

From payments to opportunities: Rethinking Ukraine's veterans policy

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30 October 2026

Executive Summary

Ukraine's veteran population is growing rapidly, while the country still relies on a veterans policy framework rooted in a law adopted in 1993. Material support remains necessary, but recurring payments and status-based benefits can create lasting fiscal commitments and become politically difficult to redesign. Croatia's post-war experience suggests that veterans policy should extend beyond benefits to rehabilitation, employment and mental health support. Ukraine should therefore strengthen reintegration services and local delivery capacity, while the EU and other partners support transparent financing, independent evaluation and evidence-based programme design.

Introduction

Ukraine's veterans policy is being shaped under the conditions of an ongoing full-scale war. The state must support people wounded or disabled as a result of war as well as those without physical or mental scars, and help make communities ready for the return of veterans to civilian life. This means not only administrative procedures and financial benefits, but accessible services, rehabilitation, employment opportunities, mental health support, and environments where veterans and their families can rebuild everyday life.

Ukraine's current veterans policy still relies heavily on the [basic law on the status of war veterans and guarantees of their social protection](#) which was adopted in 1993. While it has been amended more than 100 times, with attempts to adapt the system to new benefits and circumstances, the basic model has changed little: the law defines who receives veteran status and then links that status to a list of benefits.

The result is that Ukraine is expanding support for a rapidly increasing veteran population but relies on legal tools designed for a very different period. The policy challenge is to ensure that financial benefits remain one part of a broader reintegration system, alongside rehabilitation, employment, education and case management, rather than becoming the dominant instrument of veterans policy.

Two financial instruments, different purposes

Since the late 1990s, each year, the Cabinet of Ministers has determined the amount of a one-off cash payment to be made to [veterans before Ukraine's Independence Day](#). In 2026, the payment for the [1,417,385 people with “participant in hostilities”](#) status was [UAH 1,000, or roughly EUR 20](#) per person. Veterans with war-related disabilities receive higher amounts, which vary by disability group.

A newer programme uses financial support for a different purpose. In 2025, the government launched the [Veteran Sport programme](#), a two-year experimental project providing around EUR 30 per quarter for an array of sports services to persons with veteran status. Unlike the Independence Day payment, Veteran Sport is at least intended to support recovery and reintegration through sports.

The scale becomes clearer when the figures are added up. The 2026 Independence Day payment amounts to around EUR 27 million for the 1.4 million people with “participant in hostilities” status alone. For Veteran Sport, the quarterly cap of [250,000 participants](#) implies expenditure of up to around EUR 7 million per quarter. If the same level of participation were reached in four quarters, this would amount to around EUR 29 million over a year.

These two programmes serve different purposes and represent only a small part of Ukraine's broader veteran support system, but they show how relatively small per-person individual amounts can become significant budget items when applied at scale.

Croatia's lesson: when compensation becomes a system

The Croatian experience is instructive in showing how material benefits can gradually become a central feature of relations between the state and the veteran community.

From 1994, Croatia [developed](#) an extensive system of entitlements for war veterans. Croatia eventually registered around 500,000 war veterans. By 2007, spending on “support for war veterans and their families” had reached [1.7 per cent of GDP](#), of which 1.39 per cent of GDP went to veterans' pensions. The World Bank noted that Croatia's social spending was strongly shaped by benefits and privileges for veterans and their families, while a much smaller share was directed to poverty-related social assistance.

This does not mean that support for Croatian veterans was a mistake. After the war, it became part of the social contract. But Croatia's experience shows why such systems can become difficult to reform: once benefits are granted to a large group as formal entitlements, attempts to reduce or redesign them create visible losses for existing recipients and can therefore carry significant political costs. The consequences are not only fiscal. The World Bank found that Croatia's relatively generous veteran pension arrangements discouraged active participation in the labour market. For Ukraine, the lesson is therefore not to reduce material support, but to ensure that it does not crowd out the services and opportunities needed for long-term reintegration.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

Ukraine already combines financial support with programmes aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration. The challenge is not to build a reintegration model from scratch, but to shift the balance further towards services and opportunities that help veterans rebuild civilian lives. Financial support should remain targeted and linked to clear reintegration or compensation objectives, rather than becoming the dominant instrument of veterans policy. This requires stronger programme design at the national level and stronger delivery capacity in the communities where veterans return.

For Ukraine

- Review dedicated veteran programmes for results and value for money. The Ministry for Veterans Affairs, together with the Ministry of Finance, should regularly assess major veteran programmes for their cost, coverage, outcomes and cost-effectiveness. New or expanded programmes should have clear estimates of their target group, fiscal cost and intended outcomes. The findings should determine whether programmes are continued, expanded, redesigned or terminated.
- Shift more resources towards reintegration services and local delivery. The Ministry for Veterans Affairs should lead a cross-government effort to shift more resources towards rehabilitation, employment, education, mental health care, disability support and case management, with local authorities responsible for ensuring access at community level.
- Make public authorities accountable for veteran outcomes within their own mandates. Ministries and other public authorities should identify where veterans are a relevant target group and assess whether their policies and programmes reach them effectively and deliver the intended outcomes. This should apply beyond dedicated veterans programmes wherever public policy can materially affect veterans' return to civilian life and economic participation.

For European partners

- Integrate veteran reintegration into recovery planning and financing. The European Commission, EU member states and international financial institutions should include veteran reintegration objectives in major recovery and budget-support instruments. This would place veterans policy within decisions on rebuilding Ukraine's workforce, human capital and long-term resilience, rather than treat it as a stand-alone social-policy issue.
- Direct more support to local reintegration systems. EU institutions and bilateral donors should coordinate with national authorities on systemic policy reform, but focus implementation support on municipalities. This means identifying local needs, adapting local programmes and strengthening rehabilitation, employment support, case management and referral systems where veterans actually return to civilian life.
- Tie future support to evidence of what works. EU institutions and other major donors should fund independent evaluations of large veteran programmes, including outcome and cost-effectiveness analysis, and use the findings in policy dialogue with the Ukrainian government. The findings should inform decisions by Ukrainian authorities and their funding partners on whether programmes are expanded, redesigned, scaled back or discontinued.

Ultimately, the test of Ukraine's veterans policy will be whether national and local support programmes create real opportunities for veterans to return to civilian life, rather than simply expand the system of payments and benefits.



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