting in 2002. To obtain this status, an application must be submitted to the National Office of Veterans and War Victims, which conducts an inspection and, if confirmed, issues a combat veteran card. War veterans in France are also provided with an additional “combat veteran” pension, which they can start receiving after reaching the age of 65. This payment usually supplements their basic pension benefits, which are provided to holders of the corresponding card. In addition, veterans with a military disability may receive a special pension or additional financial assistance, the amount of which depends on the degree of disability. In some cases, such payments may be granted early if the level of disability is significant.

France also has a system of E-disability cards, which provide holders with benefits for transport, including the opportunity to use subsidized rail transport.

In Germany, war veterans have access to a network of military hospitals and specialized medical services. After completing their service, military personnel who have served for at least four years can use subsidized insurance within the national health care system. The duration of such subsidies is determined depending on the total length of service.

In addition, there is the armed forces’ own social welfare service (Care & Care), which provides extended medical and social services. The organization of the care and social support process upon discharge of military personnel is carried out in cooperation with state medical and social services, with the participation of state insurance funds.

Regarding the possibility of continuing treatment in military medical institutions after discharge, the system provides for certain time limits, but they may vary depending on the circumstances.

To support the professional adaptation of veterans, the Vocational Development Assistance Service operates, which provides assistance with retraining and acquiring new professions for seven years after the end of service.

The number of charitable groups that directly represent veterans is smaller than in many other countries studied, and this is due to historical reasons. However, several groups have emerged that work with modern veterans of the German armed forces - in particular those who served in foreign missions (for example, in Afghanistan). Two such groups are the German Armed Forces Association and the German Veterans Association. The Bundeswehr’s veterans’ organization manual provides for increased cooperation with a number of groups.

The German experience demonstrates an effective model of veterans’ social security that combines state, medical and educational services for the successful adaptation of military personnel after the end of service. Ukraine can significantly improve its veterans’ support system by introducing the following practices:

- 1) subsidized insurance for veterans within the national health care system;
- 2) the introduction of a specialized social welfare service for military personnel (Care & Care), which provides medical, social and rehabilitation services for veterans. It works in cooperation with state medical and social services, using the state health insurance and social protection system.

## 5. Conclusions.

International experience demonstrates that effective war veterans’ reintegration requires a holistic, long-term and person-centred approach that виходить за межі разових пільг and instead combines medical and psychological rehabilitation, inclusive education, tailored employment support, entrepreneurship programmes, housing and family services. Systems built on principles of

continuity (“from service to civilian life”), case management, “one-stop-shop” service models, digital accessibility and strong involvement of veteran-led organisations provide higher levels of social inclusion, prevent marginalisation and transform military experience into a resource for community leadership and economic development.

For Ukraine, the key lesson from foreign models is the need to institutionalise reintegration as a coherent state policy rather than a fragmented set of benefits, ensuring clear legal status of veterans, guaranteed access to mental health care, coordinated interagency action, and stable funding. Adapting best practices from the US, EU states, Canada, Israel and others should be carried out with regard to national realities, prioritising transparency, non-discrimination, support for families of fallen soldiers and wounded veterans, and continuous monitoring of programme effectiveness, thereby turning veteran policy into a driver of social resilience and democratic consolidation.

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