

# CONCEPT OF THE PUBLIC POLICY ON VETERANS' FAMILIES

Expert review and recommendations  
of the Coalition of Civil Society  
Organisations

2025

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# Abstract

This Concept presents a shared vision of four civil society organisations working with veterans and their families. We have combined our experience in service provision, research and advocacy to propose a framework for future public policy which recognises the agency of families, takes into account their life conditions, and provides flexible support mechanisms. The document outlines the core principles of the policy on veterans' families, examines the current regulatory framework and explores the mechanisms behind its development.

This Concept will serve as a resource for all parties involved in shaping and implementing policies, including government bodies, analytical and research teams, and service providers. Its aim is to offer a systemic vision of the policy on veterans' families as a dynamic, flexible and fair support mechanism that recognises their own journeys and experiences and can respond appropriately to their needs.

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# About the authors

**Veteran Hub** is a sustainable support network for veterans and families of service members. Established in 2018, the organisation provides legal advice, psychological support, career and vocational counselling, and personalised case management. The network comprises physical spaces in Kyiv and Vinnytsia, as well as mobile offices that provide home service delivery in Kyiv and Vinnytsia Oblasts, along with a national Support Line available by phone at 067 348 28 68.

Drawing on its daily experience of working with veterans and their families, the organisation conducts in-depth research, advocates for improving their well-being, develops information and media projects, and helps various stakeholders in the field better support service members and their loved ones.

Website: [veteranhub.com.ua](http://veteranhub.com.ua)  
Facebook: [fb.com/VeteranHubUa](https://fb.com/VeteranHubUa)  
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The **Human Rights Centre for Military Personnel and Veterans “Pryncyp”** is a civil society organisation dedicated to human rights protection, advocacy, and analytics within the military and veteran sectors. Its priority goals include a human-centric approach to personnel policy within the army, strengthening the military justice system, establishing a framework for transitioning from military to civilian life, and ensuring protection of human rights. The organisation has a developed network of pro bono lawyers who advise service members with injuries and runs training programmes for both service providers and military/veterans themselves.

Website: [pryncyp.com](http://pryncyp.com)  
Facebook: [fb.com/pryncypua](https://fb.com/pryncypua)

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**Legal Hundred** is a nationwide human rights organisation that has been supporting service members, veterans, and their families, including families of the fallen, prisoners of war, and those missing in action, since 2014. Its mission is to ensure systemic legal protection in the context of military

service and to establish sustainable mechanisms for veterans to adapt to civilian life.

The organisation has initiated and contributed to the development of more than 20 adopted laws and state programmes in the fields of veteran policy, social protection and security. It co-founded the Project Office for the establishment of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, developed the Handbook for Participants of the Russo-Ukrainian War, which provided comprehensive legal information for defenders, and implemented the Instruction on Countering Harassment in the Security and Defence Forces. Legal Hundred also operates a nationwide hotline that processes over 3,000 inquiries every month.

Website: [legal100.org.ua](http://legal100.org.ua)

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**Space of Opportunities** is an innovation lab in the field of veteran policies and an expert organisation involved in the development and localisation of veteran policy.

Its expert team partnered in relaunching the Veteran Support Specialist project by developing professional standards, primary and backup documentation of the service, and a training course and preparing both trainers and support specialists.

The organisation also coordinates the Coalition of Veterans' Spaces – a network of 26 service organisations and veteran hubs across different regions of Ukraine. The Coalition includes eight mobile teams, each staffed with a lawyer, psychologist and social worker.

Website: [pm.in.ua](http://pm.in.ua)

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# Opening remarks

Since 2014, over a million warriors have joined the army to defend the country during the Russo-Ukrainian war. While they are serving in the army, their families remain at home, taking care of civilian well-being and living in wartime without their loved ones nearby.

As a state, society, the public sector and individuals, we know little about the experiences of service members' and veterans' families. This experience has affected millions of us to this day, yet we still lack the words to name it, describe it, understand it, and turn it into effective support.

In 2023, expert public organisations in the field of veterans' affairs, such as Veteran Hub, Pryncyp, Legal Hundred, Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement and Space of Opportunities, joined forces and came up with the first concept of public veteran policy<sup>1</sup> and in 2025, its updated version.

We have a wealth of international experience and eleven years of the Russo-Ukrainian war in the field of public policy on veterans. These developments do not always encompass all possible policy areas, but they do provide significant depth to our understanding of the experiences of veterans in Ukraine. However, when we discuss the experiences of families, we realise that we know nothing.

The reason for this is that families have never been the subject of public policy, either in Ukraine or abroad. In the policies of other countries, the families of veterans are often viewed as caregivers who support them after they complete their service, rather than as individuals who also undergo their own journey and gain valuable experiences. Only recently, in the 2010s, did the approach begin to change, and countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada started to develop

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<sup>1</sup> Veteran Hub, Pryncyp, Space of Opportunities, Legal Hundred, Veteranka (2023). Concept of the Policy on Veterans and Their Families. [veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/polityka-shchodo-veteraniv-ta-ikh-simey.pdf](https://veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/polityka-shchodo-veteraniv-ta-ikh-simey.pdf)

comprehensive state policies for veterans' families that take into account their experiences and journeys.

The international experience and the experience of the Russo-Ukrainian war, particularly after 2022, formed the basis of our work on this concept, enabling us to highlight several key lessons.

**First conclusion: the idea that families' experiences are limited to caring for, looking after or supporting veterans is untrue.**

It is important and worth emphasising.

**Second conclusion: we need to look at individuals within families and family relationships, rather than at the family as a unit of social structure.** In developing this concept, we focused not on demographic demands and public policy, but on individuals and what happens to them when their loved ones are in service. We analysed various possible types of relationships in the families of veterans, including parents, children, individuals in registered marriages, and those in unregistered partnerships. All these roles can create different multi-level relationships within the family, and the impact of one person's service will affect everyone in one way or another.

We assume that until now, the state, the public sector, and other players in the field of veterans' affairs, when talking about the families of veterans, have imagined a community rather than individual people within the family. Accordingly, we observed that certain individuals and family roles were not considered.

**Third conclusion: it is important to look at different experiences of families according to the veteran's service trajectory.** The journey of warriors' families begins with shared risks but ends with different outcomes: for some, the return of a loved one from the army; for others, unfortunately, death, disappearance or captivity. Each of these experiences will influence the needs of the veteran's family.

These different experiences and roles can overlap. For example, the same person can be a wife, a mother and a sister of a warrior at the same time. As the Russo-Ukrainian war persists or with potential

future escalations of armed aggression, these combined experiences will grow more frequent.

The final important lesson and conclusion of this work is **the lack of or limited availability of data on the needs of veterans' families in various environments of well-being**. We analysed the available information on them in the environment of health, housing and physical environment, material needs and vocation, and studied the impact of long waiting for loved ones to return from the army on family members. Having seen how uneven it is, we believe that the state must recognise that the waiting and lives of veterans' families are not a "private matter" but a socially important experience that requires attention and consideration in policy. It must also provide families with conditions and support so that their problems are visible.

This is the first version of the concept of public policy on veterans' families, which lays the foundation for further development of a dignified and comprehensive support system as part of the national security and defence system.

Caring for the families of warriors directly affects their service: when loved ones are supported and safe, warriors can perform their duties more effectively. Therefore, supporting families also supports veterans and enables people to better fulfil their roles and contribute to our shared victory – so that we fight for as long as necessary and win this war.

These roles and contributions may not always be visible or recognised, and they may be predominantly held by females, but we must acknowledge them. We invite you to explore the journey, needs, and necessary support of veterans' loved ones within this concept.

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# Who this concept is for

**The concept will be useful for those who develop, shape, and implement policy, provide services, and create spaces, environments, and opportunities to improve the well-being of veterans:**

- Representatives of state institutions and bodies at the national level
- Representatives of local governments
- Representatives of charitable, public and volunteer organisations that support warriors, veterans and their families
- Warriors and veterans
- Families of warriors, veterans and their close relatives
- Providers of public services
- Scientists, analysts and researchers
- Business representatives
- The international community and donors
- The general public, the media, and anyone else interested in public veteran policy

# How to read this concept

This document consists of ten sections containing conceptual, analytical and recommendatory parts, which can be read sequentially or selectively, depending on your tasks and needs. We recommend that all readers review the introductory sections to understand the logic behind the proposed support for veterans, and then proceed to specific sections of the concept that are of interest to them.

## **What each section is about**

### **Section 1. Challenges and Historical Background.**

Entry point to the concept: explains the current state of policy on veterans' families and its historical foundations, why it needs improvement, and what exactly needs to change.

### **Section 2. Policy Goals and Principles.**

Defines the overall logic, vision, values and guidelines for the new public policy on veterans and their families. It is key to understanding the structure of the following sections.

### **Section 3. Approaches to Developing Public Policy on Veterans' Families.**

Provides a framework for developing and implementing effective policies, taking into account the diversity of family experiences and conditions, as well as different types of relationships and journeys according to the veteran's service trajectory, well-being, and policy implementation environment.

### **Section 4. Target Audience's Profile.**

Outlines who veterans' families are, how they are defined by international and Ukrainian policies, what rights and guarantees their loved ones have, and what challenges arise in different types of relationships.

### **Section 5. The Journeys of Veterans' Families.**

Describes the stages of family life from the beginning of service to return to civilian life, their challenges, and the support they need.

## **Sections 6–9. The Journeys of Families of Veterans with Disabilities, Families of Missing in Action, Prisoners of War/Liberated from Captivity, and the Fallen.**

They examine individual family trajectories and highlight the needs and approaches to supporting each of them. This section can be read selectively, depending on the policy area or programme you are interested in or working with.

**Sections 5–9** also contain an analysis of families' needs according to the Well-being model, an analytical framework for policy development. They consist of the following components: Health, Housing and Physical Environment, Material Needs, Vocation (including education, employment, and entrepreneurship), Relationships and Recognition.

## **Section 10. Stakeholder Map.**

Presents all actors involved in and responsible for shaping and implementing veteran policy. It can be used as a practical tool, in particular, for filtering stakeholders by level, audience, and type of activity.

### **For quick navigation**

**If you are interested in:**

- **what the policy on veterans' families is, why it is needed and what approaches underpin it** – read Sections 1, 2 and 3;
- **who exactly belongs to veterans' families, what their rights and guarantees are** – check Section 4;
- **how to develop policy with due regard to different experiences of families** – open the relevant component in Sections 5–9;
- **who should shape, develop, implement, and enforce veteran policy** – see Section 10.

# Glossary

This Glossary brings together our own definitions of terms used in the Concept. All terms are listed in alphabetical order.

When creating the glossary, we employed a human-centric approach, focusing on the idea that the person, their experience, and their needs must come first. We believe this principle should also underpin public policy and legislative definitions.

Our terms and definitions may differ from those established in public documents, as some regulatory acts require updates, which can be challenging to implement due to the complexity of legislative changes, especially during martial law.

<b>Accessibility</b>	Equal access to support, services, infrastructure and opportunities regardless of status, physical or social characteristics.
<b>Adaptation</b>	The process of adjusting to life conditions and circumstances following a significant change in those conditions or circumstances.
<b>Advocacy</b>	A set of systemic actions aimed at protecting the rights and promoting the interests of a particular group of people, or addressing a specific problem.
<b>Beneficiary</b>	A person or another entity that receives benefits from a certain activity.
<b>Benefits</b>	Special rights, guarantees, benefits or discounts provided by the state to citizens to improve their financial situation, well-being, living conditions and quality of life, and to provide support.
<b>Care</b>	Protecting the personal rights and interests of people who cannot look after themselves and need support. In the context of veteran policy, care means ensuring the physical, psychological, social and material well-being of veterans and their family members. A carer is a person who supports, assists

with rehabilitation, and cares for a veteran, particularly in cases of chronic illness or the need for long-term care.

<b>Caregiving</b>	Helping people who need support in their daily lives due to age, illness or disability.
<b>Civil (registered) partnership</b>	A legally formalised union of partners who actually live together but are not married. As of 2025, civil partnerships remain legally unregulated in Ukraine.
<b>Civilian life</b>	One of the environments in which veterans and their family members find themselves outside of military service and combat operations.
<b>Combat experience</b>	Direct participation in combat operations.
<b>Commemoration</b>	Official and public recognition of the significance of the contribution of the fallen or events of the past, expressed in actions aimed at showing respect and gratitude and preserving their memory.
<b>Compensation</b>	Providing compensation or financial assistance to people who have suffered damage or loss due to certain circumstances. This may include compensation for the loss of health, property, employment, or other resources resulting from governmental or social changes or circumstances, such as war or disaster.
<b>Concept of public policy</b>	A general approach or framework that sets out strategic directions for the development of public policy, the state's approaches in a particular area, and defines the main goals, objectives and mechanisms for achieving them.
<b>Condition</b>	A dynamic, changing situation that may last for a certain period of time, cease, or recur. It depends on personal experience and affects needs, but is temporary or potentially changeable. A condition may accompany a status but does not define it; it requires situational responses from the support system.
<b>Cross-sectoral approach</b>	An approach that ensures veterans and their family members are represented in all spheres and have access to all programmes and services implemented by the state, non-governmental organisations and businesses.

<b>Degree of kinship</b>	A concept that establishes the closeness of family ties and is determined by the number of generations that separate relatives from each other. Each generation is considered one degree; for example, between parent and child is one degree, and between grandparent and grandchild is two degrees.
<b>Demand</b>	The need for a comfortable and safe life and a high level of well-being.
<b>Discharge from service</b>	The completion of military service and return to civilian life.
<b>Experience</b>	A set of events, circumstances and inner changes that a person experiences in connection with various life situations, for example, military service or participation in combat operations of a loved one. Experience shapes our perception of reality, the system of needs, and the ways we interact with the environment.
<b>Family</b>	People united by shared experiences and mutual responsibility, who are in close, private relationships. Family relationships can be based on blood ties, conscious choice, shared household, financial, and emotional bonds.
<b>Family's journey</b>	Conditions in which a family finds itself as a result of the nature of the service, the conditions of discharge and the subsequent trajectory of events: return to civilian life, injury, missing in action, captivity, or death.
<b>General conscription pool</b>	The status assigned to all persons liable for military service, including those who have not completed military service.
<b>Guardianship</b>	A form of human rights protection, where a person cannot exercise their rights and represent their interests for certain reasons, such as age or health. A guardian makes decisions regarding medical treatment, education, property management, and daily life of the person under their guardianship.
<b>Human capital</b>	A set of knowledge, skills, experience, health and motivation possessed by citizens of the country, which can contribute to its economic growth and social development.
<b>Human-centricity</b>	An approach whereby public policy, decisions, initiatives and programmes are geared towards human needs, the protection of human rights and concern for human well-being.

<b>Inclusiveness</b>	Taking into account the diverse needs of all groups of citizens in policy development and implementation.
<b>Indefinite loss</b>	Experiencing loss in a state where there is no specific information about what happened to a loved one. The indefinite loss is often experienced by the loved ones of persons missing in action and veterans in captivity.
<b>Internal displacement</b>	The forced need to leave one's permanent place of residence and relocate within the country due to external circumstances (war, threat of occupation, violence, or human rights violations).
<b>Legal framework</b>	Documents establishing rules, principles, characteristics of various types of activities and their results.
<b>Maintenance</b>	Providing a person with the means of living at the expense of another person, institution or state. Dependents are those who rely on others for support and do not have sufficient personal income (children, persons with disabilities, and incapacitated parents).
<b>Military reserve</b>	Citizens liable for military service who may be called up to serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It consists of <b>operational military reserve</b> , which includes <b>combat reserve</b> , <b>build-up reserve</b> and <b>territorial reserve</b> (persons liable for military service who have already completed military service or training and are ready to quickly return to the army in the event of mobilisation or if units need to be replenished), and <b>mobilisation reserve</b> (all conscripts who may be called up and are not part of the operational reserve).
<b>Military service</b>	A special type of public service where people who are suitable in terms of age and health professionally defend the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine.
<b>Missing</b>	One of the possible experiences of veterans and their families. A person is considered missing in action when they are out of contact, and there is no confirmed information about their whereabouts or fate.

<b>Multiplicity of experiences</b>	A combination of various life conditions that affect the well-being of veterans and their families, including combat experience, health status, family status, employment, place of residence, and experience of internal displacement. Veteran policy must take these factors into account comprehensively to ensure flexible and adaptive support.
<b>One-off financial assistance</b>	State financial support provided to veterans after completing military service or to their loved ones in the event of disappearance or death.
<b>Payments</b>	A general term for any material support, financial assistance or compensation provided by the state to its citizens. Current state support for veterans includes the following payments: disability benefits, post-service benefits, pensions and allowances, and annual payments on Independence Day.
<b>Pension provision</b>	A system of financing designed to provide citizens with regular payments after reaching a certain age, loss of working capacity, or in the event of the loss of a breadwinner.
<b>Personal Directive</b>	A separate instrument for expressing a veteran's will. Unlike a will, it does not apply to all property, but only to certain types of payments, including one-off financial assistance in the event of death and financial support in the event of captivity or being missing in action.
<b>Power of Attorney</b>	A document that gives another person (representative) the right to act on behalf of the person who issues the power of attorney.
<b>Prevention</b>	An approach that focuses on the early identification of risks to the well-being of veterans and their families, as well as on preventing adverse trends in their lives.
<b>Psychological support</b>	A set of methods and approaches that help people improve their emotional state, promote self-development, stress resistance and adaptation to change.
<b>Public veteran policy</b>	The declared and described approach of the state to supporting veterans and their families, which sets out the purpose of such support, its target audience, implementation means and mechanisms, and the tools for measuring effectiveness.

<b>Public policy implementation environment</b>	The legal, organisational and infrastructural framework for the application of policy provisions and norms governing veterans and their loved ones after their participation in combat operations: military service, reserve/general conscription pool or civilian life. The environment determines the possibilities and limitations of state support, as well as the institutions responsible for its implementation.
<b>Recognition</b>	Expressing gratitude and showing respect for the contribution of veterans and their families, providing comprehensive state support for restoring their well-being throughout their lives, and dignified commemoration of fallen and deceased warriors.
<b>Recovery</b>	The process of physical, psychological, social and professional adaptation of veterans after completing their service and returning to civilian life.
<b>Rehabilitation</b>	A system of measures aimed at restoring a person's physical and mental health.
<b>Relationships</b>	Interpersonal relationships shaped on the basis of emotional, social, family or other interactions.
<b>Service</b>	A specific action or set of actions that the state, through its authorities, institutions or authorised organisations, provided to citizens to meet their needs or resolve life situations.
<b>Stakeholders</b>	All stakeholders involved in the development, implementation, financing, evaluation and support of measures aimed at ensuring the rights, interests and needs of the target audience of public policy. These include the responsible Ministry, other governmental authorities, the public sector, communities, international donors and organisations, and businesses.
<b>State social guarantees</b>	Minimum standards of financial support for citizens established by law. These include salaries, pensions, social assistance, benefits and other payments regulated by laws and legal acts.
<b>State strategy</b>	An approved official document and instrument that defines long-term goals, objectives and measures of public policy in a particular area and the main ways to achieve them.
<b>State support</b>	Assistance provided by the state to its citizens, companies or organisations to improve their social or economic situation.

<b>Status</b>	A stable, legally recognised position of a person that defines their social rights and guarantees, obligations, and access to support. It depends on experience, remains relatively constant over time, has a lifelong impact, follows clear criteria, and usually changes only through an official decision or new circumstances.
<b>Subsidies</b>	Financial support from the state provided to cover part of the costs of housing and utility services, healthcare, education and other social needs.
<b>Support</b>	Actions aimed at promoting well-being and improving the quality of life of specific individuals or social groups.
<b>Target audience</b>	A group of people at whom certain activities, initiatives, programmes, or policies are aimed and for whom they are intended.
<b>Target Audience's Profile</b>	The characteristics of the group of people targeted by a policy, programme, or initiative. It includes key parameters such as age, gender, health status, social conditions, place of residence, professional status, education level, and experiences or needs related to the specific policy area.
<b>The Journey of Veterans</b>	The Veteran Hub's study on the experiences of Ukrainian ATO/JFO veterans, based on which a map of the journeys of veterans has been created.
<b>The Journey of Warrior's Beloved Ones</b>	The Veteran Hub's study on the experiences, needs, stages, challenges, difficulties and changes in the lives of wives/partners of service members and veterans of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The team used a map to visualise the results of the study.
<b>Veteran</b>	A person who directly participated in combat operations to defend the Homeland or took part in combat operations on the territory of other states if such participation was part of Ukraine's international commitments.
<b>Veterans' affairs</b>	A set of affairs, actions, and issues related to protecting the rights of veterans and their families, and the provision of services and support, guided by the public veteran policy strategy.

**Vulnerable populations**

Groups of people who have an increased need for support due to difficult social conditions and life circumstances.

**Well-being**

Categorisation of various human needs, necessary for a comprehensive analysis of a person's condition, functionality and level of satisfaction with various aspects of their life. We distinguish between **military** well-being (during service) and **civilian** well-being (in civilian life). Well-being consists of the following six components: health, relationships and recognition, vocation, material needs, housing and physical environment, life skills and spirituality. In this Concept, we focus in detail on the first five components, as the sixth – life skills and spirituality – is a cross-cutting component that manifests within all the others.

**Will**

A document in which a person independently determines to whom and to what extent their property, property rights and obligations will be transferred in the event of their death.

# List of abbreviations

<b>AFU</b>	Armed Forces of Ukraine
<b>ATO/JFO</b>	Anti-Terrorist Operation and Joint Forces Operation
<b>CMU</b>	Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine
<b>CRO</b>	Civil Registry Office
<b>EHS</b>	Electronic healthcare system
<b>EIE</b>	External independent evaluation
<b>HEI</b>	Higher education institution
<b>HUS</b>	Housing and utility services
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally displaced persons
<b>LCU</b>	Labour Code of Ukraine
<b>LGBTQI+</b>	People who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, asexual, pansexual, and intersex individuals, queer and non-binary people, as well as people with other sexual orientations, or people whose sexual orientation or gender identity is undefined (LGBT)
<b>Ministry of Internal Affairs</b>	Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine
<b>Ministry of Social Policy</b>	Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine
<b>MMC</b>	Military medical commission
<b>MoD</b>	Ministry of Defence of Ukraine
<b>MoVA</b>	Ministry of Veterans Affairs
<b>MSEC</b>	Medical and Social Expert Commission

<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>NIB</b>	National Information Bureau
<b>NMT</b>	National Multi-Subject Test
<b>PTSD</b>	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
<b>Russia</b>	Russian Federation
<b>SSC</b>	Single social contribution
<b>SSU</b>	Security Service of Ukraine
<b>TRSSC</b>	Territorial Recruitment and Social Support Centre
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>URPTI</b>	Unified Register of Pre-Trial Investigations

# SECTION 1

## **Challenges and historical background**

# Abstract

The first section of the concept will focus on the issue of state support for veterans' families and trace the historical development of approaches to it.

## **Scope of research:**

- current challenges faced by families of warriors and veterans, namely in the context of full-scale war;
- the current state and challenges in shaping public policy on families of veterans;
- the historical continuity of Soviet policy approaches, which defined the role of the family as secondary and dependent on the status of the veteran;
- the need for a new framework for veteran policy to be based on recognition of the unique experiences of families.

# Introduction

Russia's full-scale war has not only exacerbated the challenges for the support system for warriors and veterans, but has also highlighted the lack of attention to those who are going through the war and will be building their lives after it, alongside them – partners, parents, children, families of the fallen, missing in action, or wounded. To date, Ukraine lacks a comprehensive vision for the experience and support of families of military personnel and veterans. Moreover, families of warriors are not independent subjects of public policy with their own needs and journeys, but are rather automatically perceived as executors of this policy.

This section aims to outline primary challenges faced by the families of veterans in contemporary Ukraine, trace the historical continuity of approaches to their support – from Soviet-era models to the latest reform efforts – and highlight the key and necessary structural changes within the state system. Issues of recognition, access to assistance, legal status, and institutional coordination create a complex environment in which families should not be left to face their challenges alone.

# Challenges of state support for veterans' families

More than a million Ukrainian warriors<sup>2</sup> defend the country every day in the war against Russia, guaranteeing the security of the state and preserving its sovereignty. They are following their own journeys and gaining military and combat experience. They are surrounded by beloved ones, family and friends who support them in various conditions, while themselves facing risks and constant threats to both their own lives and those of their loved ones in the context of war in their country.

During service and after returning home, it is often families who take on new responsibilities, such as providing for the family, becoming coordinators, communicators, and caregivers. At the same time, **they follow their own journey and have their own needs**<sup>3</sup>. The trajectory of their journeys and well-being may vary depending on events in the life of a service member, such as injury, captivity, missing in action, death, or return from service to different environments, including civilian life, reserve/general conscription pool, or military service. These conditions can also have different effects on families' lives, and their experiences can significantly affect their mental and physical health, their ability to live, work, perform daily tasks, and plan for the future<sup>4</sup>.

Loved ones may require separate social protection from the state, such as psychological support, access to healthcare services, or financial guarantees. For them, state support is also a significant sign of recognition and respect for their journeys, experiences, and challenges.

It should be noted that even in countries with a longer history of developing veteran policy, systemic support for families has only

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<sup>2</sup> Shenderovskiy, N. (16 January 2025). A Completely Different Figure: Ukraine's Armed Forces Reveal the Actual Number of the Military on the Front Line. UNIAN. [unian.ua/war/skilki-lyudey-voyuyev-ukrajini-u-zsu-rozpovili-pro-realnu-kilkist-viyskovih-na-fronti-12885759.html](https://unian.ua/war/skilki-lyudey-voyuyev-ukrajini-u-zsu-rozpovili-pro-realnu-kilkist-viyskovih-na-fronti-12885759.html)

<sup>3</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliakh-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliakh-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Segal, M. W., Lane, M. D., & Fisher, A. G. (2015). Conceptual Model of Military Career and Family Life Course Events, Intersections, and Effects on Well-Being. *Military Behavioral Health*, 3 (2). Pp. 95–107. [doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2015.1009212](https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2015.1009212)

begun to take shape relatively recently<sup>5</sup>. **Only in the last few decades have comprehensive approaches to recognising families as a separate policy subject emerged.** This testifies to the general complexity and duration of institutional awareness of the role of relatives.

When considering the participation of families in policy, it is important to distinguish between several roles. We proceed from the assumption that veterans' families are the primary objects of policy, i.e., those targeted by state measures, programmatic and legal support, as well as beneficiaries who directly receive benefits or services from the implementation of policy, such as psychological support, guarantees, payments, and access to health services. On the other hand, subjects of policy in this area are primarily the state and its institutions, which initiate, shape and implement policies. And also stakeholders<sup>6</sup> – all parties that have an interest in or can influence this policy: from state bodies, international partners and civil society organisations to veterans themselves and their families, who can and should become active participants in decision-making processes.

In Ukraine, the state has not considered the families and loved ones of veterans as a separate subject of policy for a long time. The family was identified in legislation partially, unevenly and inconsistently, and its support depended on the veteran's status. The role of the veterans' loved ones was determined without a single coherent and logical approach, which, for a long time, made them "invisible" to the state support system.

In 2024, the Government approved the public **Veteran Policy Strategy until 2030**<sup>7</sup>, in which families of veterans are already recognised as subjects of veteran policy. **However, in order to reform and develop**

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on international approaches to identifying and supporting families of veterans, see [Section 4. Profile of the Target Audience](#).

<sup>6</sup> For more details on the influence and roles of all stakeholders in veteran policy, see [Section 10. Stakeholder Map](#).

<sup>7</sup> Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, "On Approving the Veteran Policy Strategy until 2030 and the Operational Action Plan for Its Implementation in 2024–2027," No. 1209-r (29 November 2024). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/11209-2024-p#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/11209-2024-p#Text)

**effective public policy on families, it is important to take into account the current challenges:**

### **1. No data on families of veterans**

Currently, Ukraine lacks a systemic collection and analysis of data on the life experiences, well-being, and needs of warrior families: the state does not have comprehensive and up-to-date data on the number of these people, their roles, demographics, challenges and changing needs over time, as well as conditions that appear during and after service, in particular as a result of injury, captivity, missing in action, or loss of loved ones.

The lack of data means that the needs and challenges faced by families are overlooked by state institutions, not taken into account in policy-making, and not reflected in practical support mechanisms. The absence of a monitoring system and methodology for collecting data on changing needs also means that support programmes are often designed without taking into account the real needs of families.

The data available today is fragmentary and is collected mainly by civil society organisations within the framework of individual initiatives. Most of these studies emerged after the commencement of the full-scale invasion, when the need to focus on the families of warriors became even more pressing. **Key studies on the needs and experiences of family members are listed below.**

1	<b>The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One<sup>8</sup> (2023, Veteran Hub)</b>
An analysis of the needs of military wives and partners showed that military partners often lack systemic emotional support, while having to bear a double burden — taking care of themselves and their children, maintaining the home, working, and at the same time providing moral support to the warrior.	

<sup>8</sup> Veteran Hub (2023). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. [drive.google.com/file/d/1wSwEoA5zSMZ60L2AziXsZpy70uuue1Xi/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wSwEoA5zSMZ60L2AziXsZpy70uuue1Xi/view)

**2 Study on the experiences and needs of families of military service members who went missing under special circumstances<sup>9</sup> (2024, Legal Hundred human rights organisation and Cedos think tank)**

The study showed that families of missing warriors live in a situation of deep uncertainty, in an emotionally difficult state and face the need to independently learn about the specifics of searching for persons missing in action and the legal aspects related to paperwork and receiving payments, and they do not receive the social and psychological assistance they need.

**3 Study on the experiences and needs of relatives of the fallen<sup>10</sup> (2024, Cedos and Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement)**

The research team found that the relatives of the fallen need not only compensation, but also recognition, support during their loss, and long-term work with memory at the community level, rituals, symbolic space, as well as detailed information and algorithms during all stages of their journeys.

**4 Behind the scenes of care: Veterans' loved ones and caregiving work<sup>11</sup> (2024, Pryncyp Human Rights Centre)**

The team analysed the problems and challenges faced by loved ones caring for wounded soldiers. It noted that loved ones were effectively acting as medical or social workers without the necessary training, resources and support from the system, both moral and material.

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<sup>9</sup> Legal Hundred, Cedos (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of families of military service members who went missing under special circumstances.  
[cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-rodyn-znyklyh-bezvisty-vijskovykh](https://cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-rodyn-znyklyh-bezvisty-vijskovykh)

<sup>10</sup> Cedos (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of relatives of the fallen.  
[cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovykh](https://cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovykh)

<sup>11</sup> Pryncyp (2024). Behind the scenes of care: Veterans' loved ones and caregiving work.  
[pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczya](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczya)

5

From injury to return: Ethnographic research of the journey of veterans and their relatives (2023, Pryncyp Human Rights Centre)<sup>12</sup>

The research team collected testimonies from veterans and their family members about their experiences with the MMC and MSEC in real time – respondents shared their impressions via instant messaging apps. This provided insights for further improvement of the commissions' work and created a space where warriors and their loved ones could express themselves.

These works enabled a deeper understanding of the experiences of families and loved ones of warriors, but they provide only a partial realisation of situations relating to specific subgroups or individual dimensions of family life. There is currently no comprehensive picture, as neither holistic nor representative data have been collected nor are being collected. A significant gap remains in information about various aspects of family life (economic situation, physical and mental health, care and burden on the family, experience of loss and grief, interaction with the state, life in the community), taking into account the type of experience (service, injury, captivity, death, missing in action).

## **2. Focus on formal status rather than actual experience**

For a long time, the Ukrainian social protection system has been characterised by a categorical approach, where the primary criterion for providing support is a person's formal status, rather than their life experiences and current needs. This approach allows the state to organise support according to administrative logic, but does not reflect the complexity of the person's real-life experience.

As a result, beneficiaries are seen by the state not as whole individuals in a specific context, but as a collection of fragmented statuses. This fragmentation creates a number of systemic risks.

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<sup>12</sup> Pryncyp (2023). From Injury to Return: Ethnographic Research of the Journey of Veterans and Their Relatives. [pryncyp.org/analytics/vid-poranennya-do-povernennya-etnografichne-doslidzhennya-shlyahu-veteraniv-ta-yihnih-blyzkyh](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/vid-poranennya-do-povernennya-etnografichne-doslidzhennya-shlyahu-veteraniv-ta-yihnih-blyzkyh)

### ■ **Inconsistency between support programmes**

People with multiple statuses are often forced to interact with several programmes that are not coordinated with each other. As a result, services are duplicated or contradict each other, and some needs are overlooked, particularly those that intersect multiple roles, such as legal support, emotional support, and childcare assistance.

### ■ **Uneven access to support**

People have to independently “gather” the necessary support from several sources, which complicates navigation through the system, discriminates against those who have no access to information or administrative resources, and turns support into a random privilege rather than a systemic right.

### ■ **Ignoring the dynamics of life conditions**

A person’s formal status is static, while life conditions are changeable. A person may lose their status, for example, as an IDP, but remain vulnerable in terms of housing, finances, or emotions. However, the system does not record such changes because it is not designed to monitor the current situation, but only to verify the existence of documentary evidence of status.

The interaction and overlap of multiple statuses and experiences is also ignored: a person may belong to a veteran’s family, as well as have experience of internal displacement, raise children and care for their loved ones with disabilities, pursue education, lose, or seek employment. Such overlapping statuses often increase vulnerability, but this is not reflected in the logic of social support, which primarily considers each status separately and overlooks its cumulative effect.

## **3. Lack of coordination from the state and interagency cooperation**

The systemic absence of coherent coordination at the state level and interagency cooperation is among the reasons for fragmentation and inequality in the provision of support to families of veterans. As a result,

a significant portion of important decisions are made in a non-systemic manner, with delays, or are completely shifted to families.

### ■ **Administrative overburdening of families**

In fact, families perform functions that the state should provide institutionally. They independently organise support for veterans, collect numerous papers, coordinate processes between departments, initiate requests and monitor the fulfilment of state obligations. This situation is not only a form of administrative overburdening, but can also create additional emotional pressure on families who are simultaneously experiencing crisis, loss or trauma.

### ■ **Fragmented access to rights and services**

Due to a lack of coordination between state agencies and the absence of clear communication, access to rights, benefits, and social support often depends not on the law but on random circumstances. Many decisions at the family level are made not in line with the law, but based on informal or random access to information – through acquaintances, social media, support from civil society organisations, or advice from other families. This leads to inequality: some families may receive support thanks to personal ties or a random coincidence, while others are left without guarantees and compensation, even if they have the same right to support.

In some cases, decisions are made at an emotional level within the family and depend on the relationships between family members. The lack of clear external regulations, coordination and support can lead to conflicts within the family or to the independent determination of a “fair” scenario of behaviour, which does not always take into account the interests of all parties.

### ■ **Insufficient access to information**

Another problem is the lack of access to verified and timely information about the military's status. For example, loved ones often learn about injuries, captivity, missing in action or death late or through unofficial channels. The right of children to information is also not regulated;

relatives may conceal the truth because they lack guidance on how to inform and provide appropriate support in such situations.

### ■ **Interagency disconnect**

The absence of a single responsible body complicates interagency cooperation. Families are often required to communicate simultaneously with multiple institutions that are not interconnected and lack coordinated protocols for cooperation. For example, families of prisoners and persons missing in action find themselves between two agencies: formally, they report to the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, but in reality, the issues related to their situation remain within the competence of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine. This creates uncertainty about where to turn for help and support.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive transformation of the system. At the public policy level, it is necessary to designate a single body responsible for coordinating all processes related to veterans' families and providing institutional support to their families, namely the Ministry of Veterans Affairs. It is also important to develop state standards for information and establish effective interagency cooperation with clearly defined responsibilities and accountability for each institution, in order to ensure effective, understandable, and timely support for the warriors' families and loved ones.

# Historical Background

The current situation is a consequence of the established system, which has not been reviewed for a long time. We are at a point where the existing mechanisms no longer correspond to the actual state of affairs.

## 20th century

By the end of World War II in 1945, there were over 25 million people in the former USSR who held the public status of “frontline heroes”<sup>13</sup>. This group included only veterans who fought in the Soviet army.

After the end of World War II, the Soviet regime granted them a limited number of privileges, which mainly concerned employment and basic material compensation<sup>14</sup>. However, most of them had been abolished by 1948. Veterans with disabilities had small pensions. However, they varied considerably depending on rank and place of residence. To receive them, they needed to confirm their disability every year at a special medical commission.

Under this system, families of World War II veterans had no official status or state guarantees. Despite the lack of public policy and support, they took on the entire care for the loved ones: from receiving benefits and seeking medical assistance to direct care, rehabilitation, and psychological support.

Soviet propaganda actively reinforced the image of women as “guardians” who had to ensure that veterans returned to civilian life. Women were responsible for their physical and psychological recovery and adaptation to society. This model shifted responsibility away from the state, allowing it to save money, minimise social programmes and,

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<sup>13</sup> Edele, M. (2017, 27 January). Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group, 1945–1955. *Slavic Review*, 65 (1), 111–137. P. 120. [doi.org/10.2307/4148525](https://doi.org/10.2307/4148525)

<sup>14</sup> Decree “On the Benefits and Privileges Granted to Those Awarded Orders and Medals of the USSR” (10 September 1947). *Collection of Laws of the USSR and Decrees of the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. 1938 — July 1956*, edited by a PhD in Law, Y. Mandelshtam. State Publishing House of Legal Literature, 1956, pp. 300–301.

at the same time, maintain control over the family as the “social centre of Soviet morality.”

If a veteran lost their family or did not have one, they were left without any help or support. Female veterans, in turn, faced double discrimination: their participation in combat was often ignored, and they were expected to return to traditional female roles without recognition of their combat experience<sup>15</sup>.

The text of the **Law of the USSR “On Pension Provision for Citizens in the USSR”** of 1990<sup>16</sup> does not contain the phrase “families of veterans” at all. Instead, it includes the following categories:

- families of those who have lost their breadwinner;
- families whose breadwinner has become disabled.

Thus, this law did not recognise death or loss in service or at the front as grounds for specific social guarantees, and all cases were considered as loss of a breadwinner, without allowances, compensation or special status.

The **Law of the USSR “On Pension Provision for the Military”** of 1990 already mentions the concepts of “military families” and state support for them. However, its implementation was complicated by the mechanism of combining special and general legislation in the USSR<sup>17</sup>, where the law guaranteed families a pension payment in the event of the death or loss of a service member, but it had to be established under the **Law of the USSR “On Pension Provision for Citizens in the USSR.”** This means that, despite the declared protection, in practice, priority remained with general norms, and the family had to confirm the fact

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<sup>15</sup> I.I. Sukhovska (2017). The Image of Women during World War II in Contemporary Russian Historiography. Scientific works of the History Department of Zaporizhzhia National University, (49). [istznu.org/index.php/journal/article/download/301/285](http://istznu.org/index.php/journal/article/download/301/285)

<sup>16</sup> Law of the USSR “On Pension Provision for Citizens in the USSR” (1990). [economics.kiev.ua/download/ZakonySSSR/data01/tex10907.htm](http://economics.kiev.ua/download/ZakonySSSR/data01/tex10907.htm)

<sup>17</sup> In the USSR, as in many modern legal systems, both general and special legislation operated – two levels of legal regulation that did not formally conflict, but created a hierarchy of priorities and exceptions. General legislation encompassed regulatory legal acts that governed the rights and obligations of all citizens, whereas special legislation comprised legal acts that governed these rights and obligations for specific social categories.

of the service member's loss as a breadwinner in order to receive the minimum social guarantees.

Both laws – general and special – were adopted almost simultaneously, but remained inconsistent with each other. This prevented the creation of a clear mechanism for social protection for military families, especially in cases of service-related death or disability.

Since families were not recognised separately, they often benefited from the few general privileges granted to veterans, which the state restricted through various bureaucratic mechanisms. Thus, it often took years to receive recognition of veteran status, healthcare, or social security. Often, the only support for World War II veterans in the Soviet state was the horizontal ties between the military themselves and their families, which could develop into informal mutual aid communities.

During the USSR era, especially during World War II, members of the OUN (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists) and UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) also engaged in the armed struggle. Since their goal was Ukrainian independence, the USSR did not recognise this group of veterans and their families either.

1945	The end of World War II; more than 25 million people in the USSR were awarded the status of “front-line heroes”
1948	Abolition of most benefits for veterans
1990	<p>The Law “On Pension Provision for Citizens in the USSR” does not contain the concept of “veterans’ families”; it only refers to “families that have lost their breadwinner” or “families whose breadwinner has a disability.”</p> <p>At the same time, the law introduces the concept of “military families,” but in practice, support for them is limited to general norms</p>

## 21st century

After gaining independence, Ukraine began to develop its own policy on veterans. Still, it was fragmented for a long time and did not always take into account the needs of veterans and their families.

The Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection,”<sup>18</sup> adopted in 1993, was based on a similar Soviet law and followed Soviet approaches, despite the drastically new social and military context that emerged after the collapse of the USSR: changes in the social structure of society, the beginning of Ukraine’s participation in peacekeeping missions, and the transformation of the army.

This law already covered the families of warriors, but they were not designated as separate beneficiaries, and their rights and benefits depended on the status of the main subject – the defender or fallen defender.

For example, family members of fallen warriors were granted the appropriate status and entitled to various benefits, including free use of utilities, priority access to health resort treatment, and healthcare. However, this support was provided without taking into account the needs of the family, but only depending on the status of the fallen combatants, and the family was not recognised as an independent subject of the right to support.

The Law “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families” was adopted in Ukraine in 1991<sup>19</sup>. After 1999, it was amended several times to specify the rights of family members, particularly with regard to social protection, housing and job security. However, this still depended on the service member’s status

After the start of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2014, the issue of supporting veterans and their families in Ukraine became more pressing.

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<sup>18</sup> Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection,” No. 3551-XII (1993). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text)

<sup>19</sup> Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families” No. 2011-XII (20 December 1991). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text)

However, the state's primary efforts initially targeted the military, and only later did they focus on veterans. Instead, the families of warriors continued to play the primary role in care and socialisation, often without adequate support. Partners of veterans and their closest relatives often had to seek opportunities for rehabilitation, access to health and social services, legal protection, and emotional support on their own, without special training or assistance from the state<sup>20</sup>.

From 2014 to 2018, the State Service of Ukraine for Veterans Affairs was responsible for implementing the state's veteran policy<sup>21</sup>. It operated under the coordination of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine through the Ministry of Social Policy. It was not until December 2018 that a dedicated Ministry of Veterans Affairs was established and began its work.

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved a regulation for this ministry<sup>22</sup>. It tasked the Ministry of Veterans Affairs with shaping and executing public policy in the field of social protection of veterans and their families. However, in September 2019, it merged with the Ministry for Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine, forming a single entity: the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, Temporarily Occupied Territories, and Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine.

This resulted in an expanded remit: beyond supporting veterans and their families, the new ministry now had to handle issues related to IDPs, residents of temporarily occupied territories, and peacebuilding, reconstruction, and development of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.

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<sup>20</sup> Research "Rehabilitation of Ukrainian Military and Veterans: Navigating Systemic Gaps," commissioned by the Human Rights Centre for Military Personnel and Veterans "Pryncyp" and presented in December 2024, shows that in 24% of cases, family members of veterans were responsible for finding a healthcare facility for rehabilitation in cases where transfer between facilities was necessary. In 12% of cases, relatives and acquaintances of veterans took on the responsibility of providing healthcare for them because healthcare professionals either did not do so (2%), there were not enough healthcare professionals available, and/or healthcare professionals could not provide the necessary level of service (10%). [pryncyp.org/analytics/rehabilitation](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/rehabilitation)

<sup>21</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (10 September 2014). Resolution No. 416 "Certain Issues of the State Service of Ukraine for War Veterans and Participants of the Anti-Terrorist Operation." [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/416-2014-n#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/416-2014-n#Text)

<sup>22</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (27 December 2018). Resolution No. 1175 "Regulation on the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine." [mva.gov.ua/polozhennya-pro-ministerstvo-u-spravah-veteraniv-ukraini](https://mva.gov.ua/polozhennya-pro-ministerstvo-u-spravah-veteraniv-ukraini)

In March 2020, the merger was reversed, and the Ministry of Veterans Affairs returned to its original focus of shaping and implementing public policy on veterans and their families. Between 2018 and 2025, there were five changes in leadership at the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, including both ministers and acting ministers. For a long time, the ministry's work lacked coordination with other central executive authorities.

In response to institutional challenges in the field of veterans' affairs, civil society has been developing in Ukraine since 2014, with the establishment of civil society organisations and charitable institutions. They supplemented state efforts, offered policy solutions, provided support, and sometimes filled gaps in meeting the needs of different groups of people. They were precisely the ones providing support not only to veterans but also to their families – from psychosocial assistance to legal aid.

Civil society organisations also conceptualised the family not as a secondary supporting link in the process of veteran adaptation, but as a separate and independent policy subject – a bearer of unique experiences that are affected and require targeted, long-term support. Through research, advocacy, and public sector campaigns, public discussions began about the experiences, challenges, and needs of partners, parents, and children of military personnel and veterans.

In 2023, five expert civil society organisations<sup>23</sup>, including the authors of this document, working in the field of veterans' affairs, formed a coalition and developed their own **Concept of Policy on Veterans and Their Families**<sup>24</sup>, which they presented on 31 October 2023. In August 2024, the coalition signed a memorandum and launched cooperation with the Ministry of Veterans Affairs. The first major outcome of this joint effort was the development of a new **Veteran Policy Strategy until 2030**, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers

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<sup>23</sup> Veteran Hub, Pryncyp, Legal Hundred, Space of Opportunities, and Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement (Veteranka) non-governmental organisations.

<sup>24</sup> Veteran Hub, Pryncyp, Space of Opportunities, Legal Hundred, Veteranka (2023). Concept of the Policy on Veterans and Their Families. [veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/polityka-shchodo-veteraniv-ta-ikh-simey.pdf](https://veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/polityka-shchodo-veteraniv-ta-ikh-simey.pdf)

of Ukraine on 29 November 2024<sup>25</sup>. The Strategy is rooted in the coalition's first concept of national policy.

Another important change that took place due to the approval of the Strategy was that family members of veterans were recognised as separate subjects of veteran policy. Recognition of subjectivity is the first step towards further development and implementation of a legislative framework that will serve as a guarantee and basis for supporting the families of veterans. However, despite the adoption of the Strategy, much remains to be done to refine and strengthen the implementation mechanisms of public policy.

Today's conditions require a new approach to veteran policy that takes into account the needs and challenges not only of veterans, but also of their families. This means expanding the legal definition of the term "**veteran's family**," developing special programmes for family members, and creating mechanisms for social and psychological support that take into account real experiences and needs.

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<sup>25</sup> Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, "On Approving the Veteran Policy Strategy until 2030 and the Operational Action Plan for Its Implementation in 2024–2027," No. 1209-r (29 November 2024). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1209-2024-p#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1209-2024-p#Text)

<b>1993</b>	The Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection” mentions the families of warriors for the first time, but their rights depend on the status of the defender or fallen defender
<b>1999</b>	The Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families” establishes guarantees for family members of service persons
<b>2014</b>	The beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Public policy focuses on the military, leaving families without systemic support
<b>2014–2018</b>	Veteran policy administered by the State Service for Veterans Affairs under the Ministry of Social Policy
<b>2018 (December)</b>	Establishment of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine
<b>2019</b>	The ministry merges with the Ministry for Temporarily Occupied Territories, forming a single ministry with an expanded mandate
<b>2020 (March)</b>	Merger reversed; the Ministry of Veterans Affairs reinstated as independent
<b>2023 (31 October)</b>	A coalition of five civil society organisations presents its own Concept of the Policy for Veterans and Their Families
<b>2024 (29 November)</b>	The Government approves a new Veteran Policy Strategy until 2030, developed based on the concept. Veterans’ families are recognised as a separate subject of policy for the first time

# Conclusions

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**1** Historical analysis and current assessment of public policy on families of veterans demonstrate a systemic lack of a consistent approach to supporting them. As in the Soviet model, where responsibility was shifted to the family, and in today's fragmented programmes, which depend on the formal status of the veteran, families have long remained "invisible" to the social protection system.

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**2** Contemporary challenges: prolonged war and military service, increasing numbers of dead, wounded and missing in action – require a rethinking of approaches. Families of veterans are going through difficult experiences, taking on new roles, facing a lack of resources, information and support, often providing on their own what should be the responsibility of the state.

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**3** Insufficient coordination between institutions and a lack of up-to-date data on families' needs complicates family life. However, new civil society initiatives, the adoption of the **Veteran Policy Strategy** in 2024, and the recognition of families as subjects create potential for systemic change.

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**4** The development of effective policies should be based on recognising the unique experiences of families, focusing on real needs rather than formal statuses, and institutional responsibility on the part of the state to provide comprehensive support at all stages. This approach is not only fair but also strategically important for the stability of society and the country's future defence capability.

# SECTION 2

## **Goals and Principles of Public Policy on Veterans and Their Families**

# Abstract

Section Two of this Concept outlines the core aspects, purpose, guiding principles, and approaches of the public policy on veterans and their families. It lays the ideological foundation for rethinking the role of veteran policy in supporting those who have walked the path of war and their families.

## **Primary goal of the policy:**

Recognition of the contribution of veterans and their loved ones, comprehensive state support to restore their well-being, and lifelong cross-sectoral support.

## **Guiding principles:**

- **Cross-sectoral approach** – equal access to public services for all veterans and their families.
- **Human-centricity** – people, their rights and freedoms are a priority.
- **Proactive and long-term approach** to providing support.
- **Realism** – support should be provided with due regard to the actual resources of the state.
- **Respect** – veteran policy should recognise the contribution of veterans and their families.

# Introduction

The ongoing war in Ukraine has reshaped society and created unprecedented challenges for public policy. A critical priority is maintaining high defence readiness while ensuring veterans and their families receive adequate support, not merely as a gesture of gratitude but as a strategic investment in national security and stability.

Public policy on veterans and their families must be systemic, comprehensive, and long-term in scope. To achieve this, the state must clearly define the purpose of such a policy and enshrine the principles and approaches that will serve as a value-driven and conceptual framework for future actions.

A unified public policy should be understood as a declared approach of the government to supporting veterans and their families, encompassing the goals of such support, its target audience, implementation mechanisms, and tools to measure its effectiveness.

The current leading view among experts is that the state's greatest asset lies in its people. Thus, when discussing the consequences of the war's end and the future of national recovery and modernisation, we must first and foremost focus on restoring people and their well-being.

The development of an effective and comprehensive policy requires an inclusive process that engages the state, civil society, beneficiaries, and the public sector. Yet, clear institutional leadership is essential: a single body must be appointed to develop, coordinate, and oversee the implementation of the veteran policy and also lead the efforts of all state institutions involved in veterans' affairs.

**In our view, an effective public policy on veterans and their families should rest on several key pillars:**

Recognition	Understanding	Actions
The unique experiences of veterans and their families, and a clear definition of their status	The impact of experiences of veterans and their loved ones on their well-being and the needs arising from it	Identifying what kind of support veterans and their families need at each stage of their journey
	The goal and ways of supporting veterans and their families	Establishing standards for delivering such support
		Coordinating efforts of state institutions, civil society, and the international community

We now turn to what a modern national veteran policy should look like and will examine its key components, institutional mechanisms, and principles of implementation.

# The goal of public policy on veterans and their families

In 2023, we introduced the first Concept of the Public Policy for Veterans and Their Families, outlining its goals and guiding principles. This vision was later incorporated into the new public Veteran Policy Strategy<sup>26</sup>: “The goal of the Strategy is to duly honour veterans’ contributions to the defence of the Homeland, provide comprehensive state support for restoring their well-being (taking into account the effects of combat experience) and the well-being of their families, and ensure cross-sectoral, lifelong assistance tailored to their individual needs. It also aims to strengthen the national defence capabilities by enhancing the prestige of military service and recognising veterans’ pivotal role (particularly in military reserve) and their potential for the economic development of the country.”

This goal rests on several critical components. The public policy on veterans and their families is inseparable from national defence and security strategies, which makes it directly tied to the country's existential survival.

By joining the ranks of the Security and Defence Forces, veterans and their loved ones take high risks to their own well-being and lives. Warriors gain combat experience, expand their knowledge, and improve their combat and defensive skills, while their families are affected by the experiences of their loved ones’ service. Should Ukraine face future threats to its sovereignty after the Russo-Ukrainian war, these veterans, the bearers of battlefield-tested experience, will form the backbone of the national Security and Defence Forces, and their families will be affected again and again.

Veteran support policy must be grounded in dignity and respect, recognising experiences of veterans and their loved ones, not just

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<sup>26</sup> Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, “On Approving the Veteran Policy Strategy until 2030 and the Operational Action Plan for Its Implementation in 2024–2027,” No. 1209-r (29 November 2024). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1209-2024-p#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1209-2024-p#Text)

legally but also socially and serving a proactive purpose of inspiring future warriors. When military service is viewed as honourable and life afterwards is seen as stable and state-supported, citizens are more likely to join the Security and Defence Forces. For veterans from the military reserve and the general conscription pool, the policy must provide transparent guarantees and prospects.

Comprehensive state support must focus on restoring human well-being. Serving in wartime conditions can have deep physical, psychological, social, and economic consequences for veterans. Thus, support must be systemic, encompassing healthcare, psychological care, access to education, employment opportunities, housing, and legal assistance. Veteran policy should also acknowledge the experiences of veterans' families that endure their own battles during their loved ones' service: emotional strain, economic hardship, and shifting family dynamics. Thus, support should extend to families: partners, children, parents, and other loved ones.

These services must be tailored to the individual experiences and needs. Support should not be time-limited after service ends, but instead adapt across the life course.

Veterans and their loved ones are citizens of the country and active participants in its economy. Many seek to launch businesses, pursue studies, and transition into new careers. Public policy should enable these ambitions through targeted opportunities.

Goal Component	Definitions	Objectives
1	Honouring veterans' contributions to national defence and recognition of the roles of their families	Guarantee public recognition of the journeys of veterans and their families
		Express public gratitude for fulfilling civic duty and defending the interests of the state: its people, values, governance, and territorial integrity
2	Provision of comprehensive state support for restoring their well-being	Restore justice and equal opportunities in civilian life, compensate for measurable losses suffered by veterans and their families, especially the families of fallen or missing warriors
		Provide opportunities, resources, and support for veterans and their loved ones to independently choose their path and live the life they want
		Ensure a positive trajectory in civilian life through cross-sectoral support throughout life
3	Strengthening of the national defence capacities and recognition of the central role of veterans, their families, and their potential in the economic growth of the country	Promote the prestige of military service and national defence
		Safeguard the well-being of warriors and their families, and the economic stability of the country

# 1

## Component One Honouring veterans' contributions to national defence and recognition of the roles of their families

### Objectives

- Guarantee public recognition of the journeys of veterans and their families.
- Express public gratitude for fulfilling civic duty and defending the interests of the state: its people, values, governance, and territorial integrity.

Respect and gratitude begin with dignifying the contributions of warriors and the profound impacts that military service has on their lives. In addition, it is important to recognise the role and journey of their families and the experiences they have during and after their loved ones' service.

Only those who have stood side by side on the battlefield or have been waiting for their loved ones from the frontline can fully understand the experiences of warriors and their families. Civil society and the state can and must create an environment where veterans and their families feel supported, and their contributions receive the due recognition they deserve.

# 2

## Component Two Provision of comprehensive state support for restoring the well-being of veterans and their families

### Objectives

- Restore justice and equal opportunity in civilian life, compensate for measurable losses suffered by veterans and their families, especially the families of fallen or missing defenders.
- Provide opportunities, resources, and support for veterans and their loved ones to independently choose their path and live the life they want.
- Ensure a positive trajectory<sup>27</sup> in civilian life through cross-sectoral support for veterans and their loved ones throughout their lives.

While in service, service members often lose the opportunity to invest in their civilian well-being, such as developing a civilian career, nurturing relationships with family and loved ones, or securing stable housing. At the same time, the longer they serve, the more opportunities they have to build military well-being by advancing in rank, gaining additional knowledge, skills, or specialisations. This military well-being is harder to translate into civilian life. Thus, one of the core functions of public veteran policy is to support the transition of this knowledge and experience into the civilian domain, facilitating employment of veterans.

The rebuilding of common civilian well-being by veterans and their loved ones does not happen immediately upon returning to civilian life<sup>28</sup>; it typically follows a period of transition or recovery. However, the veteran's ability to sustain that well-being also depends

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<sup>27</sup> We distinguish between positive and negative trajectories in the journeys of veterans. A positive trajectory refers to a journey where a veteran, despite facing challenges, finds the strength and support to adapt after returning and maintain a good quality of life.

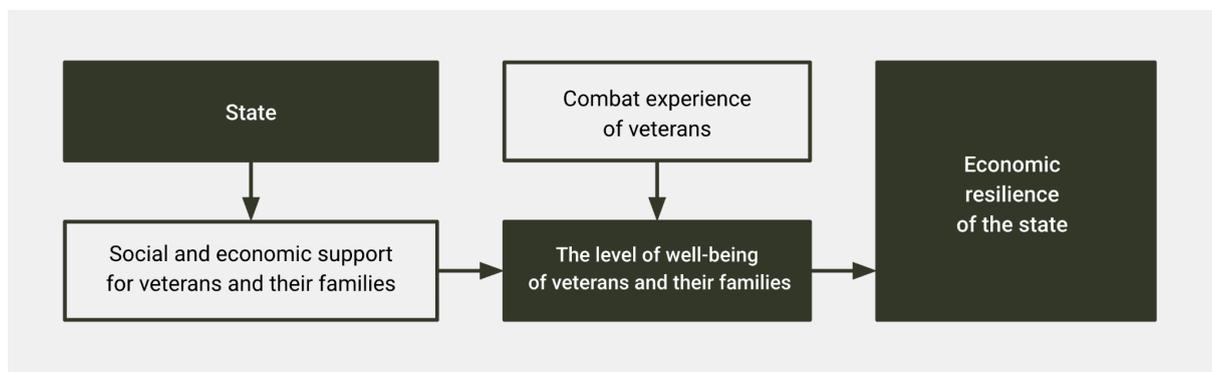
<sup>28</sup> For more details on the Well-Being Model and the stages of Veterans' Journey, see [Section 3. Approaches](#).

on the duration of this civilian life. The more call-ups a veteran undergoes, the longer their time in service is; the shorter the civilian intervals between deployments, the fewer opportunities they have to rebuild quality civilian well-being.

The families of veterans will also be affected in terms of their own well-being during their loved one's service in each call-up. These effects may manifest in physical and mental health, as well as family dynamics, due to shifting roles. In cases where a warrior is killed, missing in action, or captured, their family will require additional state support.

The combat experience and waiting for a loved one affect the lives of warriors and their families throughout their lives. That is why we believe dignified support should be aimed at restoring their well-being throughout their entire lives and based on a professional approach to designing policies and programmes that reflect their real needs. Just as vital is the state's responsibility to fulfil its declared guarantees, as supporting veterans and their loved ones cannot be merely a formality; it must provide real opportunities for a fulfilling life during and after service.

As the ones who have made a conscious choice in favour of the collective good over individual interests, veterans and their families are the foundation of Ukraine's human capital. Their military and combat experience influences their well-being, which in turn impacts the economic resilience of the state. In this sense, supporting veterans and their families means strengthening the economy.



**Accordingly, public veteran policy must include socioeconomic support, specifically:**

- providing assistance in building well-being during and after service;
- creating opportunities for rapid restoration of well-being, its growth, and protection in case of repeated service;
- protecting rights to adaptation and fair participation in social and political life and government affairs;
- facilitating access to education, employment, or entrepreneurship.

# 3

## Component Three Strengthening the national defence capacities and recognition of the central role of veterans, their families, and their potential in the economic growth of the country

### Objectives

- Promote the prestige of military service and national defence.
- Safeguard the well-being of warriors and their families, and the economic stability of the country.

Veterans and their experiences serve as role models for future defenders. A sense of belonging to a state-honoured force is a powerful motivational factor for those considering military service.

How the state and society treat veterans and their families will influence whether new warriors are willing to sacrifice their time, health, and even lives to defend the country. And veterans – whether to remain in service after the end of active combat operations.

That is why the policy on veterans and their families is inseparable from the defence planning and the prestige of military service, which should become a driver for future enlistment. Key aspects include adaptation, recognition, respect, and commemoration. Implementing these initiatives helps unite society around a respectful attitude toward its defenders, while encouraging new generations to join the Ukrainian Security and Defence Forces.

Additionally, acknowledging and supporting veterans and their loved ones through government policy can lay the foundation for bolstering national identity and societal morale, as well as enhancing citizens' trust in state institutions. This consequently enables the country to respond more efficiently to both internal and external crises.

# The principles of public policy on veterans and their families

To design an effective public policy that truly serves veterans and their families, it is essential to adhere to consistent principles built on respect for human dignity, rights, and interests.

This section outlines the core guiding principles for ensuring effective state support and opportunities for veterans and their families. These principles have already been incorporated into the Veteran Policy Strategy<sup>29</sup>.

1. Cross-sectoral approach	2. Human-centricity	3. Prevention
4. Long-term commitment	5. Realism	6. Respect

## 1 Cross-sectoral approach

As stated in the Strategy: “Veterans and their family members, as citizens, must be represented across all sectors and have access to all programmes and services implemented (or provided) by the state, businesses, and local communities. No state action or decision should result in the exclusion or discrimination of veterans or their family members.”

Regardless of their environment (military service, reserve duty, or civilian life), Ukrainian veterans continue their journeys as full-fledged citizens of Ukraine.

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<sup>29</sup> Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, “On Approving the Veteran Policy Strategy until 2030 and the Operational Action Plan for Its Implementation in 2024–2027,” No. 1209-r (29 November 2024). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1209-2024-p#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1209-2024-p#Text)

### **As such, they are entitled to:**

- an honest public dialogue;
- a clear understanding of service prospects and life planning;
- accurate information on the scope of state support they can count on;
- accessible and understandable support mechanisms.

Their needs must be fully represented, with equal access to all state, business, and community services and programmes. No action or decision by the government should ever result in exclusion or discrimination against veterans or their families. The state must ensure that its support policies remain effective regardless of the conditions in which a person finds themselves.

## **2**

## **Human-centricity**

As stated in the Strategy: “Public policy should prioritise the life and well-being of the person and the exercise of their rights and freedoms, not their status. Every person acquires a unique life experience shaped by time and context, which impacts their well-being in different ways.”

Recognising the diversity of human experience and statuses, public policy should focus on people, not statuses. That means that support provided to veterans and their families should be shaped by their actual needs, not solely by their legal status.

Public veteran policy should reflect various needs of veterans and their families – those stemming from military experience or waiting for a loved one, as well as individual factors affecting their well-being. It should be inclusive and account for the diversity of life conditions of veterans and their families. Further accumulation of sufficient data will allow identifying trends based on demographic and other characteristics, enabling more precise state support offers.

## 3

## Prevention

As stated in the Strategy: “The core approach when developing support tools should focus on early identification of risks to the well-being of veterans and their families, as well as prevention of adverse trends in their lives. Analytics, forecasting, and prevention should be the key priorities of public policy on veterans and their families.”

Understanding the needs of veterans and their families enables the development of not only reactive but also strategic and preventive solutions. Research, such as *The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One*<sup>30</sup>, shows that the combat experience of a loved one may give rise to additional needs of wives/partners. These may be needs for psychological support and mutual support communities, access to information about the veteran’s condition, financial stability, and recognition of their role.

With sufficient data and expertise, it is entirely possible for the state to predict the challenges and issues that veterans and their families may face. Prevention should be a cornerstone of public policy.

## 4

## Long-term commitment

As stated in the Strategy: “Public policy on veterans and their families should prioritise consistent support throughout all stages of life, including end-of-life care. The support system should be accessible, user-friendly, and tailored to the specific needs of all beneficiaries.”

Returning to civilian life takes time. Each veteran progresses at their own pace, facing individual challenges. Veteran policy should acknowledge the lifelong impact of military and combat experience on their well-being and ensure a dignified quality of life. This means that support

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<sup>30</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). *The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One*.  
[kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

cannot be provided just once, immediately after service. It should be guaranteed throughout the entire life of veterans.

At the same time, long-term support should also apply to their family members. Loved ones of veteran families need the most support during their service. However, they also should receive the necessary support in the event of their loved one's death, captivity, or being missing in action. In such situations, families face new and often long-lasting challenges. Public policy should ensure that support for such families is not limited to the period immediately following the loss or trauma, but continues for as long as necessary, in various forms, including psychological, social, educational, and financial support.

Military service and combat experience can have lifelong effects on the well-being of veterans and their loved ones. Care for them is not only about honouring their past and experiences. It is about ensuring quality living standards, acknowledging the unique challenges and needs they may face as they move through life.

## 5 Realism

As stated in the Strategy: "State support should focus on the swift restoration of the civilian well-being of veterans and their families by providing them with the resources and opportunities necessary for successful return to civilian life, based on the capabilities of the country."

While the war affects the entire nation, an inefficient mobilisation and rotation system creates stark disparities in the opportunities of those who have served during the war and those who have not. Similarly, the system has a lasting impact on the well-being of veterans' family members during and after their loved one's service. Families bear an additional burden: they take care of children, run the household, and look after elderly family members, often limiting their own professional development and social activities.

Upon return, veterans have to compete in civilian environments with those who faced no career interruptions, did not lose time, and were able to develop their civilian potential. Similarly, family members who effectively sacrificed part of their own opportunities during their service face challenges in restoring a stable life. Therefore, state support should be aimed at restoring the well-being of veterans and their loved ones.

As we redefine a new vision for public policy, our message is clear: veterans and their families are invaluable human capital for Ukraine's future. This means the goal of public policy is to elevate their well-being and expand competitive opportunities, regardless of the setting in which the policy is implemented.

## 6

## Respect

As stated in the Strategy, "Public policy guarantees the recognition of the combat experience of veterans. Their heroic service must become part of a renewed modern concept of the Ukrainian nation."

When service members take up arms in defence of the country, they risk paying the ultimate price for the safety of Ukraine. Since 2014, thousands have fallen in battle. Their brothers- and sisters-in-arms, families, and friends will carry their memory forever. The duty of the state is to respect, honour, and remember every name and every contribution made by fallen Ukrainian warriors and care for their families.

# Conclusions

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**1** An effective policy on veterans and their families is a key element of Ukraine's security and existential survival. It holds strategic importance for Ukraine's resilience during the war and postwar recovery.

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**2** To implement this effort, we propose that public policy on veterans and their families centre around three core objectives:

- public respect and gratitude for fulfilling their civic duty and defending the state interests of Ukraine: its people, values, governance, and territorial integrity;
- supporting the well-being of warriors and their loved ones, and Ukraine's economic stability;
- strengthening national defence and security capacity.

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**3** Principles of an effective public policy on veterans and their families:

- veterans and their families are citizens of Ukraine and, as such, are entitled to high-quality services and support from all providers;
- the focus of public policy is the person, not their status;
- the actions of the state should be preventive, not reactive;

- support for veterans and their loved ones should be lifelong;
  - veterans and their families are invaluable human capital for Ukraine; public policy should empower them to fully realise their potential;
  - public policy guarantees the recognition of the life journeys of veterans and their loved ones.
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**4** Effective and comprehensive policy requires inclusive collaboration, engaging the state, civil society, beneficiaries, and local communities. Yet, clear institutional leadership is essential: a single body must be appointed to develop, coordinate, and oversee the implementation of the veteran policy and also lead the efforts of all state institutions involved in veterans' affairs.

# SECTION 3

## **Approaches to Developing Public Policy on Veterans' Families**

# Abstract

In the third section of the concept, we describe approaches to building public policy on veterans' families and emphasise that experience should be the basis for shaping it.

## **Scope of research:**

- the impact on the veterans' families and how this affects their status and needs;
- the diversity of life experiences of the veterans' loved ones and the concepts of "status" and "condition";
- different types of relationships within the family, including factual, economic, and emotional;
- how the Journey methodology, the conditions of the veteran's service (return, injury, captivity, disappearance, or death) and the concept of Well-being can help understand the needs of the family;
- why policies on veterans' families may differ depending on the environment in which they are implemented: civilian life, reserve/general conscription pool and military service.

# Introduction

In developing public policy on veterans' families, we proceed from the understanding that the warrior's military service, combat experience and the war directly or indirectly affect their family members as well. Therefore, we consider the family not simply as an additional factor in policy on veterans, but as a full beneficiary and subject of public policy that requires separate attention and support.

In this section, we propose a new approach to developing public policy on veterans' families, focusing on the family's experience rather than just their legal status. It is the experience of service, combat, injury, captivity, missing in action, or death that determines the family's life conditions and shapes the demand for support. Therefore, the state must recognise it as the basis for flexible and sensitive support.

Veterans' family members, regardless of their status, may find themselves in different life conditions and situations, experiencing many parallel or sequential events that affect their well-being, life decisions, and need for support. These experiences can be part of different spheres of life – family, professional, social, and emotional – and vary in depth and duration. The key task of policy is not to ignore this multi-layered nature, but to take it into account in decision-making and the development of support mechanisms.

Understanding the needs at different stages and trajectories of the veteran's and their family's journey – after discharge<sup>31</sup>, in the event of injury/illness<sup>32</sup>, missing in action<sup>33</sup>, captivity<sup>34</sup> or death of a loved one<sup>35</sup>, as well as the environment in which they find themselves (military service, reserve, or civilian life) allows for a more accurate determination of the nature of their needs and the possibilities for meeting them.

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<sup>31</sup> [Section 5. The Journey of Veterans' Families](#)

<sup>32</sup> [Section 6. The Journey of Families of Veterans with Disabilities](#)

<sup>33</sup> [Section 7. The Journey of Families of Veterans Missing in Action](#)

<sup>34</sup> [Section 8. The Journey of Families of Prisoners of War and Veterans Liberated from Captivity](#)

<sup>35</sup> [Section 9. The Journey of Fallen Veterans' Families](#)

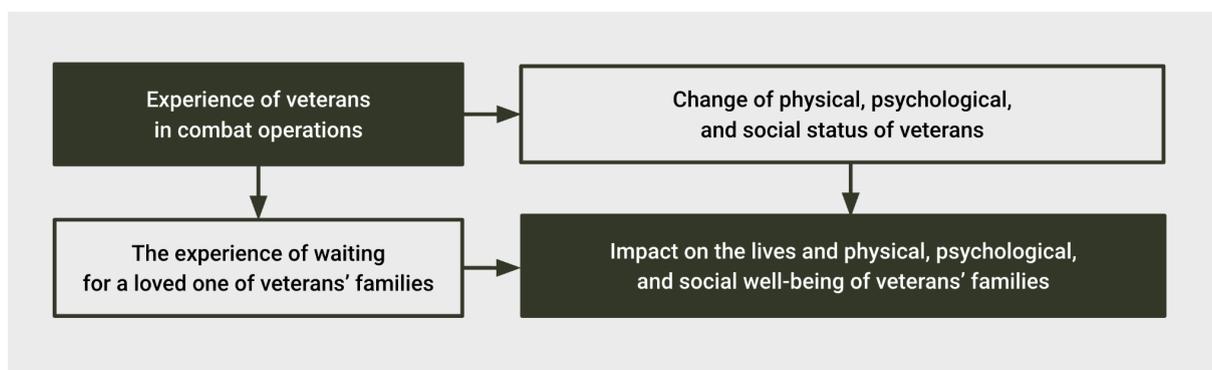
The family's journey helps policymakers understand why the need arises, and the environment helps policymakers understand the conditions under which it must be met.

These approaches enable the development of public policy that recognises the family as a subject of support with experiences, challenges and needs that must be taken into account.

# The impact of past experiences as a basis for support

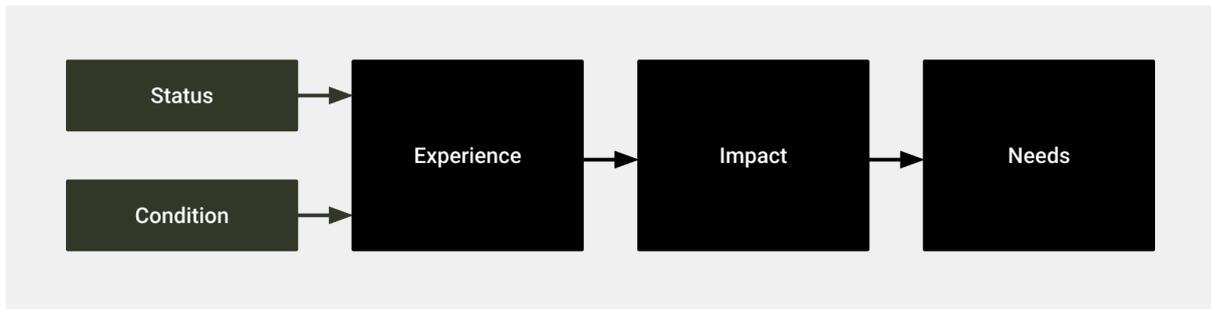
For public veteran policy to be effective and just, it must be grounded on the fact that every status reflects a unique experience. The status is not merely a legal or administrative designation, but a representation of what a person has endured. It is the experience that gives meaning to the status, not the other way around.

The combat experience has a multidimensional **impact** – physical, psychological, social, and economic – not only on veterans themselves, but on their families too. Families are forced to significantly reorganise their lives, adapt to new realities, face uncertainty, prolonged stress, and high expectations, and continue their daily lives and livelihoods with high risks to their future well-being for an extended period. When a veteran returns to civilian life, the changes affect not only them personally but also the entire family, which goes through its own difficult journey of adaptation and recovery.



In the first concept of public veteran policy<sup>36</sup>, we emphasised that any assignment of status should primarily take into account a person's actual experience. This approach helps understand how that experience affects their well-being and enables the provision of appropriate and quality support.

<sup>36</sup> Veteran Hub, Pryncyp, Space of Opportunities, Legal Hundred, Veteranka (2023). Concept of the Policy on Veterans and Their Families. [veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/polityka-shchodo-veteraniv-ta-ikh-simey.pdf](https://veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/polityka-shchodo-veteraniv-ta-ikh-simey.pdf)



For a long time, the Ukrainian social protection system has been characterised by a categorical approach, where the primary criterion for providing support is a person's formal status, rather than their life experiences or current needs. This approach allows the state to streamline assistance according to administrative logic, but it does not accurately reflect the complexities of people's real, everyday lives. This also leads to situations where support may be received by people who formally have the status of loved ones of warriors but are not directly affected by their loved ones' service, and vice versa. Relatives without a legally established status remain outside the scope of assistance.

We believe that the approach to determining statuses requires a systemic review at all levels of public policy, not only in the field of veterans' affairs. It is necessary to clearly distinguish between statuses as formal characteristics for granting rights and conditions as social and life situations in which a person or family finds themselves. This does not negate the need for categorisation as such. On the contrary, people often go through similar experiences, and this is what enables us to establish well-founded categories for policy planning and budget expenditures.

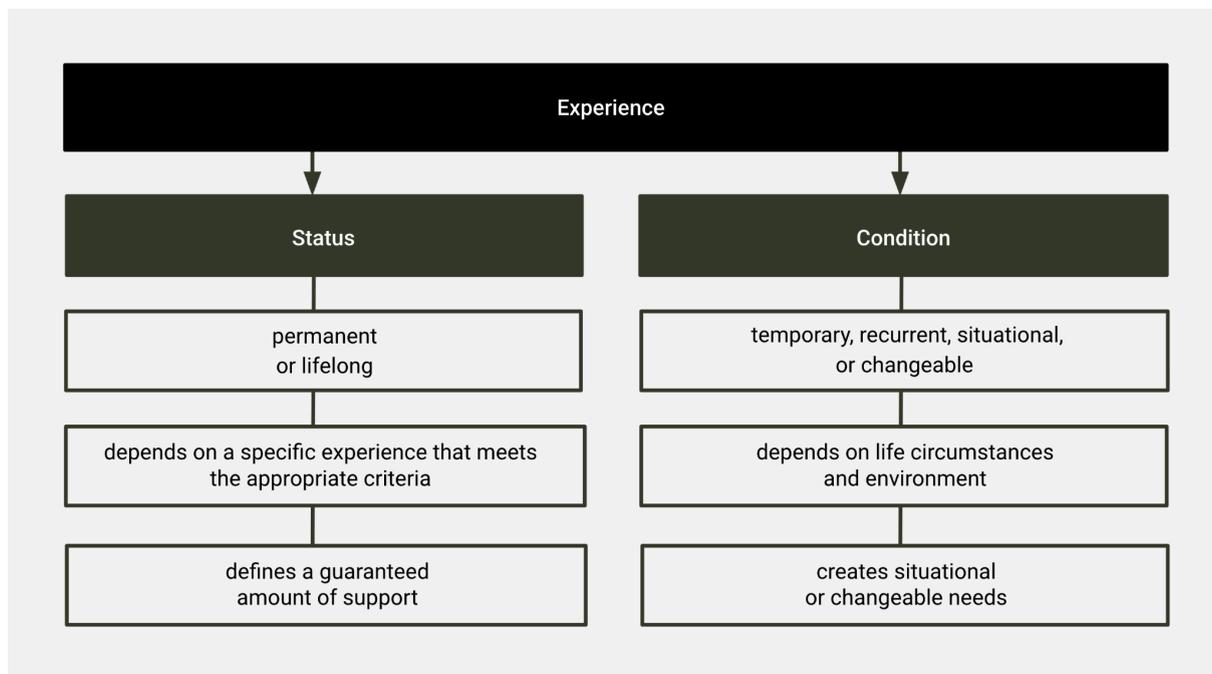
The problem today is that the current categorisation in Ukraine is methodologically outdated, fragmented, and does not correspond to the real structure of social challenges. Therefore, it is not a question of a complete transition to an individual approach, but of the need to review the very logic of social planning, taking into account the changes, the scale of the war, and the new conditions that affect people's experiences and shape their needs for support.

## Multiplicity of Experiences of Veterans' Families

Despite the influence of a loved one's combat experience, not all of the needs of veterans' families stem from it. In this Concept, we distinguish between statuses and conditions, as they influence a person's life differently, determine the level of state support, and require different response mechanisms. Our approach to defining statuses and conditions differs from that of the state.

**Status** is a more **stable**, legally recognised position of a person that defines their social rights and guarantees, obligations, and access to support. It depends on the person's experience, remains relatively constant over time, has a lifelong impact, follows clear criteria, and usually changes only through an official decision or new conditions.

Instead, a **condition** is a more **dynamic, changing** situation of a person that may last for some time, recur, or tend to change. A condition also depends on personal experience and affects needs, but is temporary or potentially changeable. It may accompany a status but does not define it; it requires situational responses from the support system.



Support should be based not only on the status, i.e. the legally defined position of a person or family, but also on their conditions, i.e. the actual living conditions in which they find themselves. We highlight several conditions that may give rise to additional or priority support needs. Some of them may be temporary, but often they determine the actual needs of the family at a particular point in time.

## **Health: Physical and Psychological Conditions**

The prolonged absence of a loved one, persistent anxiety and worry, changes in lifestyle, new roles and the loss of a familiar social circle can heighten the need for psychological support and support groups.

For example, if a veteran has an injury or is undergoing long-term rehabilitation, the burden on family members may increase due to the need to care for a loved one. This affects not only their mental health, but also their physical condition: chronic diseases may exacerbate, sleep and eating habits may be disrupted, and emotional exhaustion or professional burnout may occur.

### **Therefore, they may need:**

- psychological support, including individual counselling or group meetings;
- training in psychological self-help skills;
- access to specialised health services.

## **Geographic Location and Internal Displacement**

The geographical place of residence of veterans' families can change, but even temporary living in near-front zones or territories close to the border with Russia or to near-front zones<sup>37</sup> affects their well-being.

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<sup>37</sup> As of July 2025, Sumy, Chernihiv, Mykolaiv, and Odesa Oblasts are considered border areas due to their proximity to near-front zones, the Russian border, or potential invasion routes of the Russian troops.

When relocated (either involuntarily or for service reasons), veterans' families may lose community support, familiar social connections, and stability.

**Therefore, they may need:**

- assistance with integration into the new community, in particular through social services, support groups, and communities for children;
- access to temporary housing or housing compensation;
- access to local health, education and social services without additional bureaucratic barriers;
- assistance in restoring documents, registering statuses, and re-registering social services;
- consideration of the school, preschool and medical needs of children during relocation.

In some cases, families from frontline/border/de-occupied regions may also need financial support to rebuild their homes or move to other settlements.

## **Employment**

Employment of family members has a significant impact on the economic stability of veterans' families, their need for financial support, and social protection.

For example, family members may lose their ability to work due to caring for a veteran or other loved ones, changing their place of residence, e.g., during internal displacement, or insufficient professional training. This creates a need for financial support, employment assistance, training and retraining programmes.

Due to military service, veterans and their families may experience financial instability. For example, if their previous income level decreases, they may need to relocate or live near their place of service.

The family may need support in the form of compensation for lost income, temporary accommodation near the place of service, legal support in matters of social guarantees and job retention.

Unstable service conditions, care, and support for a veteran or other family members often force them to limit their working hours or give up employment altogether. So, in the event of captivity or missing in action, families must urgently clarify the conditions and travel to search for their loved ones. This necessitates special leave, flexible weekends, and the ability to leave work quickly to resolve urgent issues.

Overall, these conditions generate a need for a comprehensive support system – from creating adaptive work schedules to financial programmes and social services that help maintain the economic stability and psychological well-being of family members.

## **Family status**

Veterans' families may have different conditions – they may be incomplete due to the death or a missing-in-action status of one of the parents, or they may be raising several children. Such families often need additional support: social benefits and guarantees, assistance in raising children, including psychological support, as well as legal assistance.

## **Caregiving for loved ones**

Family members can take care of a veteran in case of injury/illness and other relatives – children, elderly parents, and relatives with disabilities.

### **Therefore, they may need:**

- compensation for caregiving (if unable to work due to caregiving responsibilities);
- temporary care services and opportunities for rest;
- psychological support and burnout prevention;

- legal protection – when a family member acts as a de facto caregiver.

## **Financial situation**

Families of veterans may face unstable financial situations due to loss of income, property, relocation, or challenging life conditions.

**This creates a need for:**

- targeted social assistance, subsidies, and simplified access to benefits;
- housing restoration or provision programmes (especially for IDPs);
- preferential terms for housing, education, and health treatment loans;
- support for local communities in the form of targeted programmes.

We propose to consider statuses and conditions not as mutually exclusive, but as complementary grounds for support. The status is relatively stable, allowing for the development of systemic interventions. The condition is changeable, sometimes temporary, but it can create urgent needs. Both should be visible in public policy, which strives to be flexible, inclusive, balanced, and just.

Moreover, for the support system to be sensitive to changing life contexts, it must provide mechanisms that allow individuals to determine what experience, status, or condition they need support for at a given moment. This is not about arbitrary choice or duplication of services, but about the possibility of prioritisation – depending on what conditions are decisive for a person’s well-being at a given moment. This approach not only avoids fragmented support but also helps build trust and confidence in the guarantees provided.

## Considering types of relationships within the family

For policies supporting veterans' families to be effective, it is necessary to clearly understand who exactly belongs to these families. This definition forms the basis for social guarantees, access to services and support mechanisms.

The Family Code of Ukraine establishes a **list of grounds for establishing family ties: registered marriage, blood relationship, or official caregiving**<sup>38</sup>. At the same time, people who do not have a legally recognised kinship status or other formal grounds for representing the interests of a warrior may be influenced during and after service.

There is a discrepancy in the legal field between the Family Code of Ukraine, which recognises blood relationship as the basis for family membership, and special legal acts in the field of security and defence, which regulate who has the right to represent the interests of a service member or receive information about them. For example, according to internal regulations of the Ministry of Defence, the right to information about the health or whereabouts of a service member is often granted exclusively to persons specified in the contract or personal file. These are usually registered spouses, parents or children. For example, even a sister who has a formal family relationship but is not listed in official documents may not have access to interaction with the military unit, healthcare facilities, or other units responsible for informing families.

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<sup>38</sup> Family Code of Ukraine (2002). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

To ensure the support policy aligns with real social roles, we propose considering relations not only from the perspective of formal family ties, but also in terms of actual relationships. **In this context, we distinguish two main types of relations:**

Property (economic) relations	Non-property (emotional) relations
<p>Relations in which family members have joint financial and property obligations or are interdependent. These may arise in situations where they live together, share a budget, raise children or care for relatives. Even in cases of separation or after divorce, such obligations often remain in force.</p>	<p>Relationships based on care, emotional support and daily interaction. For example, a service member’s partner who is not legally married to them may be the only person who cares for them after they are wounded and contacts the hospital or military unit. However, without legal status, they have no legal access to information or decision-making.</p>

In crises, when families need to respond quickly, it is these relationships – whether property or non-property – that often determine who actually provides support. They can be crucial for accessing health services, representation, treatment decisions, finding information or maintaining contact with institutions. Thus, these relationships should be fundamental to guarantees and access to support.

Recognising functional types of relationships – economic and emotional – allows policy to adapt to the real distribution of responsibility within the family. In other words, transitioning from a narrow, status-based approach to support, taking into account real influence and experience.

## Taking into account different journeys, environments and Well-being

In public policy on families of veterans, it is essential not only to consider the official status of the warrior or their family members, but also to gain a deeper understanding of what specific combat service experiences determine the need for support, i.e., what events and conditions shape the family's needs. We call this the **journey** – the trajectory of events and experiences that a family goes through in connection with the service of a loved one and other related conditions.

In this concept, we employ methodologies of the studies – “The Journey of Veterans”<sup>39</sup> and “The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One”<sup>40</sup>. They describe the stages – similar events and processes that veterans or their partners undergo during and after their service, as well as their challenges and needs.

**We distinguish five trajectories for families depending on different conditions of the end of service:**

Return to civilian life	Disability due to injury or illness	Captivity	Missing in action	Death
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We will discuss each of them in more detail in Sections 5–9; however, for now, let us briefly review the features of each journey and the support that loved ones may require.

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<sup>39</sup> Veteran Hub (2023). The Journey of Veterans. [veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/doslidzhennia-shliakh-veteraniv-ta-veteranok.pdf](https://veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/doslidzhennia-shliakh-veteraniv-ta-veteranok.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliakh-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliakh-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

## **Families of veterans returning to civilian life**

This journey is fundamental to the entire family support policy, as it encompasses the experiences of all those whose loved ones, namely veterans, have combat experience, since they are currently serving or completing their service, have been discharged from service, or are currently in the reserve/general conscription pool without being called up for active duty. All other journeys overlap with this basic experience of return, intensifying and changing the needs of the family.

**The main impact and key burden on the families of veterans arises from the very beginning of active military service.** It is during this period that loved ones are forced to adapt to the prolonged physical absence of a close person, take on most of the routine, financial, and parenting responsibilities, support the warrior emotionally from a distance, and interact with government agencies on their behalf, if necessary. This experience shapes their need for support, which arises not after, but during service. Accordingly, the family appears not only as an object of support, but as a full-fledged subject of public policy already during the warrior's service.

After the end of service or during the adaptation to civilian life, their needs transform, but despite the growth of autonomy, loved ones may need state support – no longer as a response to a crisis, but as a tool to ensure the stability and adaptation of the family after service.

## **Families of veterans who have sustained injuries or illnesses and acquired disabilities**

Unlike the basic return experience, this trajectory involves a long-term change in the family's lifestyle and a need for ongoing involvement in care, support and adaptation.

The main burden on the family often arises at the stage of injury or diagnosis – unexpectedly and without preparation: relatives interact with military and medical structures and coordinate treatment. Subsequently, the family takes on a significant part of care and support

functions, including physical assistance, support in decision-making, and constant presence during hospitalisation or rehabilitation.

If the veteran's condition remains stable but serious, the family needs to be recognised as a full partner in the long-term support system, with appropriate access to education, recreation, social support services and financial instruments. Policy can ensure not only the well-being of the veteran but also the dignity and resilience of the entire family.

### **Families of veterans who are in captivity and those who have been liberated from captivity**

This journey comes with additional challenges, including a prolonged period of limited contact with the warrior, a lack of information, uncertainty, and a complex legal situation. Families of prisoners of war often take the lead in advocacy efforts – reaching out to the media, communicating with international organisations, and creating support communities.

The family often performs administrative, legal, and communication functions, but their participation in state procedures remains limited.

At all stages of the journey, loved ones may need legal assistance, psychological and financial support, transparent and accessible channels of communication with the state, and official recognition of the status of the prisoner of war and the family as their representatives.

### **Families of warriors missing in action**

A distinctive feature of this journey is when a warrior is considered missing in action, and their loved ones have no confirmed information about their condition or whereabouts. The lack of communication and any news leave the family in a state of deep psychological, social, and legal uncertainty. In many cases, families take the initiative themselves, communicating independently with military units, Territorial Recruitment

and Social Support Centres (TRSSC), the police and human rights organisations.

They face several challenges that require systemic support, including official confirmation of the disappearance, legal assistance, psychological and communication support, and recognition of their representative role. Policies regarding families of missing persons must take into account their experiences and recognise families as a party to whom the state guarantees support, dignity, and constant presence in the search process.

## **Families of fallen warriors**

This journey begins with the experience of irreparable loss – the death of a warrior during service or combat operations. The family faces not only profound emotional turmoil but also numerous legal, administrative, and social procedures that must be completed to obtain the appropriate status. During this period, it is often difficult for relatives to make decisions and act independently due to the difficult experience they are going through.

Families of fallen warriors need coordinated and sensitive support at various stages: in completing formal procedures, interagency cooperation, organising burial and memorial services, psychological support, and recognition of the dignity of their loss. Policies regarding the families of fallen warriors must be based on an understanding of the complexity of this experience, from the stage of acknowledging the death to the long period of mourning, remembrance, and transformation of family life.

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To analyse each of these journeys, we also rely on the concept of Well-being<sup>41</sup>, which categorises human needs and combines subjective feelings of satisfaction with life and objective conditions

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<sup>41</sup> Veteran Hub (2023). The Concept of Veterans' Well-being. [veteranhub.com.ua/dobrobut](https://veteranhub.com.ua/dobrobut)

that ensure its quality. In other words, it is equally important to understand whether a person is satisfied with their living conditions or state of health, rather than simply assessing the availability of housing or objective physical health status.

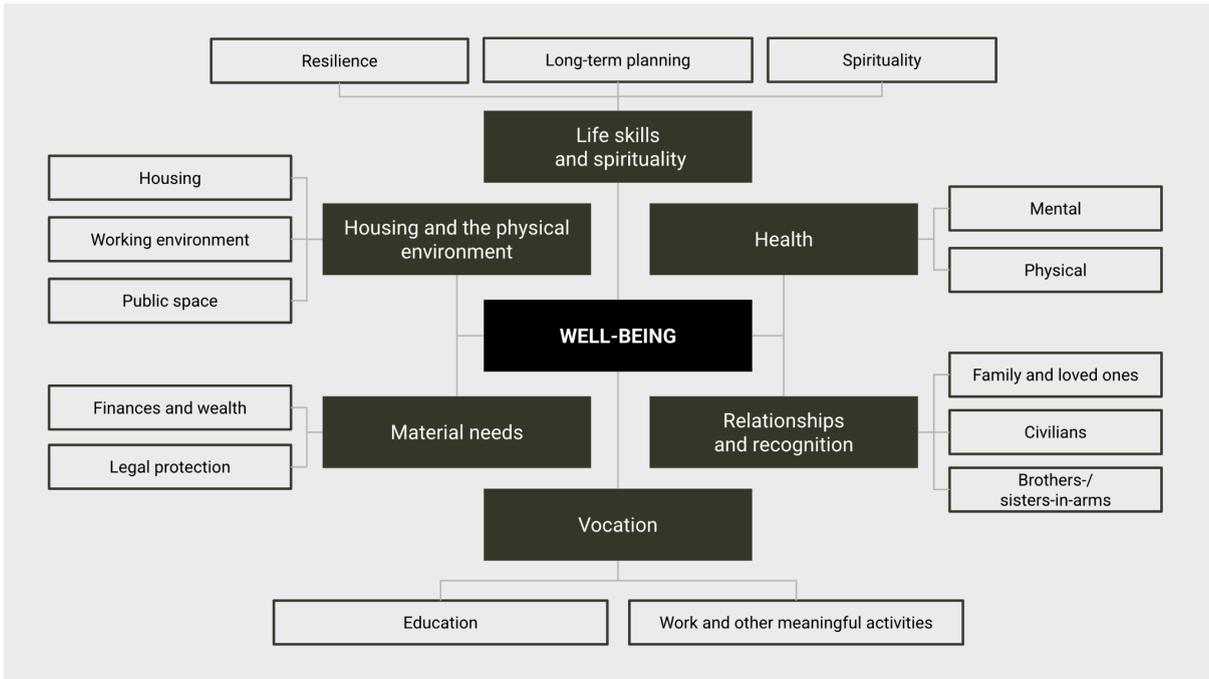
The model is based on the concept of veteran well-being used in the USA and Canada, as well as the work of international researchers David Pedlar and James Thompson<sup>42</sup>.

**Well-being consists of six components and assumes that all of them are important for a person's quality of life:**

- health (physical and mental);
- housing and the physical environment (home, work and public spaces);
- material needs (finances, income, and legal security);
- relationships and recognition (relationships with loved ones, family, environment, recognition of experience and contribution, commemoration);
- vocation (education, work, or other meaningful activity such as hobbies or activism);
- life skills and spirituality (resilience, long-term planning, and spirituality).

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<sup>42</sup> Thompson, J. M., Vogt, D., & Pedlar, D. (2022, 7 April). Success in life after service: A perspective on conceptualising the well-being of military Veterans. *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health*. [doi.org/10.3138/jmvfh-2021-0037](https://doi.org/10.3138/jmvfh-2021-0037)



## Main environments of public policy on veterans and their families

After participating in combat operations, veterans can continue their journeys in different conditions and environments. Some will choose a professional career in military service, while others will return to civilian life with no prospect of being called up again due to age or health reasons. Most veterans will form the basis of the reserve and general conscription pool and will be involved in the protection and defence of the country if necessary. Their families will also continue their own journeys alongside them.

Based on research into the experiences of veterans of the ATO/JFO<sup>43</sup>, we know that for some, the transition and subsequent rooting<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Veteran Hub (2023). The Journey of Veterans. [veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/doslidzhennia-shliakh-veteraniv-ta-veteranok.pdf](https://veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/doslidzhennia-shliakh-veteraniv-ta-veteranok.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Rooting – a stage in the veteran journey when a person is able to make important long-term decisions consciously and with sufficient inner readiness. To some extent, this state serves as an indicator that the person is on a positive returning trajectory and has essentially rebuilt a new civilian life in which they feel confident and independent.

in civilian life during wartime, even under the most favourable conditions (support and moderate challenges to health and well-being), lasted at least three years. In some cases, this period extended to five to seven years or more. This means that during the full-scale invasion, a significant number of veterans returned to service under mobilisation almost immediately after civilian life had become comfortable for them. As a result, they lost the progress they had made in civilian life and were forced to restart the entire adaptation process.

This also concerns their families. The veteran's return to military service and participation in combat operations means repeated separation, anxiety for their life and health, and additional domestic, emotional and financial burdens for their loved ones. Prolonged and repeated military service has a profound impact on family systems, as roles within the family, expectations, and ideas about the future undergo significant changes. Psychological stress, experiences of loss, and economic instability all affect the quality of life of veterans' families. Therefore, policies aimed at supporting veterans must necessarily include their family members and accompany them throughout their journeys and lives.

Each of the environments in which veterans and their families will continue their journeys has its own needs and must therefore have different priorities and goals within the framework of public policy. Understanding the environment as a variable configuration rather than a stable state helps design policies that can accompany families in different conditions and at various stages of life.

**We identify three primary environments of public policy on veterans and their families:**



## **Environment 1 Military Service**

As of 2020, up to 30% of ATO/JFO veterans remained in the Security and Defence Forces for three or more years after demobilisation<sup>45</sup>. If this trend continues, a substantial portion of veterans will continue their military service. At the same time, many of them already have veteran status, combining it with active military service. This means that they and their families go through all stages of their journey under the jurisdiction of security and defence agencies.

For families, this environment means a prolonged or indefinite state of separation between civilian and military life. Even without direct participation in combat operations, service can create numerous challenges in communication, planning a shared life, and decision-making. Part of the responsibility for daily life, paperwork, and caring for children or elderly relatives actually falls on the family.

## **Environment 2 Military Reserve**

Following the end of the war and demobilisation, veterans who do not continue a military career and have no legal grounds for discharge from service will be enrolled in the reserve.

According to Ukrainian legislation, from 2024 onward, during a special period or under martial law, all individuals discharged into the general conscription pool are automatically enrolled in the operational military reserve. This means that all veterans who complete their service during martial law without being removed from military records or declared unfit for service will be placed in the reserve. Once martial law and the special period end, veterans will be able to choose their journeys: to be discharged into the general conscription pool or registered in the operational military reserve.

In the event of a change in the nature of combat operations or a new wave of conscription, being in the reserve becomes a prolonged state of waiting, both for the warriors themselves and for their families.

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<sup>45</sup> IREX, Veteran Hub (14 July 2021). Results of the Veteran Reintegration Study on Current Employment Conditions. [irex.org/sites/default/files/Veterans-Current-Employment-Conditions-Ukrainian.pdf](https://irex.org/sites/default/files/Veterans-Current-Employment-Conditions-Ukrainian.pdf)

This state can last for months or even years, particularly in cases of repeated conscription. Families may not be able to make long-term plans, such as changing their place of residence or planning for stable employment. Uncertainty about the timing and conditions of possible repeated conscription creates a constant state of anxiety, which can complicate the stages of settling back into civilian life and reduce the sense of security.

Knowledge of future prospects, as well as the conditions and benefits of reserve service, is important for veterans and their families.

We believe that when developing a renewed vision of national security and defence strategies, and in planning the reserve as part of Ukraine's defence capability, the state must take prior experience into account. It is crucial to develop a comprehensive policy for veterans in the reserve and to update the legal framework so that it reflects both the real challenges faced by veterans and their families, as well as the state's priorities in this area.

### **Environment 3 Civilian Life**

This environment will currently include the smallest share of veterans compared to the military service, reserve, or general conscription pool. Only those who have reached the age limit, are no longer fit for duty due to health reasons, or significant family conditions are unlikely to return to service. In this context, returning to civilian life is not a restoration of the previous state, but the formation of a new model of interaction within the family and society. The experience of war continues to impact all aspects of everyday life: roles within the family are changing, as is the communication and planning for the future; there is also a growing need to make sense of what has been experienced.

Families of veterans who will not return to service may find themselves facing increased financial and emotional burdens. If a veteran loses some or all of their ability to work due to disability, the financial responsibility for the family's well-being falls on the other family members. This also involves cases where there is a need for long-term care, support, or adaptation of living conditions. Even if a person's health

allows them to work, leaving the service is often accompanied by a long period of instability: the need for retraining, difficulties with employment, loss of social status, and a change in social circle.

In this environment, the problem of the gap between the end of service and the commencement of effective support is particularly acute: many assistance mechanisms are limited to the period of service or only apply while the service member holds an active status. At the same time, families continue to need resources, especially if they lack their own financial savings or community support. Support policy should take these long-term needs into account and create sustainable programmes, such as targeted employment support, educational opportunities for family members, and access to adapted health services and mental health programmes.

We forecast that over the next decade and beyond, a significant portion of veterans will continue their journey primarily within two environments: military service and the reserve. Only a relatively small group will fully return to civilian life due to injury, reaching the age limit, or family-related reasons. Each of these environments will also affect their families.

Although the stages of the journeys of veterans' families are generally similar across all three environments, and they themselves are constantly in a civilian environment, receiving support there, the needs, priorities, and goals of public policy differ depending on each individual. These differences have a significant impact on families, as their living conditions, plans for the future and level of stability depend on the context of service or discharge.

Only a small share of veterans will return to civilian life without the possibility of being called up, and with their removal from the register. Accordingly, only a limited number of families are able to plan for long-term civilian life, build joint household strategies, and gradually adapt to new conditions.

However, such planning is difficult or impossible for most veterans' families. Discharge from military service for all other veterans

automatically means transfer to the reserve, and thus the obligation to return to the troop if necessary. Therefore, even after completing the service, building well-being and family life may be postponed or only partially achieved.

If veterans choose to continue their journeys and careers in the military, families may also face challenges: long rotations and separations, constant adaptation to change, relocation, a lack of planning, predictability, and the difficulty of systemically building a shared life together.

All these contexts determine the nature of the challenges and needs of the family, from access to quality psychological support and social services to the need for stability, predictability, and recognition of the impact of services on families. Taking into account the characteristics of each environment is an important methodological approach when formulating policy. It is because the context and conditions in which the veteran's family will find themselves will influence their experience and the support they will need.

# Conclusions

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**1** The development of effective and fair public policy on veterans' families requires a fundamentally new approach that will recognise families not as a backdrop to the support of a warrior, but as a separate target group with their own experiences, needs and guarantees. Such a policy must be not only sensitive to the context of war but also capable of adapting to the long-term consequences that remain with families after the end of service or return home. People must be at the heart of this policy.

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**2** Recognising the family's experience means moving from perceiving the family as an auxiliary link to understanding it as a full-fledged subject of veteran policy. The family goes through its own journey alongside the veteran, experiencing conscription, injury, captivity, missing in action, rehabilitation, loss, or return. This experience affects every member of the family: from children to parents, partners, and caregivers. Policy must take into account the complex experiences of families and their need for support, resources and assistance that goes beyond financial payments.

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**3** Going beyond formal status is a critical step in ensuring equitable access to support. Currently, the system focuses primarily on legally formalised relationships (marriage, parenthood, or care), leaving out civil partners, adult children, and grandparents with whom veterans may have close and responsible relationships.

Shaping inclusive policies requires flexibility in defining family – not only as a legal unit, but as a community of people united by care, trust, and participation in each other's lives.

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**4** Support throughout all journeys and in different environments means that assistance to families should be provided not only in times of crisis, but throughout the family's life cycle – during and after service, in civilian life, in military service, in the reserve/general conscription pool, in the event of captivity, missing in action or the return of a veteran with injury or disability.

# SECTION 4

## **Target Audience's Profile**

# Abstract

In this section of the concept, we analyse legal and political approaches to defining, recognising and supporting veterans' families. The focus is on how the state views the family: who it recognises as part of it, what relationships and experiences it takes into account when shaping policy, and what legal restrictions may leave some relatives outside the scope of social protection.

## **Here we analyse:**

- the experience of the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom in defining and recognising the family as a separate subject of policy, with its own needs and challenges;
- Ukrainian legislation and its view of the family, in particular, the loved ones of veterans and service members;
- the impact of legal status on access to rights: inheritance, compensation, health care, representation of the interests of veterans;
- existing mechanisms for warriors to express their will – powers of attorney, wills, directives – and their potential to determine which relatives will receive support.

# Introduction

According to the **Family Code**, a family is a group of people who live together, share a common household, and have mutual rights and duties<sup>46</sup>. Family relationships can be based on blood ties, conscious choice, shared household, financial, and emotional bonds.

Ukrainian legislation currently recognises legally registered family relationships as the most important. However, the way families are actually formed does not fit within the legislative framework – reality is broader, more complex and more extensive. For example, until recently, Ukraine had no mechanism for terminating parental rights after a child reached the age of 18<sup>47</sup>, regardless of how well or not the parental responsibilities were fulfilled until the child reached adulthood. Currently, same-sex marriages are not permitted. Therefore, even though they have all the characteristics of a family, not all real families are recognised by the state, and not all families recognised by the state are real.

Veterans, of course, have families. As with all citizens, their families vary in composition, functionality, and relations. There are families formed before, during, and after service. And although the choice of family relations is a private matter for each individual, the state is obliged to recognise and acknowledge the impact that veterans' families experience during and after service.

Relationships are a fundamental component of human well-being. We need others in order to live well. For many people, family becomes one of the most important pillars of life, both emotionally and practically. While working

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<sup>46</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Articles 3–4. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

<sup>47</sup> Ukrainian legislation does not prohibit the deprivation of parental rights after the child reaches the age of majority. This practice was previously uncommon in courts, among lawyers, and among guardianship and custody authorities. However, in 2024, the Supreme Court published a position stating that such deprivation should not be limited to the age of majority: Unified State Register of Court Decisions (29 January 2024). Decision No. 185/9339/21 (case No. 61-8918sk23) on the deprivation of parental rights. [reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/117043621](https://reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/117043621)

on this concept, one of the most difficult things for us was to understand the family as both a whole – a united group of people – and each individual within the relationship as a person with their own experiences and needs, which are both similar to and different from the experiences and needs of others in the group.

Currently, Ukraine lacks almost any organised data on veterans' families: their numbers, their situations, and the types of support they require. In this section, we do not claim to provide a comprehensive answer, but rather explore the legislative field and offer a perspective for defining and identifying veterans' families within the framework of public policy.

Our goal is to outline how the state currently defines the family of a veteran, identify the gaps and limitations in this definition, and explain why it is essential to expand this framework to reflect the complexity and diversity of human relationships. This is only an initial attempt to form a profile of the target audience – a basic guideline that will allow us to move from a general idea to a specific policy that is sensitive to those who live through their own experiences and the impact of war.

We examine international approaches to defining and supporting families, as well as the Ukrainian legal framework, including the Family and Civil Codes and relevant laws on social protection for service members, veterans, prisoners of war, and those missing in action. We also analyse the difference between formal status and actual relationships, which are not always legally confirmed but are no less important, such as unregistered partners, adult children, grandparents, and relatives acting as carers.

We would like to draw particular attention to how legal instruments can be used to record expressions of will, including wills, powers of attorney, and court applications, to establish the fact of cohabitation. These instruments can help secure the rights of those who do not fit into the traditional concept of family but play an important role in the life of a veteran.

This concept is the first step toward a systematic review and analysis of current legislation on rights and guarantees in various forms of relationships. Currently, we propose a basic framework: a simplified map of legal norms that govern access to support. This is not an exhaustive analysis, but rather a basis for further work: to identify gaps, understand the real needs of different families, and formulate a policy that will correspond not only to legal forms but also to life conditions.

# International policy approaches to veterans' families

In Ukraine, as in many countries, the loved ones of warriors have long been outside the focus of state support: the system was geared towards the military or veterans, and families were considered secondary recipients of assistance, mainly in the context of the loss of a breadwinner.

However, over the last few decades, this approach has begun to change: each wave of demobilisation following wars and armed conflicts around the world has contributed to the realisation that the warriors' return home is only part of their journey, which their families also take alongside them. Facing their own challenges, they need understanding and support. Thus, public policy in various countries have begun to recognise veterans' families as a separate target group with their own needs and to develop a comprehensive support system for them.

The United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom and Canada have some of the longest-standing support systems for veterans and their families. Due to the fact that support for veterans in these countries began a long time ago, it has evolved into the comprehensive systems that exist today. These countries have gradually moved away from fixed "status-based" payments towards flexible services and guarantees that take into account life conditions, diversity of family relationships, and roles.

The approaches of these countries in public veteran policy often serve as a benchmark for discussions in Ukraine. Sensitivity to experience, consistency, and data-driven decision-making can be a valuable basis for developing veteran policy. However, it is also important to consider the specifics of the Ukrainian context: unlike the countries mentioned above, where veteran status is granted after completing service in peacetime, in Ukraine, veterans often continue to serve in the ongoing war.

# USA

## 18th–20th centuries

The United States' first steps in supporting the well-being of veterans and their families began after the War for Independence (1775–1783)<sup>48</sup>: initially, pension payments were provided to wounded service members, and later to veterans, widows and dependent children of fallen warriors<sup>49</sup>. During the Civil War (1861–1865)<sup>50</sup>, Congress passed the **General Pension Act**<sup>51</sup>, which extended financial support to minor sisters of the fallen and their mothers who were dependent on them and had no husbands. The payment was a one-time, equal distribution among all applicants.

During World War II, the country needed to provide social protection for the families of more than 16 million mobilised warriors<sup>52</sup>. The U.S. Government passed the **Servicemen's Dependents Allowance Act**<sup>53</sup>,

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<sup>48</sup> The American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) was a military conflict between the thirteen British colonies in North America and Great Britain, resulting in the United States gaining independence.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. VA History Summary. [department.va.gov/history/history-overview](https://department.va.gov/history/history-overview)

<sup>50</sup> The American Civil War of 1861–1865 was a conflict between the northern states (the Union) and the southern states (the Confederacy), marked by fierce battles and resulting in a large number of casualties. The war broke out because of differences in the views of different states on the political and economic structure of the state, in particular on the issue of slavery and its future in the United States.

<sup>51</sup> Army Pensions; Instructions and Forms to be Observed in Applying for Them, Under the Act of July 14, 1862. General Provisions. Army Pensions (12 August 1862). The New York Times. [nytimes.com/1862/08/12/archives/army-pensions-instructions-and-forms-to-be-observed-in-applying-for.html](https://nytimes.com/1862/08/12/archives/army-pensions-instructions-and-forms-to-be-observed-in-applying-for.html)

<sup>52</sup> Cline, D. C. (1943). Allowances to Dependents of Servicemen in the United States. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. [jstor.org/stable/1023618](https://jstor.org/stable/1023618)

<sup>53</sup> Servicemen's Dependents Allowances (1942). [finance.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/ConfRpt77-2235.pdf](https://finance.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/ConfRpt77-2235.pdf)

which entitled relatives who were dependent on veterans to monthly payments<sup>54</sup>, namely:

- widows and minor children;
- former partners who did not remarry or who were awarded alimony by a court;
- parents, grandparents of the veteran or his wife;
- incapacitated siblings;
- grandchildren whom veterans cared for instead of their parents.

Two relatives could receive payments simultaneously. To do so, they had to prove their financial dependence on the veteran. The law was the first legal recognition of dependents as a separate group.

In 1944, the U.S. Government adopted the **Servicemen's Readjustment Act (aka G.I. Bill)**<sup>55</sup>, which provided veterans with access to higher education, preferential housing loans and unemployment insurance. However, the act did not apply to the families of veterans. For a long time, the policy provided only monetary payments to them, without additional forms of assistance or institutional and long-term support.

The United States' involvement in the Vietnam War (1959–1975)<sup>56</sup> created new challenges: 75,000 warriors were disabled as a result of serious injuries and often required lifelong care<sup>57</sup>. Their loved ones took care of them, balancing the responsibilities of caring for veterans with other tasks: running the household, raising children, supporting the family, working, and pursuing education.

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<sup>54</sup> In the United States, the term "dependent" covers not only those who are financially dependent on a person, but also other family members or relatives who are entitled to assistance or support through legal or moral obligation.

<sup>55</sup> The Servicemen's Readjustment Act, aka G.I. Bill (1944). National Archives. [archives.gov/milestone-documents/servicemens-readjustment-act](https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/servicemens-readjustment-act)

<sup>56</sup> The Vietnam War (1959–1975) was a long-lasting armed conflict between communist North Vietnam, supported by the USSR and the PRC, and the government of South Vietnam, supported by the United States and its allies. The United States' involvement was significant both militarily and politically, leading to profound public debate and changes in the country's domestic and foreign policy.

<sup>57</sup> Statistics about the Vietnam War. Vietnam Veteran Project. [vietnamveteranproject.org/statistics-2](https://vietnamveteranproject.org/statistics-2)

Amid these challenges, the U.S. Congress passed the **Veterans' Benefits Improvement and Health Care Authorisation Act**<sup>58</sup>, which guaranteed support for the wives, disabled children and parents of veterans. They could receive counselling, psychosocial support, and training in treatment or rehabilitation. This support was provided mainly during the hospitalisation of wounded loved ones and, in some cases, after discharge, if the involvement of loved ones was a key condition for continuing treatment at home. In the event of the death of a veteran, family members involved in their treatment were entitled to psychological support.

This act was important for recognising the needs of families in the post-war period as part of the support system, but it did not consider their journeys separately; rather, it provided support for caring for veterans.

In addition, during this period, U.S. government policy on veterans granted official status to the families of fallen warriors – widows, parents and children – known as the Gold Star Family<sup>59</sup>. Since World War I, they have received a physical badge with a gold star, known as the Gold Star Lapel Button. However, it was not officially approved for the families of the fallen until 1973<sup>60</sup>. This symbol has become not only a sign of respect but also a tool for publicly acknowledging the loss experienced by families.

## **21st century**

In the early 2000s, the U.S. government system for supporting veterans and their families faced new challenges. At that time, the United States was engaged in combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. So, more and more seriously wounded warriors were returning from service. They required long-term treatment and rehabilitation, and in some

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<sup>58</sup> Veterans' Benefits Improvement and Health-Care Authorization Act (1986). [govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-100/pdf/STATUTE-100-Pg3248.pdf](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-100/pdf/STATUTE-100-Pg3248.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> GSLB.

<sup>60</sup> U.S. Department of Defense (2007). 32 CFR. § 578.63: Gold Star Lapel Button. [govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2007-title32-vol3/xml/CFR-2007-title32-vol3-sec578-63.xml](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2007-title32-vol3/xml/CFR-2007-title32-vol3-sec578-63.xml)

cases, lifelong care<sup>61</sup>. For the most part, the role of carers – those who support, assist with rehabilitation, and care for veterans – was typically taken on by their relatives and loved ones. They were often forced to quit their jobs, move closer to healthcare facilities, or significantly change their lives<sup>62</sup>, without having the necessary training or resources<sup>63</sup>.

The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act<sup>64</sup>, adopted in 2010, became the state's response to these challenges. It officially introduced the status of "caregiver" for those who constantly care for veterans at home. These can include family members, such as spouses, parents, children, or other relatives, or individuals who are not relatives but are willing to take on this role, such as friends or volunteers.

The state also introduced support programmes for caregivers<sup>65, 66</sup>: specialised training, monthly payments, health insurance, compensation for travel expenses, psychological support, and payment for services of a temporary caregiver, if the primary one needs a break or has urgent matters to attend to. Thus, in the 21st century, continuing the legislation of the 1980s, the United States further developed a system of support for veterans' families as caregivers for their loved ones.

In the early 2010s, the Gold Star Families programme was expanded, and the U.S. Congress enshrined a number of benefits and measures for the families of the fallen, including official commemorative events, educational scholarships, and targeted benefits. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs launched a programme for veterans and their family members who have lost or are on the verge of losing

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<sup>61</sup> Jennings, A. M. (2023). A History of the Veterans Affairs Caregiver Support Program. Social Welfare History Project. [socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/federal/history-of-the-veterans-administration-caregiver-support-program](https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/federal/history-of-the-veterans-administration-caregiver-support-program)

<sup>62</sup> Executive Order 13426 (2007). [govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2007-03-08/pdf/07-1137.pdf](https://govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2007-03-08/pdf/07-1137.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs: Caregiver Support (2020). EveryCRSReport. [everycrsreport.com/reports/R46282.html](https://everycrsreport.com/reports/R46282.html)

<sup>64</sup> Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act (2010). Public Law 111–163. [congress.gov/111/plaws/publ163/PLAW-111publ163.pdf](https://congress.gov/111/plaws/publ163/PLAW-111publ163.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Program of General Caregiver Support Services. [caregiver.va.gov/care\\_caregivers.asp](https://caregiver.va.gov/care_caregivers.asp)

<sup>66</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. [va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/health-and-disability/comprehensive-assistance-for-family-caregivers](https://va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/health-and-disability/comprehensive-assistance-for-family-caregivers)

their homes<sup>67</sup>: assistance in finding new housing, paying debts, compensation for moving expenses, rent, and utilities. In addition, the programme also provides comprehensive support for low-income families of veterans, designed to help plan a family budget, increase income, access community support, and understand how the housing system works. In 2018, the VA MISSION Act<sup>68</sup> was passed, strengthening the status of caregivers, expanding the circle of people eligible for compensation, and providing greater access to various services for families, including private health, financial planning, and legal services.

Support is also available for family members of U.S. veterans to help cover education or living expenses while studying. It is comprehensive and may include different services: educational or career counselling, and part-time employment to help cover living expenses while pursuing an education<sup>69</sup>. Additionally, families can receive government support for life insurance.

Families of the fallen in the United States are eligible for financial assistance for burial. And if a warrior goes missing in action, is buried at sea, or chooses to donate their body to science, their family can receive a memorial gravestone or monument to symbolise their loss. The state also provides psychological support during grieving for family members of fallen veterans<sup>70</sup>.

It is also important to mention that the U.S. Department of Defense has a Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency<sup>71</sup>. Due to the nature of armed conflicts in which the United States has been involved in recent years, almost all the warriors missing in action participated in the wars of the 20th century: Korea, Vietnam, and World War II. The U.S. Department of Defense searches for information about the veterans missing

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<sup>67</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Supportive Services for Veteran Families. [va.gov/homeless/ssvf/index.html](https://va.gov/homeless/ssvf/index.html)

<sup>68</sup> VA MISSION Act of 2018, S. 2372, 115th Cong (2018). Congress.Gov. [congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/2372](https://congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/2372)

<sup>69</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Education and career benefits for family members. [va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/education-and-careers](https://va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/education-and-careers)

<sup>70</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Burials and memorial benefits for family members. [va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/burials-and-memorials](https://va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/burials-and-memorials)

<sup>71</sup> Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. U.S. Department of Defense. [dpaa.mil](https://dpaa.mil)

in action and identifies them. Instead, support is provided by non-profit organisations, particularly through the promotion of remembrance and memorialisation practices, which serve as important symbols of support for veterans’ families.

Currently, veterans’ families and caregivers have access to a comprehensive system of state support<sup>72</sup>. The state recognises them as a separate target group, and the guarantees provided take into account the different social roles and life conditions that families may find themselves in. Although the state offers educational programmes for children of veterans and support for families in difficult conditions, most of the assistance is still directed at those who provide direct care for veterans following injury.

<p><b>1775–1783</b> <b>Revolutionary War</b></p>	<p>Commencement of state support: pensions for wounded military, later, for widows and dependent children of the fallen</p>
<p><b>1861–1865</b> <b>Civil War</b></p>	<p><b>General Pension Act</b></p> <p>Expansion of the circle of beneficiaries: minor sisters of the fallen, mothers who were dependent and did not have husbands. One-off payments, equal division</p>
<p><b>1942</b> <b>World War II</b></p>	<p><b>Servicemen’s Dependents Allowance Act</b></p> <p>Introduction of the concept of “dependents.” Monthly payments for relatives who were dependent on the veteran</p>
<p><b>1944</b></p>	<p><b>Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (G.I. Bill)</b></p> <p>Access for veterans to higher education, preferential loans, and unemployment insurance. Did NOT apply to families</p>

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. VA benefits for family and caregivers. [va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits](https://www.va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits)

<p><b>1973 Vietnam War</b></p>	<p><b>Gold Star Lapel Button</b></p> <p>Official approval of the symbol for the families of the fallen. Public acknowledgement of family loss.</p>
<p><b>1986</b></p>	<p><b>Omnibus Veterans' Benefits Improvement and Health Care Authorization Act</b></p> <p>Support for wives, disabled children, parents of veterans: counselling, psychosocial support, and care training.</p>
<p><b>2010 Combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan</b></p>	<p><b>Caregivers And Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act</b></p> <p>The official status of a caregiver covers both relatives and non-relatives. Support programmes for caregivers</p>
<p><b>Early 2010s</b></p>	<p>Expansion of the Gold Star Families programme. The U.S. Congress enshrined a number of privileges and measures for the families of the fallen.</p>
<p><b>2012</b></p>	<p>A programme for veterans and their families who have lost or are on the verge of losing their homes.</p>
<p><b>2018</b></p>	<p><b>VA MISSION Act</b></p> <p>Strengthening the status of caregivers, expanding the circle of people entitled to compensation, and providing access for families to private health services.</p>

## Canada

Similar to the United States, Canada's first steps in developing veteran policy were primarily focused on veterans themselves. Families began to appear in the system after the end of World War I, primarily

as recipients of pensions in the event of a service member's death<sup>73</sup>. Initially, only widows, children and parents of the fallen were eligible for such payments.

During World War II, against the backdrop of mass demobilisation, Canada established Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and designated the families of veterans as separate beneficiaries. In the 1980s, the VAC launched the Veterans Independence Program<sup>74</sup>, under which the state hired professional caregivers to assist veterans with domestic and medical tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and accompanying them to doctors. This reduced the financial and emotional burden on family members.

The change in approaches to supporting warrior families began in the 1980s at the initiative of families: wives of the military living near RCAF Station Penhold founded the OSSOMM<sup>75</sup> and began to emphasise the critical need for public social services. Following public outcry in 1991, a programme of services for military families was launched<sup>76</sup>, which included the establishment of support centres. They offered crisis assistance, mental health services, childcare, and later support with education, employment, relocation, and the return of the warrior.

In 1998, as part of its Plan to Improve the Quality of Life in the Armed Forces<sup>77</sup>, Canada recognised that the well-being of families directly affected the combat readiness of the military. Consequently, support for the warrior families began to be viewed not only as part of social policy, but also as an element of security and defence strategy.

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<sup>73</sup> Neary, P. (2004). *The Origins and Evolution of Veterans Benefits in Canada, 1914–2004* (3rd printing). Veterans Affairs Canada – Canadian Forces Advisory Council. [publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2018/acc-vac/V32-357-2004-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2018/acc-vac/V32-357-2004-eng.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. Pp. 29–32.

<sup>75</sup> Original name – Organizational Society of Spouses of Military Members.

<sup>76</sup> National Defence (24 October 2016). Canadian Armed Forces celebrates 25 years of support to military families. Canada.ca. [canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2016/10/canadian-armed-forces-celebrates-25-years-support-military-families.html](http://canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2016/10/canadian-armed-forces-celebrates-25-years-support-military-families.html)

<sup>77</sup> National Defence (2000). DAOD 5044-1, families. Canada.ca. [canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-order-s-directives/5000-series/5044/5044-1-families.html](http://canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-order-s-directives/5000-series/5044/5044-1-families.html)

Following missions in Afghanistan (2001–2014) and an increased number of wounded veterans, Canada rethought the role of families in the life of the military. There is a growing awareness that partners and children of veterans also need support, adaptation skills, and psychological assistance. In 2005, the OSISS<sup>78</sup>, which had been operating for the military since 2001, was extended to cover the families of warriors and veterans. In 2006, the country passed the **Veterans Well-being Act**<sup>79</sup>, which changed the model of support for veterans and their families from monetary compensation to integrated rehabilitation and support during the transition to civilian life. Families began to be viewed as part of a model based on the well-being of veterans and their families as a holistic process encompassing physical, psychological, social, economic, and professional recovery.

In 2017, as part of the **Veterans Well-being Act**, Canada approved the **Pension for Life plan**<sup>80</sup>, which provides for regular payments instead of a one-off compensation, covers the lifelong needs of veterans, and takes into account the impact of service on their families. This plan is based on the concept of well-being and provides support to veterans and their families in various areas of life. Thanks to this plan, additional opportunities for caregivers were introduced, and access to counselling, training, and career programmes for family members of veterans was expanded. Families now have access to psychological support, housing, healthcare, and financial assistance, including crisis support.

The Canadian experience shows how recognising the voice of families themselves can be a starting point for shaping sustainable public policy. From responding to the specific needs of families, the public support system has gradually transformed into a strategic approach where the well-being of families is recognised as part of the overall capacity of the troop.

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<sup>78</sup> Original title — Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS).

<sup>79</sup> Government of Canada. Veterans Well-being Act (S.C. 2005, p. 21) [aws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-16.8](https://aws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-16.8)

<sup>80</sup> Veterans Affairs Canada (2017). Pension for Life Overview. [veterans.gc.ca/GCWeb/pdf/Factsheets/Introduction.pdf](https://veterans.gc.ca/GCWeb/pdf/Factsheets/Introduction.pdf)

1914–1918 World War I	Commencement of support for families: pensions for widows, children, and parents of the fallen
1941–1945 World War II	Establishment of the Veterans Affairs Canada and designation of veterans' families as separate beneficiaries
1980-ti	<b>Veterans Independence Program</b>  The state hires professional caregivers for veterans: cleaning, cooking, and accompanying them to doctors. Reducing the burden on families
1991	<b>Service programme for military families</b>  Occurred after the OSSOMM. Support centres: crisis assistance, mental health, childcare, education, and employment
1998	<b>Plan for improving the quality of life in the armed forces</b>  Official recognition: family welfare = military combat readiness. Supporting families as part of military strategy
2005	<b>OSISS expansion</b>  The Operational Stress Injury Social Support (since 2001 for the military) was extended to the families of warriors and veterans
2006	<b>Veterans Well-being Act</b>  Model change: from monetary compensation to integrated adaptation. Families are part of a holistic recovery process
2018	<b>Pension for Life</b>  Regular payments instead of one-off payments. More opportunities for caregivers and family members, expanded access to counselling, training, and career programmes

## The United Kingdom

After the First and Second World Wars, social protection for veterans' families in the United Kingdom was limited to pension payments for widows and children of the fallen<sup>81</sup>. Public and charitable organisations mainly handled the protection of the rights of veterans and their families.

This situation persisted until 2011, when an important document was adopted – the **Armed Forces Covenant**<sup>82</sup>. It legally enshrined the moral and social principle that “no one who serves or has served, nor their families, should suffer harm because of their service.” The agreement formed the basis of a unified approach, ensuring that service members, veterans, and their families have equal rights to access public services. The state recognises their contribution to the country's security and guarantees that they will not face any restrictions in accessing support.

In the United Kingdom, the Office for Veterans' Affairs, which operates within the Ministry of Defence<sup>83</sup>, is responsible for implementing, developing, and coordinating the covenant in the field of public policy on veterans and their families, ensuring that support for them is part of the state's security and defence policy. The principles of the covenant also formed the basis of the **Armed Forces Act 2011**<sup>84</sup>, which required the government to report annually on the fulfilment of its obligations to families. They are binding on local authorities and the National Health Service (NHS) since 2021 when providing services in the areas of health, education and housing.

The covenant provides a basic definition of a service member's or veteran's family, which includes spouses, civil partners, dependent children, parents, and other close relatives. There is also a separate

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<sup>81</sup> Suddick, C. An overview of the Pension System immediately after the War. The Western Front Association. [westernfrontassociation.com/world-war-i-articles/an-overview-of-the-pension-system-immediately-after-the-war](https://westernfrontassociation.com/world-war-i-articles/an-overview-of-the-pension-system-immediately-after-the-war)

<sup>82</sup> Ministry of Defence. The Armed Forces Covenant. [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78c7b740f0b62b22cbcbd4/the\\_armed\\_forces\\_covenant.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78c7b740f0b62b22cbcbd4/the_armed_forces_covenant.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> Office for Veterans' Affairs. About us. Gov.uk. [gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-veterans-affairs/about](https://gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-veterans-affairs/about)

<sup>84</sup> Armed Forces Act. Legislation.gov.uk. [legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/18/contents](https://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/18/contents)

definition for loved ones of the fallen service members and veterans – “bereaved” – a person who has lost a loved one.

In 2022, the UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022–2032<sup>85</sup> was approved, broadening the legal definition of family and recognising different types of relations: same-sex couples, parents, caregivers and other close relatives involved in raising children or caring for elderly or sick family members. To develop and implement its strategy, the Ministry of Defence also draws on the results of research into the experiences and needs of service members, veterans and their families<sup>86, 87, 88, 89</sup>.

Currently, families of veterans can count on state support in various environments of well-being: housing, education, employment, health care, social services, financial assistance, and access to commercial products and services<sup>90</sup>. In addition, the government uses the Family Test<sup>91</sup>. This assessment method determines the extent to which state policies take into account the needs of families in different life situations: starting a family, having a child, caring for relatives, losing loved ones, long-term illness, or divorce.

In the United Kingdom, family support principles apply to both the families of serving military and the families of veterans. It is important that the state immediately recognised families as independent subjects

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<sup>85</sup> Ministry of Defence (2022). UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022-32. [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61e80893e90e07037ac9e10b/UK\\_Armed\\_Forces\\_Families\\_Strategy\\_2022\\_to\\_2032.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61e80893e90e07037ac9e10b/UK_Armed_Forces_Families_Strategy_2022_to_2032.pdf)

<sup>86</sup> Ministry of Defence (2020). Living in our Shoes. Understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families. [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ef46ab9e90e075c5582f501/Living\\_in\\_our\\_shoes\\_Full\\_Report\\_1\\_embargoed\\_30\\_June.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ef46ab9e90e075c5582f501/Living_in_our_shoes_Full_Report_1_embargoed_30_June.pdf)

<sup>87</sup> Tri-service families continuous attitude survey: 2024. Gov.uk. [gov.uk/government/statistics/tri-service-families-continuous-attitude-survey-2024](https://gov.uk/government/statistics/tri-service-families-continuous-attitude-survey-2024)

<sup>88</sup> Services and support, responses from family members of UK armed forces veterans: Veterans' Survey 2022, UK. Gov.uk. [gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/services-and-support-responses-from-family-members-of-uk-armed-forces-veterans-veterans-survey-2022-uk](https://gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/services-and-support-responses-from-family-members-of-uk-armed-forces-veterans-veterans-survey-2022-uk)

<sup>89</sup> Ministry of Defence (2022). UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022-32. [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61e80893e90e07037ac9e10b/UK\\_Armed\\_Forces\\_Families\\_Strategy\\_2022\\_to\\_2032.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61e80893e90e07037ac9e10b/UK_Armed_Forces_Families_Strategy_2022_to_2032.pdf)

<sup>90</sup> Army Families Federation. Armed Forces Covenant. [aff.org.uk/armed-forces-covenant](https://aff.org.uk/armed-forces-covenant)

<sup>91</sup> Department for Work and Pensions. The Family Test. Revised Guidance for Government Departments. [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/989018/family-test-guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/989018/family-test-guidance.pdf)

of veteran policy, granting them appropriate status within support programmes. Additionally, the policy is grounded in the experiences of families, taking into account the diversity of family relationships and experiences. This enables us to make decisions that meet the real needs of the relatives and loved ones of the military personnel and veterans. Although the system is still developing, the state is already focusing on the individual and taking into account the life experiences of families.

1918–2011	After the First and Second World Wars, social protection for veterans’ families was limited to pension payments for widows and children of the fallen. Public and charitable organisations mainly handled the protection of the rights of veterans and their families
2011	<p><b>Armed Forces Covenant</b></p> <p>The agreement formed the basis of a unified approach, ensuring that service members, veterans, and their families have equal rights to access public services. The principles of the Covenant were the basis of the <b>Armed Forces Act (2011)</b></p>
2021	The principles of the Covenant are binding on local authorities and the NHS when providing services in the environments of healthcare, education, and housing
2022	<p><b>UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022–2032</b></p> <p>Expanding the definition of family: same-sex couples, caregivers, and other close relatives. Introduction of the Family Test to evaluate policies</p>

An analysis of the experiences of the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom demonstrates a gradual but consistent evolution in public policy regarding the families of veterans – from a focus exclusively on the military to the recognition of the family as a separate, full-fledged subject of veteran support. Despite different historical, legal, and social contexts, all three countries have followed a common path: from one-off compensation or pensions for widows to comprehensive

systems that take into account not only formal family status but also actual relationships and individual needs.

In all these countries, approaches to providing support for veterans' families have different focuses and sometimes still tend to provide support from a caregiving perspective, but we can identify some **key characteristics of contemporary approaches in developed countries:**

- **recognition of veterans' families as a separate target group of public policy**, with their own experiences, needs, and rights;
- **institutional consolidation of the status of caregivers** and family members as people who are entitled to social services, education, health care, psychological assistance, and compensation;
- **use of research, data and surveys** to develop policies and programmes that reflect the real experiences of families;
- **flexibility in defining family composition** – taking into account civil partners, carers, adult children who provide care, and other people whose involvement in the life of a veteran is significant;
- **integration of social and security policies**, where family well-being is seen as one of the factors contributing to the overall sustainability of the military system;
- **gradual expansion of support over time** – from support during service to long-term programmes after settling back into civilian life.

These approaches shape a coherent model in which the family is perceived not as an “appendage” to the veteran, but as an important group that also suffers the consequences of a tough experience, needs support, and should be involved in the system of veteran services.

For Ukraine, this experience is a valuable source for reflection and rethinking. Although international models cannot be mechanically applied in the Ukrainian context, they focus on key principles that can form the basis of a policy that is sensitive to the experiences of families.

At the same time, it should be taken into account that even in countries with well-developed support systems, special attention to the families of veterans has only recently emerged. Ukraine is just beginning to develop a public veteran policy, but it has the opportunity to immediately lay the foundation for it on the principle of recognising the experiences and needs of families, in parallel with other countries.

# The approach of public authorities in Ukraine to defining veterans' families

Currently, various Ukrainian legal acts define family differently depending on the context: social protection, pension provision, captivity or missing in action. As a result, the same family relationship may guarantee access to support in one situation, but not be recognised by the state in another.

In this section, we analyse how Ukrainian legislation defines the family of a veteran. We consider the provisions of the **Family and Civil Codes of Ukraine**, as well as special laws regulating the social and legal protection of military personnel, prisoners of war, persons missing in action, and the families of the fallen. We pay particular attention to the criteria – kinship, cohabitation, maintenance – that form the basis for legal recognition of the family and how they affect access to support.

This review shows that there is currently no single approach to understanding the family of a veteran in Ukraine. The lack of a clear, unified definition creates gaps in protection that are particularly painful in times of war. Awareness of this problem is the first step towards shaping a fair and sensitive policy that recognises not only legal categories but also human connections.

## General definition of family

Currently, the legal understanding of family in Ukraine is based primarily on the provisions of the **Family Code**. According to it: "A family is a group of people who live together, share a common household, and have mutual rights and duties. A married couple is considered a family even if the wife and husband do not live together due to factors such as education, work, health treatment, the need to care for parents

or children, or other valid reasons. A child belongs to the family of their parents even if they do not live with them.”

A family is created on the basis of marriage, blood relationship, adoption, or other conditions that “do not contradict the law or moral principles of society.”<sup>92</sup> Family members are considered to include spouses, children, parents, and other relatives who live together.

**The Family Code also regulates two main types of legal relations between family members:**

- 1. Property relations** – joint financial and property obligations during cohabitation (spouses, parents, and children) and in the event of separate living arrangements (separate residence or divorce).
- 2. Non-property relations** – mutual rights and obligations, e.g. parenthood, respect for individuality, division of responsibilities, care for the family, freedom, and personal inviolability.

To establish the scope of rights and guarantees, state social policy also applies the concept of **degree of kinship**, which, under the **Civil Code of Ukraine**, is determined by the number of generations that separate relatives from each other<sup>93</sup>. Each generation is considered one degree: between parent and child is one degree, and between grandparent and grandchild is two degrees.

Ukrainian legislation currently does not contain a single legal act defining a complete list of relatives by degree of kinship; however, an indicative classification is provided in the **Tax Code of Ukraine**<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Articles 3–4. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

<sup>93</sup> Civil Code of Ukraine. Articles 1261-1265. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15?find=1&text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15?find=1&text)

<sup>94</sup> Tax Code of Ukraine. Article 263, subparagraph 14.1, point 14.1.263. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2755-17#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2755-17#Text)

Degree of kinship	Family members
First	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Parents/guardians/adoptive parents<sup>95</sup></li> <li>■ Parent</li> <li>■ Children</li> </ul>
Second	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sibling</li> <li>■ Grandparent</li> <li>■ Grandchildren</li> </ul>

Degrees of kinship are also used in practice as a guideline for determining the rights and duties of relatives.

- In **family law**: first- and second-degree relatives cannot marry each other<sup>96</sup>.
- In **inheritance law**, children, spouses, and parents have the first priority in inheritance; the second priority goes to siblings, grandparents, and grandchildren<sup>97</sup>.
- In **organ donation**, according to the **Civil Code**, close family members (first and second degree of kinship) may transfer an organ to a relative without anonymity and without the need to go to court – a statement and consent are sufficient<sup>98</sup>.
- In matters of **mobilisation and contract service**, to grant deferral or exemption<sup>99</sup> for caring for a person with a disability, preference rests with first-degree relatives, and in their absence or inability to perform these duties, with second-degree relatives.

<sup>95</sup> The term “parents” often also refers to guardians/adoptive parents, as parents act as legal representatives who can act on behalf of the child without special authorisation.

<sup>96</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Article 26. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

<sup>97</sup> Civil Code of Ukraine. Articles 1258–1265. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15)

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. Article 290.

<sup>99</sup> Law of Ukraine “On Military Duty and Military Service.” Article 26(12). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2232-12#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2232-12#Text)

## Relevant legislation

### Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection”

This law<sup>100</sup> does not provide a general definition of veterans’ families, but establishes **two groups of families, defining their status, social guarantees and benefits:**

Families of fallen or deceased war veterans	Families of fallen or deceased Defenders and Defendresses of Ukraine
These include war veterans’ families, persons with combatant status and persons with disabilities resulting from war	The status was granted after the Russian Federation unleashed a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It is granted to families of fallen warriors or those missing in action during the Russo-Ukrainian war (since 2014 during the ATO/JFO and after 2022)

The law defines the list of family members of fallen or deceased veterans and defenders:

- 1. Parents.**
- 2. One spouse who has not remarried:** after the death of their husband or wife, they have the status of a widow or widower, which entitles them to benefits and social support, even if they do not receive a pension due to the loss of their breadwinner. If the person remarries, they lose their status and social guarantees.
- 3. Children who:**
  - **do not have and have never had their own families and children:** in this case, the parental family remains the main family unit, so the child is entitled to social support;

<sup>100</sup> Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection.” [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text)

- **have their own families but became disabled before reaching adulthood:** regardless of family status, disability creates an additional need for social support, so they are entitled to certain guarantees as first-degree relatives;
  - **have lost both parents due to death or missing in action:** the complete loss of parental care necessitates additional protection from the state.
- 4. Dependents** who are entitled to a pension due to the death of their breadwinner.

## **Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families”**

This law<sup>101</sup> defines the concept of veterans’ families in a broader context. It applies to the families of active, fallen or deceased service members, as well as those who have become disabled as a result of military service<sup>102</sup>, including veterans who have participated in combat operations. **According to the current version of this law of 22 September 2025<sup>103</sup>, the family circle includes<sup>104</sup>:**

- 1. Biological or adopted children**, in particular:
  - children conceived during the lifetime of the deceased person and born after their death;
  - children in respect of whom the deceased person was deprived of parental rights during their lifetime.
- 2. Widow/widower.**

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<sup>101</sup> Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families” No. 2011-XII (20 December 1991). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text)

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. Article 3.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. Article 16-1(4).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. Article 18.

3. **Parents/adoptive parents** of the deceased person, if:
  - they were not deprived of their parental rights in relation to the deceased person;
  - their parental rights were restored at the time of death.
4. **Grandchildren** of the deceased person, if at the time of death their parents were also deceased.
5. **De facto family partners:** a woman or man who lived with the deceased person as a family without being officially married to them or to anyone else. To this end, the court must establish the fact of cohabitation.
6. **Dependents:** family members who lived entirely or mainly at the expense of the deceased person. In the event of a person's death, they may be eligible for a survivor's pension, even if they had previously received other pension benefits<sup>105</sup>.

All these family members are entitled to receive a one-off cash benefit and access to relevant social guarantees.

The 1999 clarification of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine<sup>106</sup> on this law is also important for determining who is considered a family member of a veteran. At that time, the legislation did not have a clear list of people included in the family, and the Family Code of Ukraine had not yet been adopted<sup>107</sup>, so the document identified two groups: immediate relatives and other people who permanently live with a military person and run a joint household.

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<sup>105</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Pension Provision of Military Men, Persons of Senior Staff and the Ranks of Bodies of Domestic Affairs and Some Other Persons." Articles 30–31. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2262-12#n278](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2262-12#n278)

<sup>106</sup> Decision of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine in the case concerning the official interpretation of the term "family member." Paragraph 6. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/v005p710-99](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/v005p710-99)

<sup>107</sup> The Family Code was adopted in 2002 and took effect in 2004.

Immediate relatives	Other persons who permanently reside with a service member and share a household
Spouse, children, and parents. They are recognised as family members regardless of whether they live or run a household together	These can be blood relatives (siblings, grandparents) or relatives through marriage or informal ties (stepfather, stepmother, stepsons, stepdaughters, guardians). The key condition for acquiring this status is the existence of a shared household, shared expenses, and agreements on housing

This decision is important because it can be used in court cases by loved ones of fallen, captured, and missing-in-action warriors. Legislatively, it allows individuals who are or were in a civil partnership with a veteran to obtain some of the rights and guarantees typically provided to spouses.

## **Law of Ukraine “On the Legal Status of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances”**

This law<sup>108</sup> regulates the status of persons missing under special circumstances, such as during occupation, hostilities or natural or man-made emergencies, as well as their families.

The law employs a broader concept of family than the **Family Code of Ukraine**, taking into account not only officially registered relationships but also de facto family or domestic ties. The document guarantees social protection for close relatives and family members of missing persons, as well as their right to truthful information about their whereabouts, the conditions of their death, or the place of their burial, if known.

<sup>108</sup> Law of Ukraine “On the Legal Status of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances,” No. 2505-VIII (12 July 2018). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2505-19#n40](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2505-19#n40)

## Law of Ukraine “On the Social and Legal Protection of Persons Deprived of Their Personal Liberty as a Result of Armed Aggression against Ukraine, and Their Family Members”

This law<sup>109</sup> defines the legal status of persons who are or have been in captivity, as well as mechanisms of state support for them and their families. It applies to civilians, military members, and their family members. The relevant status is granted by the Commission for Establishing the Fact of Deprivation of Personal Liberty as a Result of Armed Aggression against Ukraine. The issue may be initiated by the person themselves, their legal representatives, or loved ones based on an application.

The law relies on the **Family Code of Ukraine** in defining the concept of “family.” Loved ones may obtain the status of “family members of a person deprived of personal liberty as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine”<sup>110</sup>.

### Formal status and real relationships

The **Family** and **Civil Codes of Ukraine** employ a broad definition of family, encompassing both blood relatives and all household members. Specialised laws specify the circle of people who belong to the family of a veteran and are entitled to relevant social guarantees.

The difference in definitions may result in individual family members having different access to support, depending on which law applies in a particular situation. For example, laws governing the status

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<sup>109</sup> Law of Ukraine “On the Social and Legal Protection of Persons Deprived of Their Personal Liberty as a Result of Armed Aggression against Ukraine, and Their Family Members,” No. 2010-IX (26 January 2022). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2010-20#n8](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2010-20#n8)

<sup>110</sup> Order of the Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine, “On approval of application forms for ensuring social and legal protection of persons deprived of their personal liberty as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine, and their family members” No. 76 (21 January 2025). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0177-25#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0177-25#Text)

and protection of veterans missing in action and prisoners of war rely on the broader definition in the **Family Code of Ukraine**. In contrast, the laws defining state guarantees for veterans and their families have a much shorter list of people who are considered family members and are eligible for support.

Consequently, the key criterion is not the experience of family life with a veteran, but rather the formal legal status of close individuals and the course of events in the lives of the service member (captivity, death, or missing in action).

There are various relationships within families of veterans, just as in any other family. These relationships can be based on mutual support, care and responsibility, but they are not always legally formalised. For example, these may be partners without a formal marriage, adult children who help their parents, grandparents involved in raising their grandchildren, or other relatives who take care of the affairs of the military. Sometimes this lack of a legally formalised relationship is a conscious choice, for example, when partners are not ready for such a step. Sometimes, legal formalities, such as powers of attorney, can be complicated due to the service member's lack of time and opportunity to visit a notary. And in some situations, such as when adult children provide household assistance to their parents, the relevant legal statuses simply do not exist.

The experience of war can alter the dynamics of family relationships, causing family members to assume new roles, such as supporting the family independently or caring for their partner's relatives. Although these relationships often correspond to family logic in essence, they do not always fit into the official statuses provided by the state. This means that the Ukrainian state support system only recognises relatives and loved ones with officially established status.

This can create situations where people who actually perform family functions are left without adequate protection. In particular, civilian partners of the military are currently unable to receive one-off financial assistance, participate in decisions regarding treatment or burial, or inherit property. This means that a person who lived with a service

member, ran a joint household, and possibly raised children together, does not legally exist in the system of rights and guarantees, even though they suffer the same emotional and practical losses.

Social and material support for the children of fallen service members is also provided only after legal confirmation of family ties or recognition of paternity through the court.

**Policies to support the families of veterans should be based not only on formal criteria, but also on an understanding of the real meaning of family ties, life roles and conditions.** In the context of war and its related challenges, it is important to develop flexible and sensitive mechanisms for supporting people with similar experiences.

This requires a rethinking of current approaches in favour of an inclusive, people-centred and fair system that recognises and supports all forms of care, mutual responsibility and family solidarity. Such recognition must be enshrined in legal acts, as this is the only way for the state to recognise real family relationships. At the same time, it is important that such a procedure for recognising real relationships is implemented in practice.

# Rights and guarantees of veterans' families in different family relationships

Family relationships among Ukrainian citizens, including veterans, can take various forms – from officially registered marriages to civil partnerships, from parenthood to care provided by other relatives or loved ones. However, it is the type of relationship – not the content or duration of the relationship – that determines the rights and social guarantees available to loved ones, ranging from the right to inheritance and one-off financial assistance to the ability to represent their interests during treatment, burial, or pension registration.

## Registered marital relationships

According to the **Family Code of Ukraine**, marriage is a union between a man and a woman, concluded in a civil registry office<sup>111</sup>. It establishes a number of rights and duties for spouses that apply both during marriage and after its dissolution.

## Right to joint property ownership

All property acquired during marriage (salary, pension, gifts, income from business or creative activities) is jointly owned by the spouses, even if one of the partners had no income, for example, due to studying, caring for children, or military service<sup>112</sup>. After the dissolution of a marriage, former partners have the right to divide the property.

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<sup>111</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Article 26. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. Chapter 8. The right of joint ownership of spouses.

## Right of inheritance

According to the **Civil Code**, after the death of one spouse, the other has a guaranteed right to inheritance, even if the deceased person did not leave a will<sup>113</sup>. Such an heir belongs to the first category of heirs, together with the decedent's children (both biological and adopted) and their parents.

Inheritance encompasses everything that belonged to a person at the time of their death, including their civil rights and obligations. These rights and obligations are comprised of two main categories: property, which includes items and ownership, such as real estate, funds, stakes in a business, and copyrights; and property obligations, which encompass debts and contractual obligations. If the spouses were legally married, the share of property acquired during the marriage is considered joint property; therefore, only the other spouse's share is subject to inheritance.

## Right to maintenance

According to the **Family Code of Ukraine**, spouses are required to support each other financially during marriage<sup>114</sup>: if one of the partners is unable to work and cannot support themselves, the other is obligated to provide financial support.

This right remains in force for one year after the dissolution of the marriage. For example, if a veteran becomes disabled during service and loses their ability to work, their former spouse is obligated to provide financial support.

If one of the partners is unable to work or obtain education due to valid reasons, such as caring for a child, the maintenance obligation remains in effect for up to three years after the divorce. If a spouse lives with a child with a disability who requires constant care, the right to maintenance remains in force for the entire period of care.

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<sup>113</sup> Civil Code of Ukraine. Article 1261. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15)

<sup>114</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Chapter 9. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

The right to maintenance ceases when life conditions change, such as when the recipient recovers, becomes able to work, or remarries.

## **Right to information and representation**

**The status of a spouse entitles the husband or wife of a veteran to:**

- officially contact state institutions with requests regarding the whereabouts of a prisoner of war or missing-in-action warrior, clarification of the circumstances of injury, missing in action or death;
- receive information about the person's health and, in the event of hospitalisation or intensive care, visit the person and make decisions;
- make decisions about the place of burial and the organisation of the burial, receive posthumous awards and represent the interests of the veteran after their death.

## **Official status and social guarantees**

The spouse of a deceased veteran is entitled to the status of a family member of a fallen war veteran/Defender or Defendress of Ukraine<sup>115</sup> and additional state guarantees, including one-off financial assistance, a survivor's pension, discounts on utilities and transport, healthcare and medicines, sanatorium resort treatment, and priority provision of housing.

For couples who are service members and veterans, these guarantees are important in conditions of increased risk and different service trajectories, including injury, missing in action, captivity, or death. Therefore, during martial law in Ukraine, a simplified marriage registration procedure has been introduced, which allows couples to marry remotely, without visiting the registry office in person, if one of the spouses is serving in a combat zone or is far from home<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection." Article 15. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#n379](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#n379)

<sup>116</sup> Online Marriage Is Back In Action – Get Married Via Video Connection (23 January 2025). Diia. [diia.gov.ua/news/shliub-onlain-povernuvsia-v-diiu-odruzhuitiesia-cherez-videozviazok](https://diia.gov.ua/news/shliub-onlain-povernuvsia-v-diiu-odruzhuitiesia-cherez-videozviazok)

If the couple decides to dissolve their marriage, this affects access to state support for partners of veterans. If partners do not have children together, including foster or adopted children, the legal relationship between them is formally lost, and the spouse loses their status as a veteran's family member and is therefore no longer eligible for the related social guarantees. In case of the veteran's death, social guarantees and benefits for the other spouse are only available until he or she remarries.

## Unregistered marital relationships

The Family Code of Ukraine does not recognise as a family a man and woman who live together, share a household, but have not officially registered their marriage<sup>117</sup>. Accordingly, they do not have all the rights and duties of spouses in a registered marriage, but may have joint ownership of property.

This is particularly important for families of service members and veterans. In wartime, access to state support guarantees depends on the partner's legal status. Currently, the de facto partners of fallen war veterans can receive a one-off cash benefit if they prove the existence of their relationship in court<sup>118</sup>. Other guarantees provided for a spouse, such as survivor's pensions and discounts on housing and utility services, remain unavailable to them.

The situation is similar in the case of inheritance: according to the law, all property passes to blood relatives or the other spouse. This means that even long-term cohabitation does not give the de facto partner the right to inherit a share without a will or a separate court decision recognising joint ownership.

Without legal formalisation of the relationship, the de facto partner is deprived of most social benefits, the right to represent the interests

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<sup>117</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Article 74. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

<sup>118</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families". Article 16-1(4). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#n321](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#n321)

of the injured or missing-in-action person, as well as the ability to quickly dispose of property or organise a burial. This problem is particularly acute for members of the LGBTQI+ community, who are currently unable to marry under current legislation and do not have access to state support programmes.

In order for de facto marital relationships to have legal guarantees, such as the right to maintenance or joint ownership of property, they must be officially recognised by a court. The court assesses the facts that together indicate life as spouses<sup>119</sup>: cohabitation, running the household, budget, and the couple's perception by those around them as spouses. However, in practice, this journey can be difficult and lengthy. It can be difficult to gather evidence, especially if the couple does not have children together, registered property, or witnesses willing to confirm their cohabitation.

The length of the process is also noticeable in the event of a veteran's death and the distribution of a one-time cash benefit (OCB). Initially, official relatives apply for the payment, and it is distributed among those who have submitted an application. Partners who were in an unofficial marriage with the veteran may also be eligible for it, but this requires a court decision. However, while the common-law spouse proves the fact of cohabitation in court, sometimes over several years, the OCB is still distributed among official relatives, so the partner may not have time to apply for the payment or may only be able to receive a small part of the payment.

One of the solutions for de facto partners could be the **introduction of civil (or registered) partnerships**, which will provide social protection for those who live together without a legal marital status. As of November 2025, civil partnerships remain legally unregulated in Ukraine. In 2023, draft law No. 9103<sup>120</sup> was submitted to the Verkhovna Rada, which, for the first time, proposes

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<sup>119</sup> Courts may rely on the decision of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine on the interpretation of the term "family," where family members may be considered to be people who have both an official relationship with a relative and a de facto relationship.

<sup>120</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Draft Law "On the Framework of Registered Partnerships" No. 9103 (13 March 2023). [itd.rada.gov.ua/BILLINFO/Bills/Card/41497](https://itd.rada.gov.ua/BILLINFO/Bills/Card/41497)

creating a mechanism for state registration of civil partnerships at the legislative level. According to the draft law, registered partners acquire a status equivalent to that of family members under the **Family Code of Ukraine**<sup>121</sup>. This could open up access to key social and legal guarantees that were previously reserved only for spouses. At the same time, the draft law does not equate civil partnerships with marriage in all respects; for example, it does not provide for joint adoption of children or automatic acquisition of family status regarding the children of one of the partners. The draft law is currently under consideration by committees.

Legally registered marriage remains the primary form of family relationships recognised and protected by Ukrainian law. It is the focus of most legal acts governing the rights to social support, property guarantees, access to information, inheritance, and representation of veterans' interests. Registered marriage provides for the widest range of rights, most of which are clearly regulated, creating relative legal certainty.

At the same time, despite the fact that unregistered partnerships are widespread in Ukrainian society, particularly among the military and veterans, they have significantly limited legal recognition. Such relationships do not automatically provide access to social guarantees, representation, or inheritance, and their legal recognition is only possible through additional procedures. In critical situations, such as injury, disappearance, or death, this creates serious risks of legal and social invisibility for a partner who actually performs family functions.

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<sup>121</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Article 3. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

<b>Legal Sphere</b>	<b>Registered Marital Relationships</b>	<b>Unregistered Relationships</b>
<b>Medical decisions</b>	The right to decide on treatment	No right to decide on treatment
<b>Representation of interests</b>	Official representation in institutions	A special power of attorney is required
<b>Housing benefits*</b>	Discounts on utilities	Discounts are not available
<b>Arrangement of burial</b>	The right to decide on burial	Decisions are made by blood relatives
<b>Inheritance (1st priority)</b>	Automatic right to inheritance without a will	A will or court decision recognising joint ownership is required
<b>One-off financial assistance</b>	Guaranteed payment in the event of death	Only after the court has established the fact of cohabitation
<b>Survivor's pension*</b>	Guaranteed pension payment	Unavailable

\*After the veteran's death, their spouse retains the right to social guarantees and benefits until remarriage.

The gap between formal status and actual relationships is particularly acute in wartime, when many couples are unable to register their marriage due to circumstances, yet are still able to live together, raise children, run a joint household, and share responsibilities. Current legislation does not provide sufficient flexibility to recognise and protect such forms of relationships.

This suggests a need to update approaches to defining family in veteran policy, focusing not only on formal characteristics but also on the genuine meaning of relationships, responsibilities, and care. In the future, the legislative framework should take into account

contemporary social practices so that guarantees are available to those who are actually members of the family.

## Children of veterans

Every child in Ukraine has rights guaranteed by the state, including the rights to life, safety, family upbringing, education, healthcare, protection from violence and exploitation, a decent standard of living, and development. These rights are enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Family Code of Ukraine, the Civil Code of Ukraine, the Law of Ukraine “On Protection of Childhood” and other regulatory acts. The fundamental principle of public policy on children is to ensure the best interests of the child. All decisions affecting children must be made with due regard to their needs, rights, and well-being.

According to the Family Code of Ukraine, children are defined as anyone who has not yet reached the age of majority, which is 18 years old<sup>122</sup>. The document also stipulates that the adopted child’s legal status is equivalent to that of a biological child: from the moment of adoption, the child has the same personal and property rights and obligations in relations with the adoptive parents.

A person can also be a guardian or custodian. Guardianship is appointed for children under 14 years of age, and the guardian acts on behalf of the child in all areas of life: making decisions on treatment, education, property management, and daily life<sup>123</sup>. Custodianship, by contrast, applies to children aged 14 to 18, and the custodian does not replace the child in legal transactions, but gives consent to their performance and helps exercise their rights<sup>124</sup>.

Like spouses, children of veterans have legally enshrined rights and guarantees.

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<sup>122</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Article 3. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

<sup>123</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Article 243. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. Article 244.

## **Right of inheritance**

According to the **Civil Code of Ukraine**, children have a guaranteed right to inherit from their father or mother after their death, even if the parent did not leave a will. Children, both biological and adopted, are first-priority heirs – along with the spouse of the deceased and their parents.

To acquire the inheritance, the child must accept it within six months after the death of the father or mother. If the child is a minor, their interests are automatically protected by law, and they are considered to have accepted the inheritance.

## **Right to maintenance**

The material support of children, including food, clothing, education, healthcare, and housing, is the responsibility of both parents, regardless of their conditions. Family law guarantees a child's right to be maintained by their parents until they reach the age of majority, or until the age of 23 if they are pursuing further education. If one parent is a veteran and has deceased, lost their ability to work, or is unable to contribute to the maintenance of the child, the other parent is responsible for their maintenance.

If a child has a disability and requires constant care, the right to maintenance may be retained without any time limitation. The state may also provide additional assistance, benefits or social payments if the child has lost a veteran parent as a result of hostilities.

During wartime, exercising the right to maintenance can be challenging. Conditions of service, long separation from family, risk of death or injury, and loss of working capacity may affect the ability of veteran parents to maintain their child. This creates a need for mechanisms of temporary or additional support for the child through the involvement of other family members, social services, and state assistance.

According to the Constitution<sup>125</sup> and the Family Code of Ukraine<sup>126</sup>, adult children also have a duty to support their incapacitated parents or adoptive parents if they need help. In a legal sense, this is a manifestation of mutual care between generations, which reinforces expectations of support in the event of loss of working capacity, serious illness or old age.

However, in the context of veterans' families and military service experience, this approach needs to be reviewed more sensitively. People who have participated in combat operations are more likely to experience long-term health deterioration, including the risk of disability and the need for constant support and care. The law, in turn, stipulates that this care should be provided by the spouse or adult children.

However, the responsibility of adult children cannot and should not be the main instrument for ensuring a dignified life for veterans if they lose working capacity. It can only play a supporting role, while the state should provide the main support for veterans. Therefore, legislative norms must be supplemented by state policies that guarantee long-term support for veterans, for example, social care programmes, adapted pension mechanisms, and access to medical and psychosocial assistance in old age.

## **Right to information and representation**

Children of veterans, as well as spouses, have the right to access certain information about their parents and may participate in important decision-making – but not in all cases. They can receive information about the veteran's health with their consent, or about the conditions of death, missing in action or captivity if there is no spouse and the child is the closest relative. They can also participate in organising the burial and receive posthumous awards.

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<sup>125</sup> Constitution of Ukraine. Article 51. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/254k/96-вр#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/254k/96-вр#Text)

<sup>126</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Articles 202–203. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

At the same time, official representation of the veteran's interests in courts, social protection bodies, or other state institutions is only possible with the appropriate power of attorney or if the child has the status of a legal representative or guardian.

## **Official status and social guarantees**

Like spouses, children of fallen veterans are entitled to the status of family members of fallen war veterans/Defender or Defendress of Ukraine<sup>127</sup> and additional state guarantees: one-off financial assistance, a survivor's pension, discounts on transport and utilities, preferential admission to educational institutions, and priority access to places in kindergartens, schools, or dormitories.

In the event of the veteran's death, the child retains this status until marriage or, if they have their own family but have become disabled, until reaching the age of majority. Children of veterans may also be eligible for additional regional benefits provided by local support programmes, such as free school meals.

## **Right to the freedom of movement**

In peacetime, a child's departure from Ukraine is regulated by CMU Resolution No. 57<sup>128</sup>. According to it, a child under the age of 16 may cross the border only with the consent of both parents. If the child is accompanied by only one of them, the notarised consent of the other is mandatory.

At the same time, during martial law, a special provision of the same resolution comes into force, which temporarily simplifies the above rule<sup>129</sup>. It allows one parent to leave the country with the child without

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<sup>127</sup> Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection." Article 15. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#n379](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#n379)

<sup>128</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (27 January 1995). Resolution No. 57 "On Approving the Rules for Crossing the State Border by Citizens of Ukraine." Paragraph 3. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/57-95-n#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/57-95-n#Text)

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. Paragraph 2-3, indent 13.

the notarised consent of the other parent, which significantly reduces the administrative burden and meets the needs of the times. This rule applies exclusively within the framework of martial law and takes precedence over the general procedure.

Additionally, the **Family Code of Ukraine** provides further grounds for the temporary departure of a child abroad without the consent of the other parent. In particular, this refers to situations where the departure has a clearly defined purpose (e.g. medical treatment or participation in sports competitions) and does not exceed one month. The right to travel without the consent of the other parent also arises in the event of significant arrears in child support payments. If the parents do not agree and live separately, the issue is resolved in court, regardless of marital law.

The introduction of a simplified border crossing regime for one parent with a child during wartime is an adaptive measure that takes into account the realities of the situation, particularly when the other parent is at the front, a prisoner of war, or considered missing in action. At the same time, the general procedure requiring the consent of both parents will automatically be restored after the end of martial law. This creates serious challenges for families who cannot obtain the consent of the other parent for objective reasons, in particular due to their disappearance or captivity. In the future, it may be necessary to amend the legislation to regulate such cases.

## **Veterans' children without official status**

For a child of a veteran to receive all the appropriate social guarantees, status, benefits, and exercise their inheritance rights, parenthood must be officially established, i.e., recorded in the state register. However, this is not always possible. In particular, the problem arises when the parents were not officially married, and voluntary acknowledgement of parenthood was not formalised in a timely manner, the couple

separated before the child was born, and the child was born more than 10 months after the father's death or missing in action.

If a child is born during marriage or within 10 months after its dissolution or the husband's death, paternity is established automatically, without additional action<sup>130</sup>. **If the marriage was not registered, paternity can be established:**

- **voluntarily** – parents must submit a joint application to the CRO;
- **through the court** – if voluntary recognition of paternity has not taken place or is impossible (in particular due to the death or disappearance).

In the case of an unregistered marriage, when paternity is not established voluntarily, information about the father is recorded according to the mother's statement<sup>131</sup>. However, in order for the child to obtain inheritance rights, social guarantees, and benefits, paternity must be established separately through the court.

In the event of the death or disappearance of a service member, establishing parenthood through the courts can be difficult and protracted. Although, according to the **Family Code of Ukraine**, any information about the child's origin from one of the parents can be used as evidence<sup>132</sup>, in practice, the most convincing evidence for the court is forensic genetic examination. However, if the warrior's body has not been found, identified, or is located in a temporarily occupied territory, such an examination becomes impossible.

Courts may recognise parenthood based on other evidence. This includes, for example, facts such as the couple living together, running a joint household, or participating in the child's upbringing<sup>133</sup>. This approach may work for children who have already been born, when

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<sup>130</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Article 122(3). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

<sup>131</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Article 135. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. Article 128.

<sup>133</sup> Supreme Court ruling of 16 May 2018 in case No. 591/6441/14-c. Unified State Register of Court Decisions. [reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/74064505](http://reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/74064505)

the relationship between the parents was long-term and open to those around them.

However, in situations where the missing-in-action or fallen service member lived separately from the child or the child was born after their disappearance or death, alternative evidence may be incomplete or unavailable. In such cases, the inability to conduct an examination significantly complicates the judicial establishment of parenthood. This may prevent the child from accessing inheritance rights, social guarantees, and benefits.

## Veterans' children who lost parental care

War also causes situations where children may lose one or both parents as a result of their death, missing in action or captivity. Such circumstances have a double consequence: the warrior's child not only experiences loss, but also needs protection of their rights and access to state guarantees – housing, property, and social<sup>134</sup>.

The state guarantees every child the right to be raised in a family. Therefore, if a child has lost parental care, they must be placed in a family through guardianship, foster care, or adoption, or a family-type children's home<sup>135</sup>. The priority right of close relatives to such placement is of particular importance, as this allows the child to maintain ties with their loved ones and previous environment<sup>136</sup>.

Such guarantees apply regardless of the conditions under which parental care is lost, whether in peacetime, during hostilities, or in emergencies. However, in the event of the death or missing in action of a service member, the procedure for registering the status

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<sup>134</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (5 April 2017). Resolution No. 268 "On Approving the Procedure for Granting the Status of a Child Affected by Military Operations and Armed Conflicts." [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/268-2017-n#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/268-2017-n#Text)

<sup>135</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring Organisational and Legal Conditions for Social Protection of Orphans and Children Deprived of Parental Care" No. 2342-IV (13 January 2005). Article 6. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2342-15#n91](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2342-15#n91)

<sup>136</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Articles 207, 213 and 218. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

of a child left without care can be complex and time-consuming, especially if the death has not been legally recorded.

Children of veterans are one of the most vulnerable categories in families experiencing war. They may lose their parents, find themselves without proper care, experience traumatic events, or take on adult roles as a result of injury, disability, or death of a service member.

Current legislation provides certain guarantees for children, but only if the family relationship is officially recognised, for example, through legal parenthood, dependent status or disability. Children born out of wedlock may face challenges in establishing their legal status, which can directly impact their access to pensions, benefits, and privileges. Children who lose both parents or are dependent on their grandparents remain equally vulnerable.

The war has significantly expanded the range of situations in which veterans' children need support – from psychological assistance to legal protection and care. However, at the policy level, children are still most often viewed as “secondary” beneficiaries rather than as a separate group with their own needs.

Therefore, the further development of state programmes should provide for an inclusive approach to children in veterans' families: with clear mechanisms for recognising family ties, taking into account situations of incomplete, mixed, or informal families, and prioritising the well-being of the child as an independent value.

## Parents of veterans

In wartime, one of the most vulnerable family members is also the parents of veterans. Parents are hereinafter referred to as those who are the biological or legally recognised parents of a veteran.

In the relevant legislation on the military and veterans, approaches to defining parents vary. For example, the Law “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families” provides the following definition of parents of fallen (deceased) veterans: “parents (adoptive parents) of a deceased person, if they have not been deprived of their parental rights or their parental rights have been restored at the time of the person’s death.”<sup>137</sup> On the other hand, the Law “On Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection” mentions the parents of fallen (deceased) veterans without further detail<sup>138</sup>.

Given the age composition of warriors in the Defence Forces, veterans’ parents may also be of different ages and, accordingly, have different needs. For example, if we are talking about the mother of a veteran who joined the troop at the age of 18, she may be between 36 and 60 years old. If we are talking about the parent of a 50-year-old warrior, their age may range from 68 to approximately 90 years old. Therefore, the needs of veterans’ parents will also differ.

Older people may need care and financial support from the veteran. However, participation in combat operations, injury, missing in action, captivity, or death of a warrior significantly complicate or make it impossible to fulfil this duty. Thus, parents may remain emotionally, socially, and financially vulnerable and without sufficient support from the state. In this context, approaches to supporting the parents of veterans need to be rethought. The state should not only formally

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<sup>137</sup> Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families.” Article 16-1. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#n353](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#n353)

<sup>138</sup> Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection.” Article 10. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#n147](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#n147)

recognise parents as relatives of veterans, but also take into account their needs and experiences.

## **Right of inheritance**

According to the **Civil Code of Ukraine**<sup>139</sup>, parents of a fallen veteran are first-priority heirs alongside his or her children and spouse. This means that in the absence of a will, they have a guaranteed right to inherit a portion of their deceased child's property.

If the fallen veteran had no children or spouse, the parents may inherit all of the property. If a dispute arises between the heirs or several people claim a share, the court determines the size of the inheritance in accordance with the established shares.

## **Right to maintenance**<sup>140, 141</sup>

According to the **Family Code of Ukraine**, adult children are obliged to maintain their incapacitated parents who need financial assistance. This rule also applies to veterans who, after returning from service, care for their parents or provide them with financial support.

If a veteran dies while performing their duties or as a result of injuries sustained during service, the right to maintenance passes to the state. However, in some cases, other adult children or relatives may also be obliged to provide assistance to the incapacitated parents of a fallen veteran.

The amount of maintenance may be determined voluntarily or through the court and depends on the financial situation of the adult child and the needs of the parents. The right to maintenance is retained until the parents' working capacity is restored or their financial situation improves.

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<sup>139</sup> Civil Code of Ukraine. Article 1261. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15#Text)

<sup>140</sup> Constitution of Ukraine. Article 51. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/254k/96-вр#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/254k/96-вр#Text)

<sup>141</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Articles 202–203. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

## **Right to information and representation**

**Veteran's parents may have the right to access information and represent their child's interests, if:**

- the veteran has no spouse or official partner;
- the veteran has provided their parents with the appropriate power of attorney;
- there is a direct threat to the life or health of the veteran, and there are no other legal representatives.

In such situations, parents may:

- submit requests to state institutions regarding the whereabouts of a prisoner of war or a warrior missing in action, receive information about the circumstances of injury, missing in action, or death;
- receive information about the state of health and, if necessary, make decisions on treatment (in the absence of another legal representative or based on a power of attorney);
- make decisions about the place of burial, organise the funeral, receive posthumous awards, and represent the interests of the veteran after death, if there are no spouse or other authorised persons.

## **Official status of a family member and social guarantees**

The parents of a fallen or deceased veteran are entitled to the status of family members of a fallen or deceased Defender or Defendress of Ukraine.

**This provides them with appropriate social guarantees, including the opportunity to:**

- receive a share of the one-off cash benefit in the event of the death of a service member, unless there is a separate order;
- apply for a survivor's pension, in particular if the parents were dependent on their child;
- take advantage of the benefits for the payment of utilities, free travel, health care and medicines.

However, in practice, parents' access to these forms of support may be limited. For example, only parents who are unable to work, i.e. those who have reached retirement age or have a recognised disability, are eligible for a survivor's pension<sup>142</sup>. This form of support is not available to parents who are able to work, even if the child was their main source of financial support, or they find themselves in challenging conditions after the child's death.

Similar challenges arise when awarding a one-off cash benefit after the death of a service member. The distribution of these funds depends on the existence of a personal directive of the warrior. If there is no such directive, the funds are divided equally between the parents, children, and spouse. If service members made a directive but did not mention their parents in it, only children under the age of 18, adult children with disabilities, incapacitated parents and spouses are guaranteed a share of the payments<sup>143</sup>.

Another challenge is that relatives are not always informed; veterans' parents may not be aware of the possibility of receiving payments. Often, state support is tied to formal criteria, such as the ability to work or the procedure for applying for payments, rather than to the experience

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<sup>142</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Mandatory State Pension Insurance." Article 36(2)(1). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1058-15#n2](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1058-15#n2)

<sup>143</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (28 February 2022). Resolution No. 168 "Issues concerning certain payments to service members, enlisted personnel and officers, police officers and their families during martial law." Paragraph 2. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/168-2022-n#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/168-2022-n#Text)

of loss endured by parents. At the same time, in the event of the death, missing in action or captivity, parents, regardless of age or health, need stability, attention and resources to cope with the consequences of these events. Support for parents needs to be rethought and should be based on life conditions and experiences, regardless of legal status.

Parents of veterans remain largely invisible in terms of state support, even though they are affected by their child's service. In the event of injury, disability or death of a son or daughter, it is often the parents who become caregivers, represent their interests in medical or legal institutions, organise funerals, and care for their grandchildren. Although benefits are already in place for them, the services are not designed to meet their actual needs and experiences.

The law provides for assistance to parents, but mainly in the event of the death of a service member and provided that they have not been deprived of their parental rights. At the same time, the level of guarantees depends significantly on the degree of kinship, the status of a dependent or other legal grounds. In peacetime, this logic may seem formally justified, but in wartime, it may not accurately reflect the actual involvement of parents in a veteran's or their family's life.

# Forms of expression of will and representation of veterans

Access to state benefits for veterans' families depends not only on legislation but also on personal decisions of the individual. According to the law, the right to benefits is granted based on family ties, specifically to spouses, parents, and children. In addition, military personnel can independently determine who will receive property or non-property rights through instruments of personal expression of will, such as a will, personal directive, or power of attorney.

With the help of these documents, a veteran can determine who will receive inheritance, one-time assistance, or financial support, and the right to act on their behalf, particularly during their absence or inability to manage their own affairs.

Instruments of personal will		
Will	Personal Directive	Power of Attorney
Receive inheritance / one-off assistance / financial support		Receive the right to act on behalf of a veteran

These instruments simplify families' access to state support systems. However, not all warriors do this before starting their service due to ignorance of this possibility or a lack of time<sup>144</sup>. When they fail to do so or fill in the documents incorrectly, their relatives must also confirm their rights to the property, which can complicate access to it.

There are other barriers in the healthcare field. For example, physicians have the right to disclose information about the health status of military personnel only to patients or their legal representatives. Ukrainian legislation does not yet provide a mechanism that allows warriors to appoint a representative in advance. As a result, in the event of loss

<sup>144</sup> Prysedska, V. (9 April 2024). Wills in Wartime: Procedure and Key Considerations BBC News Ukraine. [bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/cyjz2el10q7o](https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/cyjz2el10q7o)

of consciousness or serious illness, the family has no legal basis to influence decisions regarding treatment and rehabilitation.

The current regulations do not fully account for the needs of families in various service scenarios. Currently, legislation on family access to property, payments, and medical information remains fragmented. The implementation of these rights depends primarily on two factors: whether the warrior has had time to draw up documents certifying their wishes in advance, and the ability of state institutions and healthcare facilities to take into account the conditions and needs of relatives.

In this section, we will examine the primary instruments for expressing the will of the military – wills, personal directives, and powers of attorney. We will also share our vision for how families can effectively represent the interests of veterans, particularly in cases involving guardianship of property and participation in medical decisions.

## Will

After the veteran’s death, their property and certain rights may be transferred to other persons. This occurs through inheritance<sup>145</sup>, which takes two forms: by will and by law. In the event of inheritance by will, the testator independently determines to whom and to what extent their property will be transferred.

Types of Inheritance	
By Will	By Law
The person independently determines to whom the property is transferred	The right to inheritance in the order of priority guaranteed by law

<sup>145</sup> Civil Code of Ukraine. Article 1216. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15)

A will is executed in writing and certified by a notary or the commanding officer of the military unit<sup>146</sup>. This document permits the transfer of property not only to relatives but to anyone as well. At the same time, it does not always provide complete freedom in determining the order of succession.

Certain family members have a legally guaranteed right to inheritance, even if they are not mentioned in the will: minor and underage children, adult children with disabilities, incapacitated parents, or incapacitated widows or widowers. They must receive at least half of the share that would have belonged to them in the event of inheritance by law<sup>147</sup>.

If there is no will, it is declared invalid, or if the heirs have not accepted the inheritance, the inheritance is distributed according to the law. In this case, all property is distributed among relatives in the order specified by the Civil Code of Ukraine, with priority given to spouses, children, and parents. If there are none, the property passes to the relatives of the next priority: siblings, grandparents and others. A person who was dependent on a veteran for at least five years prior to their death may also inherit the property<sup>148</sup>.

The estate encompasses all property that belonged to the person at the time of their death, including their home, vehicles, bank accounts, and business shares. In addition, all debt obligations are also inherited. At the same time, not all cash payments are subject to inheritance. The right to a pension, one-off cash benefit (OCB) or other payments is personal and cannot be inherited. However, if such a payment has already been assigned and partially received by the testator (for example, an unpaid pension or OCB amount), these funds are included in the inheritance.

In addition, family members may receive OCB or other special payments for a fallen, missing-in-action service member, or a prisoner of war in accordance with the law and/or their personal instructions. If the right

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<sup>146</sup> Civil Code of Ukraine. Articles 1248, 1252, subparagraph 4. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15)

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. Article 1241.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. Articles 1261–1265.

to such a payment has been exercised but the recipient has died before receiving the full amount, the remaining funds are inherited.

## Personal Directive

Cash payments are one of the main types of support that a family can receive in the event of the warrior's death, captivity or missing in action. The law defines the procedure for their distribution, but veterans can decide in advance who will receive these funds and in what proportions. A personal directive is drawn up for this purpose.

Similar to a will, veterans may designate anyone as the beneficiary in their directives. At the same time, there are loved ones who cannot be completely excluded from the distribution of support: minors, adult children with disabilities, parents and a spouse, if they are incapacitated, i.e. unable to work due to age or health conditions. They have a guaranteed right to their share of payments, even if the veteran decides to transfer it to other people. All of them will receive half of the share that would have been theirs without the directive.

A personal directive can be issued in any form, indicating the recipients and their shares. The document shall be signed by the veteran and certified by a notary or the commanding officer of the military unit. If the conditions or wishes of the warrior have changed, it is sufficient to issue a new order – it automatically supersedes the previous one.

A **personal directive** is a separate instrument of expression of will by the military. Unlike a will, it does not apply to all property, but only to certain types of payments: one-off financial assistance in the event of death<sup>149</sup> and financial support in the event of captivity or missing in action<sup>150</sup>.

Applies to the following payments	The right to payment is guaranteed to	Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ One-off financial assistance in the event of death</li> <li>■ Financial support in the event of captivity or being missing in action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Minor children</li> <li>■ Adult children with disabilities</li> <li>■ Parents</li> <li>■ Incapacitated spouse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Any form</li> <li>■ Contains: shares and signature of the veteran</li> <li>■ Requires certification by a notary / commanding officer of a military unit</li> </ul>

If a warrior has not drawn up a personal directive in the event of their death or has not specified the full amount of payments in it, the one-off cash benefit is distributed under the general procedure. Similar to a will by law, the order of relatives applies in this case. At the same time, assistance may also be provided to those who lived with a service member as a family but were not officially married to them. This is possible if the court has recognised the fact of cohabitation<sup>151</sup>.

If a veteran is in captivity or missing in action and has not drawn up a directive, the state continues to pay part of their allowance to their relatives<sup>152</sup>. First and foremost, these funds are received by the spouse, parents, legal representatives of minors, and adult children who became

<sup>149</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (28 February 2022). Resolution No. 168 "Issues of Certain Allowances to Service Members, Rank-and-File Personnel and Senior Officers, Police Officers and Their Families during Martial Law." [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/168-2022-n#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/168-2022-n#Text)

<sup>150</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families." Article 9, part 4. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text)

<sup>151</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families." Article 16-1(4). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text)

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. Article 9(6).

disabled before reaching the age of 18. They can receive up to 50% of the warrior's monthly allowance. Payments are divided equally among the recipients. For example, if a warrior has only a spouse and parents, they receive 16.6% of the warrior's allowance, as 50% remains with the warrior and the remaining 50% is divided between three people: parents and spouse.

If there are no first-priority relatives, the payments go to second-priority relatives – adult children or siblings, provided that the service member was their legal representative. They are entitled to up to 20% of the total amount. The rest of the allowance is reserved for the warrior in case of return from captivity. Payments continue until their status changes: for example, they are found, released from captivity, or declared dead.

To apply for payments, relatives can contact the TRSSC and submit an application addressed to the commanding officer of the military unit<sup>153</sup>.

## Power of Attorney

During their lifetime, people are not always able to represent their own interests or dispose of their property independently, for example, when they are ill for an extended period or temporarily absent. In this case, a person may draw up a power of attorney.

The power of attorney is executed in writing and contains the details of the service member and their representative, the time, and a list of permitted actions. If no term is specified, the document remains valid until revoked, in particular, in cases such as the veteran's return from service, being declared missing, or being declared dead. If the power of attorney is necessary for legal transactions that require confirmation,

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<sup>153</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (30 November 2016). Resolution No. 884 "On Approving the Procedure for Payment of Monetary Compensation to Service Members in Captivity or Taken Hostage, and Those Interned in Neutral Countries or Missing in Action." Paragraph 4. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/884-2016-n#n9](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/884-2016-n#n9)

such as the purchase of real estate, representation in court or before state authorities, it is certified by a notary or unit commander<sup>154</sup>. However, a power of attorney cannot replace purely personal actions, such as writing a will or getting married.

A **power of attorney** is a document that gives another person (representative) the right to act on their behalf.

Contains	Possible Permitted Actions	Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Service member's data</li> <li>■ Representative's data</li> <li>■ Validity period</li> <li>■ Permitted actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Dispose of the property</li> <li>■ Represent interests</li> <li>■ Manage affairs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Written form</li> <li>■ Requires certification by a notary or commanding officer of a military unit (if needed)</li> </ul>

For families of veterans, power of attorney becomes an important tool for social protection, as warriors may be in combat zones, in captivity, undergoing treatment, or missing in action. With a power of attorney, relatives can dispose of property, represent the interests or conduct the affairs of a veteran, for example, pay for housing, sell or buy property.

## Representation in case of absence or incapacity

If a veteran is missing in action<sup>155</sup> or loses their legal capacity due to injury/illness, their family faces the challenge of resolving legal issues on their own – from managing property to representing interests before

<sup>154</sup> Civil Code of Ukraine. Articles 245–248. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15)

<sup>155</sup> In legal terms, a “missing person” is someone whose whereabouts are unknown at the time their relatives report them to the police. On the other hand, “declared missing” is a status assigned by a court decision if there is no information about the whereabouts of a missing person for a year.

public authorities. Currently, the law regulates two areas of representation that enable the family to act on behalf of the military: property guardianship and medical representation. Next, we will look at how guardianship over the property of missing warriors works and what rules determine relatives' access to information and decisions about the treatment of the wounded.

Property Guardianship	Medical Representation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ if there is an extract from the Unified Register of Missing Persons: a description of assets drawn up by a notary</li> <li>■ payment of current bills, maintenance of property in good condition, and sale only with court permission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ written permission to share medical info with more people</li> <li>■ the ability to obtain copies of medical records, but not to make medical decisions</li> </ul>

## Property Guardianship

If a veteran is missing in action, their relatives can apply for guardianship over the veteran's property<sup>156</sup>. To do this, they first obtain an extract from the Unified Register of Persons Missing Under Special Circumstances and submit an application to a notary. After confirming the status of missing in action, the notary draws up a list of assets belonging to the warrior – real estate, vehicles, and bank accounts – and issues a guardian certificate. The guardian may pay current bills and maintain the property in good condition, but may only sell it with the court's permission<sup>157</sup>.

Sometimes, it happens that a service person issues a power of attorney to a loved one to dispose of property. After they go missing, a notary appoints another relative as guardian. The law does not establish which of these two statuses takes precedence. The power of attorney is valid

<sup>156</sup> Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances," No. 2505-VIII (12 July 2018). Article 8(2)(3). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2505-19#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2505-19#Text)

<sup>157</sup> Civil Code of Ukraine. Article 44. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15?find=1&text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15?find=1&text)

from the moment of certification and is terminated, in particular, upon its expiry or when the veteran is declared missing. Guardianship of property is terminated upon the return of the warrior or as soon as the decision to declare missing is revoked. Until this point, the guardian's power of attorney and certificate coexist.

Let us assume that a service member entrusted his wife to sell his flat in order to use the proceeds for the treatment of their child or the purchase of new housing. However, after he was declared missing in action, a notary appointed his father as the guardian of the flat. As a result, the wife will not be able to execute the warrior's wishes, as housing under guardianship cannot be alienated to another person. If these funds are needed for the child's treatment, the wife can apply to the guardianship and custody authorities for permission to sell. However, if it is about buying a new home, the wife may be denied permission to sell until the guardianship is lifted or the service member returns.

## Medical Representation

Injuries change the lives of not only veterans, but also their families. In particular, relatives often do not know what happened to their loved one, their whereabouts, or their current condition. There is currently no single mechanism in Ukraine that would oblige military units or healthcare facilities to promptly notify families of injuries. Sometimes, military units themselves are unsure of who to notify, as not all warriors provide their contact details for emergency cases. Therefore, after losing contact, families may have to search for this information themselves – through brothers- and sisters-in-arms, or by visiting hospitals.

When relatives find an injured service member, they are not always able to obtain information due to medical confidentiality. According to the law, a person's diagnosis and treatment are confidential information<sup>158</sup>, which doctors can only disclose to the child's parents, adoptive parents, guardians, caregivers or adult wards<sup>159</sup>. At the same time, service

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<sup>158</sup> Law of Ukraine "Fundamentals of the Legislation of Ukraine on Healthcare" No. 2801-XII (19 November 1992). Articles 39–40. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2801-12#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2801-12#Text)

<sup>159</sup> Civil Code of Ukraine. Article 285. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15)

members may give written permission to disclose this information to a wider circle of people, such as their spouse, adult children, or other relatives. However, in practice, it is not always possible to do this in a timely manner, so relatives may be left without access to information about the condition of the injured service member.

There are also currently no legal mechanisms that would allow veterans to appoint a person in advance to represent their interests in medical matters. With a notarised power of attorney, loved ones can only obtain copies of medical records that clearly state that the person consents to disclosure, but not to medical decisions, such as diagnostics, examinations, or surgeries. Additionally, for emergency communication, medical records in the electronic healthcare system (EHS) include the contact details of a person who can be notified about a veteran's condition. However, this record is only used to report on a person's condition and does not entitle to view medical information or medical history.

If a warrior is unconscious, physicians are not obliged to take into account the position of relatives regarding treatment in order not to violate medical confidentiality. Therefore, in urgent, life-threatening situations, healthcare professionals act independently<sup>160</sup>. As a result, relatives may not always be aware of the condition of a loved one.

A series of studies on the journeys of warriors and their loved ones after injuries<sup>161, 162, 163</sup> have shown that information challenges for families can occur during rehabilitation. For example, when doctors fail to warn about a service member's transfer to another healthcare facility, medical

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<sup>160</sup> Law of Ukraine "Fundamentals of the Legislation of Ukraine on Healthcare" No. 2801-XII (19 November 1992). Article 43. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2801-12#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2801-12#Text)

<sup>161</sup> Pryncyp (2023). From Injury to Return: Ethnographic Research of the Path of Veterans and Their Relatives. [pryncyp.org/analytics/vid-poranennya-do-povernennya-etnografichne-doslidzhennya-shlyahu-veteraniv-ta-yihnih-blyzkyh](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/vid-poranennya-do-povernennya-etnografichne-doslidzhennya-shlyahu-veteraniv-ta-yihnih-blyzkyh)

<sup>162</sup> Pryncyp, Gradus, Terra U. (2023). The Journey of the Wounded: Needs, Challenges, and a Vision for the Future. [pryncyp.org/analytics/socziologichne-doslidzhennya-shlyah-poranenogo-potreby-problemy-ta-bachennya-majbutnogo](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/socziologichne-doslidzhennya-shlyah-poranenogo-potreby-problemy-ta-bachennya-majbutnogo)

<sup>163</sup> Pryncyp (2024). Behind the scenes of care: Veterans' loved ones and caregiving work. [pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczya](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczya)

documents are issued with errors, and queues for the military medical commission (MMC) can last for months.

Therefore, the existing approaches do not provide the families of wounded with a clear way to obtain information about the condition of their loved ones and mechanisms for representing their interests. As a result, families remain in a state of uncertainty and tension, as they must balance searching for information with supporting the service member, despite lacking proper communication from medical staff.

# Conclusions

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**1** Countries with developed veteran policies, such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, have gradually moved away from the idea of the family as an “appendage” of the veteran to recognising it as an independent target audience. At the heart of such approaches are sensitivity to the experiences of families, flexibility in defining family composition, institutional recognition of caregivers, and a commitment to long-term support.

It is important to rely on data and research when developing programmes – family experience becomes the source of policy, not its object. For Ukraine, this experience serves as an important guide: it does not provide ready-made solutions, but points to the principles that should be the basis of a public policy that is sensitive to the real lives of families.

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**2** Ukrainian legislation does not provide a single, clear definition of a veteran’s family. The legal understanding of family is based on the **Family, Civil and Tax Codes**, and a number of special laws.

The presence of legal status is important because it determines the scope of rights to inheritance, pensions, compensation, representation, housing, and healthcare. Officially registered marriages guarantee a higher level of protection than civil partnerships or other forms of close relationships.

Some families find themselves outside the support system because their relationships are not legally recognised. This concerns civil partners, grandparents, and families with children born outside of official marriage.

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**3** Ukrainian law provides instruments for recording the wishes of veterans regarding important decisions, such as wills, personal directives and powers of attorney. These mechanisms partially compensate for the lack of official status among loved ones, but they may be difficult to access or implement, especially in wartime. It is therefore important to simplify and promote methods of expressing wishes and representation, especially for families that do not fit formal models, but where there are mutual responsibility and care.

# SECTION 5

## **The Journey of Veterans' Families**

# Abstract

In this section, we analyse the journey that families of veterans go through: from the decision to join the service, waiting for a loved one, to returning and adapting.

## Here we consider:

- what changes occur in family roles and life plans when one of its members decides to join the troop;
- what needs the family has during the service and after the veteran's discharge;
- the characteristics of the transition stage – the family's adaptation to a new reality, changes in internal family relationships, planning, and dynamics.

In addition, **we provide recommendations** on how the state can support veterans' families in various environments of well-being: health and vocation (work and children's education).

# Introduction

The families of veterans go on their own journeys alongside their loved ones. We view the start of a veteran's journey not from when their service ends, but from the decision to embark on it. This moment also marks the beginning of a change for the family.

From the moment of conscription/mobilisation or signing a contract, the family's normal life begins to transform: the emotional connection with a loved one changes, domestic roles are redistributed, and new responsibilities for children, property, and finances arise. The family encounters state institutions for the first time, seeking support in uncertain conditions.

This journey may then take several trajectories, depending on the conditions of military service. For example, a veteran may be wounded, become ill or experience an exacerbation of a chronic condition as a result of combat operations, leading to temporary or permanent disability. In such cases, the family often worries about the warrior, going through their own journey of adaptation, changes in roles, careers, daily life, and the family's financial situation.

Another trajectory is missing in action. At this point, the family is in a state of constant uncertainty, between hope and loss, and needs information support, transparent and regular communication from the state, psychological support, and recognition. This journey can last for months or even years.

In the event of captivity, the family lives in constant anxiety and uncertainty, often without official information or support, and after the return of a loved one, they go through the journeys of recovery, adaptation, and rebuilding their lives, taking into account the experience they have gone through. The family may need official support, advocacy and communication support, psychoeducation, and preparation for the return of a loved one. If a loved one has deceased, the loved ones move on to living with the loss and rebuilding their lives. At this point,

long-term support, psychological support, recognition of loss and contribution, and guaranteed access to social protection are important.

These trajectories and journeys of veterans and their families can also change and overlap depending on the conditions. After a person goes missing in action, the family may learn that their loved one is in captivity or fallen, thus changing the trajectory to another one. Before or during captivity, a warrior may be wounded, so after release, they and their family may have needs related to the experience of captivity and injury. In the event of a warrior's death, the family may go through the journey of missing in action, then a period of captivity, and only after official confirmation of loss.

The family also goes through the journey together with veterans who are completing their service. In 2025, the Law of Ukraine "On General Military Duty and Military Service"<sup>164</sup> defined several options for such completion:

Due to health reasons	Upon reaching the age limit	Due to family conditions
Following release from captivity	Due to the contract completion	Due to a court conviction resulting in the deprivation or restriction of liberty

Each of these options involves different experiences, including the transition from military service to civilian life, which affects the needs of veterans and their families. It can also take place in one of three environments: the troop, the reserve, or civilian life.

Within this concept, we focus specifically on the journeys of veterans' families returning to civilian life. We do not currently distinguish the needs of veterans' families who continue to serve in the troop, nor do we know all the needs of the families of those warriors who will remain in the reserve or general conscription pool after completing their service. At the same time, it should be noted that veterans who have

<sup>164</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Military Duty and Military Service" No. 2232-XII (25 March 1992). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2232-12](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2232-12)

already completed their service may be called up again. In this case, the family is once again going through a new cycle of change and returning to life in a state of service. Some families may have several family members with different statuses at the same time, for example, when one son is in captivity, and another has been wounded in combat. This also imposes several trajectories and needs.

In this section, we will describe the stages of the basic family journey: from the beginning of service to transition and subsequent civilian life. In addition, we will look at how the roles, challenges, and needs of the family change at each stage, and what policy tools can provide continuity, support, and a sense of security for the family. The journeys of families of veterans with injuries or illnesses, experience of captivity, missing in action, or fallen veterans are considered separately in the following sections of the concept.

To analyse the stages and experiences of veterans' families, we draw on the methodology of the study "The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One,"<sup>165</sup> which is based on in-depth interviews with military partners. At the same time, it is important to further explore the needs and journeys of other members of veterans' families who are also affected by service and return. It is also worth considering the stages that warriors go through after completing their service, identified on the basis of the study "The Journeys of Veterans,"<sup>166</sup> in particular discharge, transition and civilian life: taking care of yourself, reinventing yourself, rooting, and ageing.

This analysis is preliminary, and further research is needed on the experiences and needs of families at all these stages.

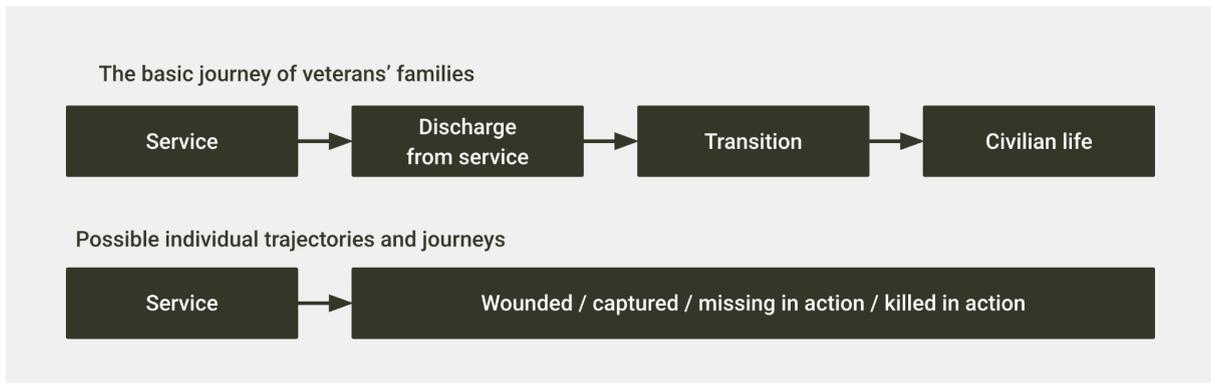
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<sup>165</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. P. 253.  
[kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliakh-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliakh-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

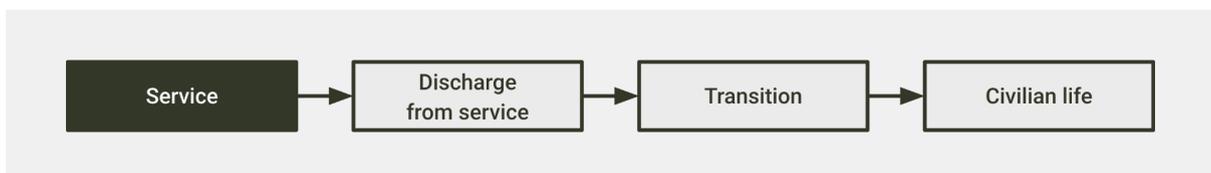
<sup>166</sup> Veteran Hub (2023). The Journey of Veterans.  
[veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/doslidzhennia-shliakh-veteraniv-ta-veteranok.pdf](https://veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/doslidzhennia-shliakh-veteraniv-ta-veteranok.pdf)

# Needs and challenges along the journey

A veteran's journey does not begin when they complete their service, but when they decide to embark on it. Accordingly, this moment marks the beginning of the family's own journey of change.



## Stage 1. Service



When veterans begin their service, their loved ones need the most support from the state, in what is a new experience for most of them. It is at this stage that loved ones face challenges that they did not encounter in their civilian lives. Due to restrictions on communication related to security and service conditions, the amount of personal information that families can obtain about their loved ones is reduced, in particular regarding their whereabouts, the nature of their tasks, living conditions, or emotional state.

During this period, family members may experience anxiety about the life and health of the service member, uncertainty about the duration of the separation, changes in the situation, and the future in general.

Family life changes, some decisions must be made without the involvement of the warrior, and household responsibilities are redistributed. So, a partner may take on all or part of the responsibility for household matters: childcare, finances, work, housework, and social contacts. This may cause increased emotional and physical stress and prompt a search for new approaches to organising daily life and upbringing. Sometimes children may take on more responsibilities – helping with household chores, looking after younger siblings, or providing emotional support to their mother or father.

The parents of the service member are also affected: they may become more involved in family life, move closer, help with children or finances, and experience anxiety about their child at war.

Loved ones who were dependent on the warrior are affected distinctly. If they covered part of the parents' critical expenses – medicine, utilities, food – and their income decreased during their service, the parents may be left without sufficient financial support. Children who are completely dependent on their parents' support find themselves in a similar situation: reduced income can be critical both for basic needs (food, clothing, housing) and for the child's development opportunities (education, leisure).

Due to the unpredictability of military service, frequent rotations, short or unscheduled leave, the opportunity to see their loved ones is rare and precious for the military. Often, families can only spend a few weeks together a year, if conditions allow.

In this context, public policy should provide flexible employment guarantees for military family members. **In particular, it is important to ensure:**

- **the right to annual leave at a chosen time**, so that it can be synchronised with the leave of the service member;
- **flexible working conditions**, such as the option of remote work, reduced working hours, and additional days of leave.

The housing sector also requires flexible support mechanisms from the state. Formally, certain state instruments, such as a discount on utility bills or compensation for rented housing, are intended specifically for the service member, yet in practice they are used by the entire family. Often, it is partners or parents who look for, rent, maintain, and pay for housing. This is an example of a support model, where social guarantees take into account not only the formal status of the military, but also the real burden on the family. This approach not only eases the financial pressure but also recognises the important role of the family in providing housing conditions during the service of a loved one.

During the service period, legal support for the loved ones of warriors is also important, particularly with regard to access to information, protection of rights and guidance within the system of benefits and compensation. They may encounter difficulties in paperwork, obtaining benefits, or protecting property rights or children's rights. Misunderstandings may also arise with employers or authorities, for example, regarding labour rights, access to benefits, and guarantees. In such cases, legal assistance is extremely important.

Currently, the state already provides some forms of support, such as exemption from court fees. In the future, it is important that legal protection takes into account the current needs and requests of families.

The period of military service is also important for establishing interaction between the family and state institutions. When a family encounters institutional support for the first time, it can shape an initial experience of interaction that will determine its future attitude towards state support. It is therefore important that this support is effective, accessible and sensitive to the experiences of the relatives of service members.

Challenges	Needs	Possible State Support
Limited communication, lack of information about the location, tasks and condition of the military	Information support and anxiety reduction	Effective, accessible, and responsive institutional support
Redistribution of household roles, burden on partners and children	Emotional, physical, and financial support	Flexible working conditions (remote work, reduced working hours, and additional days of leave)
Reduced family income	Financial stability and provision of basic needs	Housing benefits (discount on utility bills, compensation for rented housing)
Rare brief encounters during rotations and leaves	Opportunity to spend time together	Right to annual leave at a chosen time (to be synchronised with the leave of the service member)
Legal difficulties	Legal support and protection of rights	Legal aid, exemption from court fees

## Stage 2. Discharge from service



The discharge of a warrior from service, even without injury and the need for treatment and rehabilitation, is a complex administrative and psychological process. The focus of public attention is usually on the veteran, but this stage can also be stressful for the family and require involvement and reorganisation of everyday life.

Families are often in a state of waiting, as the discharge process can take weeks or even months. The lack of clear information about the sequence of actions – passing a medical commission, paperwork, the date of final return – can create a constant emotional background of tension and anxiety, along with exhaustion after a period of living in conditions of chronic stress, constant waiting, or worrying about a loved one.

The process of discharge from military service and the related paperwork is usually not automated or transparent and requires interaction with the command, personnel departments of the military unit and the TRSSC, civil registry offices, and healthcare facilities. Some of them can be taken on by family members. In this case, they effectively act as navigators. Public policy should recognise the involvement of the family in this process and provide support tailored to their needs during this period.

Until the veteran officially ends their service, the family may face a number of practical challenges: changes in household logistics and everyday roles. The family prepares for the return – physically, emotionally, and financially. The distribution of responsibilities, daily routine, and priorities in the family often change.

During this period, the family’s total income may decrease or be suspended, particularly in the event of termination or delay in payment of allowance. Family members who help with paperwork, travel, and visits to institutions are often forced to take leave from their main jobs or even temporarily reduce their level of employment. This complicates planning the joint budget and the future in general.

Challenges	Needs	Possible State Support
Complexity of the administrative process: passing a medical examination, paperwork, and interacting with the command, personnel departments, TRSSC, civil registry offices, and healthcare facilities	Clear information about the sequence of actions and procedures	Recognition of family involvement in the process; support tailored to the family’s needs
Changes in household logistics, division of responsibilities, daily routine, family priorities; physical, emotional and financial preparation for return	Support in adapting to changes related to service or return	
Temporary reduction or suspension of family income due to termination or delay of allowance; additional expenses for paperwork, travel, and leave	Financial stability	

## Stage 3. Transition



The transition stage is a transitional period (lasting from one to one and a half years<sup>167</sup> or more) during which the warrior is discharged from service and returns to civilian life<sup>168</sup>. For the family, this is a process of gradually shaping a new reality in which roles, daily routines, relationships, and ways of identifying yourself may change. During this period, there is room for emotional experience of service, restoration of contact, and rethinking of familiar patterns of shared life.

If during previous stages, particularly during discharge, the family was forced to act constantly: respond, maintain stability, make decisions in conditions of uncertainty, then during the transition stage, there may be room to pause and pay attention to yourself<sup>169</sup>. The warrior's loved ones may need to re-evaluate their attitude towards health – physical, mental, and emotional. Delayed fatigue, tension, and suppressed emotions accumulated during the service of a loved one may manifest themselves now, when there is time for awareness and response. Caring for your health becomes not only a practical task, but also part of understanding yourself, your own limits and needs. That is why, at this stage, families need access to psychological support to stabilise their own condition, find resources, and facilitate adaptation to the new dynamics of relationships.

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<sup>167</sup> Veteran Hub (2023). The Journey of Veterans. [veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/doslidzhennia-shliakh-veteraniv-ta-veteranok.pdf](https://veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/doslidzhennia-shliakh-veteraniv-ta-veteranok.pdf)

<sup>168</sup> Pryncyp (2025). Transition from Military Service to Civilian Life: Contexts, Experiences, Solutions. [pryncyp.org/analytics/perehid-vid-vijskovoyi-sluzhby-do-cyvilnogo-zhyttva-konteksty-dosvidy-rishennya](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/perehid-vid-vijskovoyi-sluzhby-do-cyvilnogo-zhyttva-konteksty-dosvidy-rishennya)

<sup>169</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. P. 207. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliakh-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliakh-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

Communicating with other people with similar experiences can help families reduce feelings of loneliness and make the transition period easier. Therefore, support groups and access to them in small communities or remote areas can be important during this period.

Living in a state of constant anxiety, tension, and instability can affect physical health as well as mental health. Family members often put off taking care of themselves, focusing instead on their loved one's service or return. That is why regular health check-ups are important as a way to detect accumulated exhaustion or chronic problems in time and get the necessary help before the condition worsens.

Alongside administrative and financial difficulties, families may experience repeated changes in relationships. After a veteran returns to civilian life, the family adapts to living together again: daily interactions change, and relationships are rebuilt. The family seeks new ways of communicating, dividing roles, and solving everyday issues. This period requires an environment in which trust, emotional contact, and a sense of togetherness in everyday life can gradually be restored. Access to support programmes for families, including family counselling, can be an important source of support at this stage.

During the transition stage, families may also face the need to find sources of income, as their usual financial arrangements change after the end of service. Financial support ceases, veterans may not yet have stable employment, and previous constraints, such as long periods of separation, childcare, and inability to plan, also affect the employment of other family members. In such conditions, partners or parents may change jobs, seek temporary employment, or retrain in order to support the family in the new conditions. This is a lengthy process of finding new sources of stable income and a new way of sharing financial responsibility.

It is therefore important that policies guarantee access to state mechanisms, such as employment and temporary financial assistance programmes. Their timely and effective implementation can significantly reduce the pressure on the whole family, making it easier to resume life together after the end of service.

Challenges	Needs	Possible State Support
Changes in roles, daily routine, relationships, and adaptation to new relationship dynamics	Space and opportunity for emotional experience of service, restoration of contact and shared life	Access to government support programmes for families, including family counselling
Delayed fatigue, tension, delayed concern for physical and mental health, feelings of loneliness during transition; difficulty establishing new ways of communicating and building relationships	The need for psychological support, healthcare, stabilisation of one's own condition, communication and support from people with similar experiences	Access to state programmes supporting physical and mental health, including support groups in small communities or remote settlements
Changes in financial arrangements after the end of service; cessation of financial support; unstable employment of a veteran; impact on the employment of other family members	The need to find sources of income, maintain financial stability, and redistribute financial responsibility	State mechanisms: employment programmes and temporary financial assistance

## Stage 4. Civilian life



At this stage, veterans' families are gradually moving away from responding to service-related challenges and consequences to long-term planning: opportunities arise to set priorities, make plans and take decisions.

According to the Veteran Hub study "The Journeys of Veterans," we can conditionally identify several stages in the shaping of stability in the civilian life of a veteran: taking care of yourself, reinventing yourself, rooting, and ageing<sup>170</sup>. This is not a return to the previous state or environment before the service, but a separate journey with its own dynamics and family needs.

Although these stages primarily relate to the experiences of veterans themselves, we assume that families also go through their own phases of adaptation, with their own needs and challenges. At the same time, we emphasise that there is currently a lack of targeted studies that comprehensively describe the experiences of the warriors' loved ones with different roles in this process. Further study of this issue will enable more effective formulation of policies and support programmes for the families of veterans.

After returning home, veterans go through a period of reinventing themselves, which is a period of searching and changes that manifest themselves in all aspects of well-being. These changes are a normal part of the journey and are necessary for veterans to be able to independently determine what the new normal is for them and how they want to live their lives. After completing their service and enduring prolonged stress, families can return to caring for their own well-being. At this point,

<sup>170</sup> Veteran Hub (2023). The Journey of Veterans. [veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/doslidzhennia-shliakh-veteraniv-ta-veteranok.pdf](https://veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/doslidzhennia-shliakh-veteraniv-ta-veteranok.pdf)

it is important to ensure access to basic medical and psychological services, additional leave, and rest.

At the same time, the future journeys of veterans and their families also depend on the characteristics of the environment to which they return. After completing their service, only a small share of veterans will be able to return to civilian life without the prospect of being mobilised or conscripted again – those who are deemed unfit for service due to health reasons or those who have reached the maximum service age. The majority will either join the reserve or general conscription pool or continue their professional journeys in military service.

Although the stages of the veterans’ journeys are generally similar for all three environments, the needs of veterans and their families may differ depending on each of them. Veterans and their families need to understand their future prospects, in particular, how possible involvement in reserve service will affect their overall stability, plans, and division of responsibilities.

Challenges	Needs	Possible State Support
A period of searching and changes; the family returns to caring for their own condition after a long period of stress	Access to basic medical and psychological services, and additional leave and recreation	General access to services, their quality, and sensitivity to different experiences
Dependence on the return environment, impact on plans and distribution of responsibilities	Understanding one’s own future prospects	Guarantees and information about the journey in different environments

# Well-being

Families of veterans are most affected and may need support during their loved one's service. During this period, they may experience emotional tension and uncertainty, as well as new challenges in long-distance relationships. A significant number of families in Ukraine go through this journey, so the state must understand their needs and build systems to support and recognise their experience. Next, we will consider how this can occur in various environments of well-being.

After the initial stages of return, the family of a veteran usually no longer needs separate targeted policies, but may still benefit from support for the veteran. In the long run, relatives can also use the general support mechanisms available to all citizens of Ukraine. During this period, it is particularly important that the healthcare, education, social protection, and local services systems are able to respond effectively to the needs of families, with an understanding of their journeys, respect, and recognition of their experience.

**Important:** We do not provide a comprehensive overview of all possible problems and needs that may arise in veterans' families. Instead, we focus on potential solutions that the state can implement to meet their needs. We identified them by analysing available data and information.

The recommendations are the result of the Coalition of Organisations' work based on expert experience in the field of veterans' affairs and discussions/consultations with experts from various fields. We understand that we cannot cover all possible challenges and potential solutions, so it is important to continue exploring these topics to develop effective support for veterans' families.

## Health

The service of a loved one affects the mental and physical health of the family, both during and after their service. At the initial stage, loved ones

may experience insomnia, anxious dreams, panic attacks, emotional swings, and apathy<sup>171</sup>. These conditions are exacerbated when the warrior is in combat positions, and there is no contact with them.

Chronic stress and increased household chores and responsibilities can also affect physical well-being: fatigue and decreased activity may occur, and chronic diseases may worsen.

The condition of loved ones may also be doubly affected by the threats of war (shelling, alarms) and concern for a loved one. And after the warrior returns, their loved ones may also put their own health on hold for a while, focusing on supporting the veteran.

A loved one's service and forced separation can also significantly affect a couple's ability to plan a family. While serving, partners might not have the chance to conceive a child, and upon returning, aspects like mental and physical health or combat experience could affect the process. This is particularly relevant for those whose reproductive function may deteriorate due to age.

## Expert Recommendations

- **Provide the possibility of state compensation for psychotherapeutic services**

Ukraine has already introduced a state compensation programme from the Ministry of Veterans Affairs for free psychological assistance to veterans, their families, and the families of the fallen<sup>172</sup>. However, this support does not cover all families in need of psychological support due to the service of a loved one. Extending the programme to all families of veterans will help reduce the level of chronic stress and

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<sup>171</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One.

[kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

<sup>172</sup> Become a provider of psychological assistance for war veterans, their families, and the families of the fallen warriors and receive payment for your services from the Ministry of Veterans Affairs (11 February 2025). Government portal. [u.gov.ua/news/stante-nadavachem-posluh-iz-psykholohichnoi-dopomohy-dlia-veteraniv-viiny-chlenam-ikhnikh-simei-rodynam-polehlykh-ta-otrymuite-oplatu-za-posluh-y-vid-minveteraniv](https://u.gov.ua/news/stante-nadavachem-posluh-iz-psykholohichnoi-dopomohy-dlia-veteraniv-viiny-chlenam-ikhnikh-simei-rodynam-polehlykh-ta-otrymuite-oplatu-za-posluh-y-vid-minveteraniv)

emotional exhaustion in loved ones that arises during service and after the return of veterans.

It will also be an important part of systemic state support that recognises the need for psychological support not only for veterans themselves, but also for their loved ones, ensuring a comprehensive approach to family well-being.

## Vocation

### Work

After completing military service, it is not only the life of the veteran that changes – the life of the entire family is transformed. For a long time, loved ones were in a state of constant waiting, tension, anxiety, and often separation.

Returning home is an important but not automatic transition to civilian life. The family faces the need to rethink their daily routine, re-arrange their household, build a common rhythm, and find time for shared rest and emotional recovery.

During this period, loved ones may take on more responsibilities in everyday life, experience temporary exhaustion, and need psychological rest. This requires time, resources, and flexibility, particularly in employment.

### Expert Recommendations

- **Guarantee the right to annual leave at a convenient time, both during service and after the veteran's discharge, during the recovery period**

The right to leave at a time convenient for the family is not a privilege, but a minimum guarantee of flexibility and an important tool for supporting veterans' families. The ability to plan leave according

to family needs allows them to spend time together after a long period of separation, build a life together, move or settle into a new home, plan for the future, and simply relax without constant stress.

We propose to guarantee this right for the recovery period – the first three years after discharge from service, when the family is adapting to a new life. It is at this time that the need for flexibility in employment increases: the ability to plan time so that the family can adapt to new realities without additional stress.

## **Education**

The military service experience of a family member affects not only adults but also children. They also experience separation, anxiety, and changes in their familiar environment – all of which leave a mark on their emotional state and daily life, including their education.

The educational journey of veterans' children can be complicated even in the course of the service, due to prolonged absence, instability at home, forced relocations, or constant stress and waiting for news. Returning to civilian life can also be a period of adaptation for the whole family, which usually affects the child's motivation, concentration, and academic performance.

### **Expert Recommendations**

- **Continue to provide grants for higher education for veterans' children**

Educational support should be provided at all stages of the child's development, but it is during their studies at higher education institutions (HEIs) that it becomes particularly important as a key component of long-term public policy on the families of warriors.

We believe it is important to continue providing compensation that covers 100% of tuition fees within the established limits for bachelor's

and master's degrees at Ukrainian HEIs<sup>173</sup>. The condition for receiving this support is obtaining a passing score on the NMT or the EIE. Such assistance not only contributes to stability within the family but also demonstrates the state's long-term involvement in the lives of veterans' children and its responsibility for their well-being.

#### ■ **Ensure free access to NMT preparation courses**

For veterans' children studying in grades 10–11, we propose providing free access to NMT preparation courses. This will help ensure equal opportunities during admission to HEIs, even when the family has lost part of its income or the child requires additional support due to psychological or physical strain.

#### ■ **Ensure compensation for educational losses in the form of payment for tutoring services**

For school-aged children, we propose introducing compensation for tutoring services to strengthen their academic performance in difficult circumstances and to create conditions for successful completion of secondary education. A family may choose up to two academic subjects, taking into account the child's individual needs, and receive support within a set budget.

#### ■ **Ensure priority enrolment of veterans' children in kindergartens**

Another component of long-term support is caring for veterans' children as an investment in the future and an opportunity to ensure the sustainable development of the family. In particular, it is important to provide them with access to quality care and education at an early age, for example, through priority admission to kindergartens.

This right will enable veterans' families to stabilise their lives after completing their service, more easily combine work with parenthood, and return to economic activity more quickly. This is especially

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<sup>173</sup> Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine (2025). How to obtain compensation for education for children of veterans in pre-higher or higher education institutions. [mva.gov.ua/prescenter/category/86-novini/yak-otrimati-kompensatsiu-za-navchannya-ditey-veteraniv-ta-veteranok-u-zakladah-peredvischoi-abo-vischoi-osviti](https://mva.gov.ua/prescenter/category/86-novini/yak-otrimati-kompensatsiu-za-navchannya-ditey-veteraniv-ta-veteranok-u-zakladah-peredvischoi-abo-vischoi-osviti)

important in the first years after discharge, when the family is adapting to new conditions, establishing a daily routine, moving, or going through stages of recovery.

■ **Provide free meals in schools and kindergartens for children of veterans**

We propose providing free meals to the children of veterans in preschool and secondary education institutions. This guarantee can be implemented in accordance with **CMU Resolution No. 305 “On Approving the Procedure for Providing Services of Meals for Children in Educational Institutions”<sup>174</sup>** and local council decisions. Such support will provide a more stable environment for children, who will receive regular, nutritious meals regardless of their family’s financial situation.

Environments of Well-Being	Challenges	Recommendations
Health	Chronic stress, psycho-emotional stress	Continue to provide state compensation for psychotherapeutic services
Work	The need to adapt and establish a shared life after returning home	Leave at a convenient time
Children’s education	Decreased motivation to study, educational difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue to provide grants for higher education</li> <li>■ Provide payment for tutoring services</li> <li>■ Guarantee free tuition for NMT preparation courses</li> <li>■ Priority enrolment in kindergartens and free meals in schools and kindergartens</li> </ul>

<sup>174</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (24 March 2021). Resolution No. 305 “On Approving Standards and the Procedure for Organising Meals in Educational Institutions and Children’s Health and Recreation Facilities.” [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/305-2021-n#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/305-2021-n#Text)

# Conclusions

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**1** A veteran's family begins its journey from the moment the decision to serve is made. At this stage, the distribution of roles within the family may change, the usual rhythm of life is disrupted, anxiety and uncertainty increase, and the need arises to independently resolve legal, financial, and logistical issues. During this period, the family may require legal and housing support, flexible employment guarantees, and sensitive institutional care that fosters trust in the state.

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**2** The process of discharging a veteran is often lengthy and complicated. The family is in a state of waiting, involved in administrative processes, preparing for the warrior's return – physically, emotionally, and financially. Therefore, they must have clear algorithms and accessible information about the sequence of actions during discharge, as well as support in bureaucratic processes and in conditions of reduced income.

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**3** The stages of service and discharge are periods of maximum stress for the family. It is not only about paperwork, but also about settling into everyday life, such as finding housing or employment. At this time, the family often assumes the role of coordinator, which must be taken into account in public policy through access to services and providing clear communication about them.

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**4** The transition period to civilian life for veterans may last from one to one and a half years or longer. During this period, the family shapes a new reality, experiences accumulated fatigue and tension, revises life roles, and needs to restore emotional contact and stability. The family also develops new long-term plans together with the warrior, which become part of their new everyday life.

At this stage, it is important to provide psychological support, including local support groups, family counselling programmes, health services, for a timely response to accumulated problems, as well as opportunities for temporary financial assistance and retraining.

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**5** During the post-service civilian stage, the family gradually transitions from responding to long-term planning, creating space for development, self-realisation, and new meanings. It continues to adapt, rethinks roles within the family, and prepares for a new stage of life together. During this period, it needs transparent information about reserve service and its impact on the family, consistent access to health, psychological and educational services, state support for children, consideration of families' experiences in general systems of state support for all citizens, and sensitivity and respect for them.

# SECTION 6

## **The Journey of Families of Veterans with Disabilities**

# Abstract

In this section, we consider the journeys of families of veterans with disabilities: the challenges and needs that arise during the periods of waiting, treatment of injury or chronic illness, caregiving, and their impact on relatives.

## Here, we analyse:

- what a family goes through at different stages of the journey: during notification of an injury or a sudden deterioration in health, treatment, rehabilitation, and long-term care;
- the role of the family in providing support during treatment, dealing with bureaucratic procedures, and daily care;
- the well-being of families of veterans with disabilities through the lens of their daily experiences and everyday needs;
- the impact of care work on the family's needs and existing mechanisms for supporting caregivers.

We additionally **provide recommendations** on how the state can support families of veterans with disabilities across various environments of well-being: health, housing and the physical environment (including mobility), material needs (payments and social insurance) and vocation (employment and children's education).

# Introduction

The journeys of families of veterans with disabilities may differ and depend on the way in which the disability was acquired – through injury, the exacerbation or development of service-related physical or mental health conditions.

In accordance with legislation, **the grounds for establishing disability or limitations to daily functioning may include:**

- mental and behavioural disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), affective and anxiety disorders;
- musculoskeletal injuries, including traumatic amputations;
- complex traumatic brain injuries;
- severe oncological diseases with organ damage, as well as those with a high likelihood of recurrence or progression;
- cardiovascular diseases;
- diabetes;
- chronic respiratory diseases;
- neurological conditions (epilepsy, multiple sclerosis);
- other conditions, including autoimmune, renal, and hepatic diseases.

Acquiring a disability during service profoundly changes the daily life of a family. It is always an unexpected, deeply traumatic event – both for the veteran and for those close to them.

In the first hours and days after an injury, relatives may find themselves in an information vacuum, trying to establish where their loved one is, what their condition is, where to go, and whom to contact. This period is marked by intense emotional stress and uncertainty.

When the injured or ill person is delivered to a military hospital or civilian healthcare facility, the family often assumes responsibility

for coordinating the entire process: being present, obtaining information about treatment, seeking the necessary specialists, and managing documentation. In some cases, a family member is forced to take leave or even resign from work in order to remain constantly by their side.

In cases of oncological or other service-related illnesses, the situation may also be complex. Unlike an evident injury, the link between a health condition and military service may be difficult to prove. Symptoms often develop gradually, and even when the person is already seriously ill, they may continue to serve.

During this period, the family is compelled not only to manage treatment but also to navigate a complex bureaucratic pathway in parallel: collecting medical documents, gathering evidence of circumstances, and attending commissions to prove that military service caused the condition. Without this, it is impossible to obtain the relevant status, benefits, or rehabilitation services. This process may last for months and requires considerable persistence.

All of this takes place amid urgent medical needs – chemotherapy, pain management, hospitalisation, and care. The family finds itself balancing the immediate need to support their loved one physically and emotionally, and the difficult, exhausting struggle for access to assistance.

After hospitalisation or diagnosis, everyday life does not return to normal. The family must rapidly reorganise their lives: prepare a room, arrange continuous care, monitor medication, maintain medical records, and respond to crises or exacerbations. In the case of a mental health condition, they must learn to understand its manifestations, overcome fear, and find the right words of support.

This is not a one-off stressor but a process that may last for months or years. Often, family members undertake these responsibilities for the first time in their lives, without knowledge, support, or guidance. They search for answers on their own, ask others for advice, and may face refusals or indifference in healthcare facilities and governmental institutions.

In this situation, the needs of the family itself – emotional, financial, and organisational – may take a back seat. Their own pain, loss of stability, and fear for the future remain unaddressed. Yet families do not only accompany a person with a disability – they themselves undergo profound change: they may lose income, become exhausted, or feel isolated. These conditions have a substantial impact on their physical and mental health: anxiety increases, sleep disturbances, chronic fatigue, and emotional burnout appear.

Particular attention is required for relatives who provide care for veterans with injuries or illnesses – **caregivers**. Their involvement may be temporary, 24/7, hourly, or long-term. It may demand time, energy, and resources, and have a direct impact on the well-being of the family. At the same time, it should be considered that caregiving is not always performed by family members: the veteran may independently appoint a carer, and also designate a person representing them in communication with state institutions. This means that the group of individuals involved in care may be broader than formally defined relatives. Therefore, it is advisable to expand the range of beneficiaries of state support policies to include those who, in practice, provide care and have the appropriate authorisation or consent from the veteran.

At present, this work largely remains invisible, poorly paid, and exhausting, and its implementation depends more on the family's resources than on support from the state<sup>175</sup>. Families cover a significant share of expenses themselves – transport, housing, medication, and rehabilitation services – without compensation or state support. Some loved ones may be forced to leave paid employment, lose income and work record, and still have no access to alternative employment models or social guarantees. Prolonged caregiving without rest and support can also result in emotional and physical exhaustion and affect caregivers' health.

Currently, caregiving is only partially reflected in Ukraine's public policy. Despite the existence of some support mechanisms, there is a need

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<sup>175</sup> Pryncyp (2024). Behind the scenes of care: Veterans' loved ones and caregiving work. [pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczva](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczva)

for a comprehensive system that takes into account the experience of such families and recognises them as a separate group with their own needs and challenges.

Overall, throughout their journey, the family of a veteran with a disability interacts with several institutions, each responsible for a different area of support.

<b>Government institutions that families of veterans with disabilities engage with</b>	<b>Scope of responsibility</b>
<b>The structure of the Security and Defence Forces to which the service member belonged (Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Security Service of Ukraine)</b>	Provides financial support during treatment, paperwork and implementation of benefits stipulated by law. At the same time, many issues fall outside the remit of these bodies, necessitating the involvement of other authorities
<b>Ministry of Veterans Affairs</b>	Responsible for providing comprehensive support and assistance: adaptive housing, access to psychological and legal support, as well as ensuring the overall social and economic well-being of the family
<b>Ministry of Health of Ukraine</b>	Medical rehabilitation, professional assistance and long-term treatment
<b>Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine</b>	Performs key functions in the field of prosthetics, provision of rehabilitation aids, registration of the status, as well as in matters of social care services or compensation for caregivers and other forms of social protection

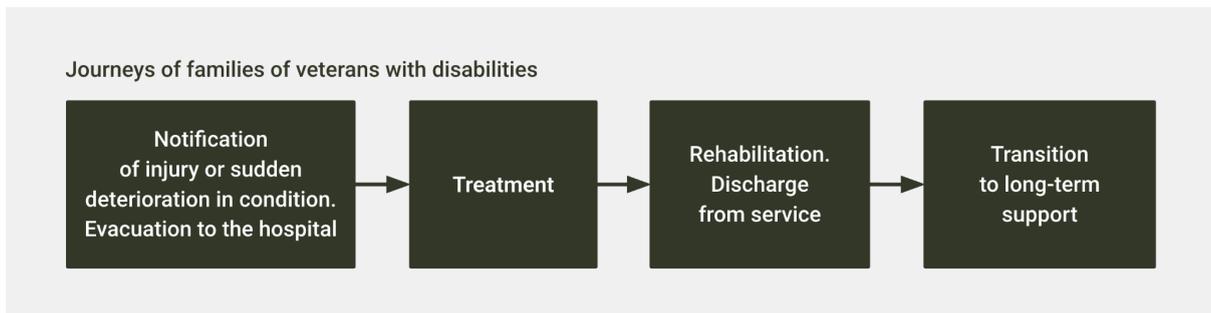
As responsibilities are split between agencies and healthcare facilities, families might find it challenging to obtain holistic support. It faces the need to interact simultaneously with several ministries, services, and healthcare facilities. During this period, coordinated guidance is essential for it.

The subsequent journey of a veteran with a disability and their family may also unfold in different conditions and environments when the service member remains in military service, is placed in the military reserve (depending on the decision of the MMC and the disability group), or transitions to civilian life. Each of these environments has its own support algorithms, so even if the family's needs do not change, the possibilities for meeting them may differ substantially.

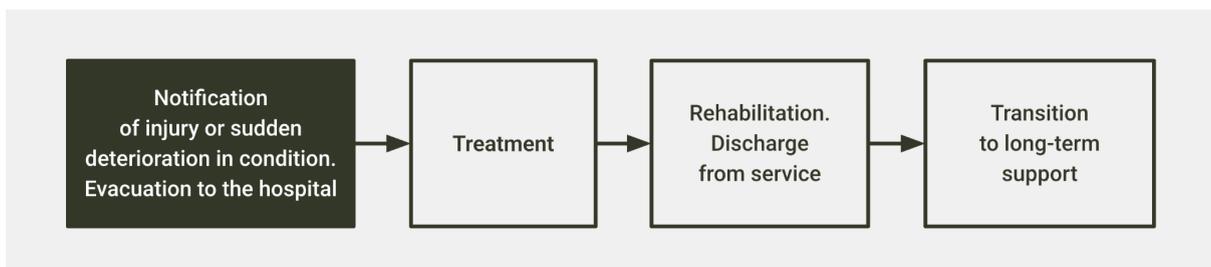
In this section, we will consider the experiences and needs of families of veterans with disabilities at key stages: from the moment of notification, treatment, and rehabilitation to long-term care. We will also outline the types of support that families may require, and provide recommendations for developing and implementing a sensitive and coherent policy.

# Needs and challenges along the journey

The journey of the family of a veteran with a disability begins with the news of an injury. From this point onward, the warrior's loved ones assume new duties and responsibilities, often without adequate support from the state.



## Stage 1. Notification of injury or sudden deterioration in condition caused by illness. Evacuation to the hospital



The experiences of families of veterans with disabilities may begin with notification of an injury or worsening in the health condition. During this period, relatives are immediately drawn into a crisis and must respond quickly, often without preparation or adequate institutional support<sup>176</sup>. Often, it is not just a matter of logistics or material costs, but also

<sup>176</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

of complex emotional and moral decisions. For example, how and when to inform relatives about a severe diagnosis, who has the right to know this information, and where the boundary lies between informing and intruding on privacy.

Certain cases involving stigmatised illnesses or diagnostic errors may be profoundly traumatic. For example, a warrior learns about a terminal condition but has not yet had the chance to process this information, while the family has already been informed. There are known situations where the news of a diagnosis, such as oncology, a neurological disease, or HIV infection, triggered a deep emotional crisis. This requires not only clinical accuracy but also on-site psychological support – in the hospital, immediately after diagnosis, including for the families of warriors.

Therefore, support policy must take into account ethical aspects as well: confidentiality and the warrior's right to choose independently whom to involve in decision-making, and to what extent. The family should also receive support and be informed, but not compelled to participate in ways that contradict the will of the person with a disability.

Relatives often lack verified information and may initiate their own search for it<sup>177</sup>: trying to establish details, contact the commander, brothers- or sisters-in-arms, or medical personnel of the military facility to determine the place of evacuation, the condition of their loved one, and where they are being treated. However, it is important to consider that information about the warrior's injury, diagnosis, or whereabouts may be officially communicated only to those individuals whom the warrior has previously identified as authorised. This may cause additional disorientation within the family when close relatives do not know whether they are entitled to receive information and whether someone else has already been informed. Such a situation requires both legal regulation and a sensitive communication approach.

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<sup>177</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

## Obtaining information about injuries or illnesses

Challenges	Needs
No verified information	Clear communication channels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Disorientation due to restricted access to medical data</li> <li>■ Ethical dilemmas: who to report to and how, and the limits of privacy</li> </ul>	Instructions on rights and limitations in access to information

Families are often left in a state of uncertainty regarding their next steps: whether they should travel immediately to the hospital, what exactly needs to be delivered (medication, personal belongings, or documents), and how and with whom to coordinate these actions. Some are forced to interrupt their work, arrange emergency leave, and remain unsure about the prospect of returning to their job<sup>178</sup>.

During this period, loved ones may experience high levels of stress and anxiety about the warrior's health and life, emotional strain, uncertainty, and exhaustion from constantly waiting for updates about their loved one's condition. For this reason, families may require psychological support from the very first days<sup>179</sup>.

<sup>178</sup> Pryncyp (2024). Behind the scenes of care: Veterans' loved ones and caregiving work. [pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczya](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczya)

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

## Coordination of actions and emotional support

Challenges	Needs
Uncertainty about steps (where to go and what to deliver)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Action algorithms for the family</li> <li>■ Information tools for coordination with medical and administrative structures</li> </ul>
Work interruptions and urgent leave	Legal support on access to information
High levels of stress and anxiety, emotional strain due to uncertainty about the warrior's condition	Access to psychological support immediately after the notification

Loved ones effectively assume the role of crisis coordinators: they make decisions, communicate with various structures, and ensure veterans' basic needs, often without clear instructions on how to interact with different state institutions. At the same time, despite their deep involvement, loved ones often have no verified information, as they were not designated as contact persons in advance.

Public policy must take into account that **recognition of the family as a separate actor requiring support begins precisely at this stage.** From the very first days, families should have access to psychological support, as well as to informational tools - action algorithms that explain who may serve as a contact person, what scope of medical and administrative information may be provided, and within what timeframes. Even before an injury occurs, military units should inform families about what it means to be a contact person, what authority this role entails, and what constitutes the warrior's informed consent.

In addition, it is important to differentiate between types of information. Medical data may be disclosed only to the injured person and, with the warrior's consent, to a family member. Administrative information related to the consequences of the injury (the fact of evacuation, place of hospitalisation, and the responsible unit) may and should

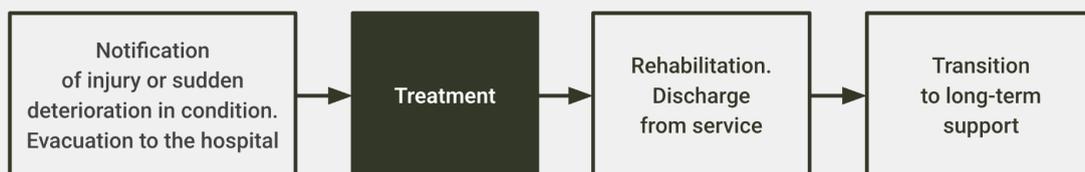
be communicated to the family. Without such differentiation, families remain in a state of uncertainty, and military institutions lack a clear obligation to act.

The deployment of support services in hospitals and military units requires special attention. Currently, such services operate primarily within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, while similar infrastructure within the Armed Forces is only being established. To implement an effective support policy, it is necessary to formally designate responsible staff within military units who can serve as communicators for families in the event of an injury.

#### Engagement with institutions and services

Challenges	Needs
No clearly designated communicators in military units	Normative designation of those responsible for communication with families
Families do not always understand who is entitled to access information	Informing families about the distinction between medical and administrative information

## Stage 2. Treatment



After the evacuation and stabilisation of the service member's condition, the treatment phase begins, and from that point onward, the family remains continuously involved in the support process. Loved ones

or partners often spend more time in the hospital, coordinate communication with physicians, and accompany medical examinations and consultations. Families may also independently search for alternative healthcare facilities or professionals, especially in cases of prolonged or ineffective treatment<sup>180</sup>.

They may assume roles and perform tasks that are not formally defined but are essential for the stable functioning of the treatment process: monitoring adherence to medical recommendations, assisting in arranging daily living conditions in the hospital or during home care, collecting and organising medical documents required for rehabilitation or obtaining official status. Family members may, in practice, spend extended periods in hospitals and perform duties of junior medical staff, despite lacking the necessary skills and training<sup>181</sup>.

The presence of loved ones in a healthcare facility is often perceived as an opportunity to shift part of daily caregiving tasks onto them, such as assistance with hygiene, feeding, or support with mobility. During this time, the family's need for psychological support may increase: while in the hospital, family members are confronted not only with the experience of their loved one's injury but also with that of other patients – injured or seriously ill warriors in the same ward.

In some cases, for example, the veteran's spouse becomes an informal coordinator for everyone around them, and this, in turn, can intensify emotional exhaustion. This practice partly emerges due to a lack of junior medical staff. As a result, loved ones may become involved in caregiving to an extent that exceeds their capacity and may have no time for their own physical or psychological recovery<sup>182</sup>.

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<sup>180</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. P. 33.

[kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

<sup>181</sup> Pryncyp (2024). Behind the scenes of care: Veterans' loved ones and caregiving work.

[pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczya](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczya)

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

## Involvement in direct treatment

Challenges	Needs
Families spend extended periods in the hospital, coordinating medical examinations and consultations	Access to basic instructions on caregiving and monitoring the course of treatment
No formal training to perform medical or caregiving tasks	Support in carrying out medical procedures and guidance from healthcare professionals
The need to take on the functions of junior medical staff without skills, and a lack of basic knowledge on caring for people with limited mobility or severe illnesses	Training materials (videos, printed guidelines, and online courses) on safe caregiving and physical support

An additional challenge may be the repeated transfer of the warrior from one healthcare facility to another. Since the family usually needs to be present: to monitor treatment, provide support during the hospital stay, especially when staff are overloaded, and handle documentation procedures, particularly when the veteran is unable to do so independently, the family relocates together with them. This often entails extra expenses for housing, food, and transport. A partner or another family member who provides care may also have other responsibilities, such as being the parent of a young child or caring for elderly relatives. In such conditions, the person cannot continue fulfilling these responsibilities, maintain their previous daily routines, and requires additional support to sustain their caregiving role.

If a family member responsible for caring for the warrior is employed, there might be a requirement for a temporary reduction in working hours, remote work options, or extra leave. This is essential because the person cannot devote sufficient time to work due to constant travel, the need to stay in the hospital, communicate with physicians, or manage

documentation. Even if the job can be performed remotely, it must be done under unstable conditions.

Care during the warrior’s treatment may be shared among several individuals, for example, a partner, a parent, or an adult daughter or son. In such cases, it is important not only to determine who may be entitled to social support but also to take into account the actual shared involvement in caregiving and the needs of all those providing support. If the caregiver is an adult child who is studying, they may need adjustments to their academic schedule, postponement of examinations or qualification work. Educational institutions must be informed about such cases and provide flexible solutions for students who are performing caregiving duties.

#### Logistics and organisational challenges

Challenges	Needs
Frequent transfer of the warrior from one facility to another, and the need to fulfil other responsibilities at the same time (children, care for older relatives)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Flexible working arrangements (temporary reduction of working hours, remote work, and additional leave)</li> <li>■ Coordination of shared caregiving when several family members are involved</li> </ul>
Children or young relatives who are studying and require changes to their academic schedule or postponement of examinations	Informing educational institutions about the situation and providing flexible solutions for caregiving students

During this period, families also experience an increased need for basic caregiving knowledge, for example, when an injury or illness affects the person’s mobility: how to assist with movement, ensure hygiene, and monitor adherence to prescribed treatment. At present, such information is generally not available in an accessible format. Ukraine lacks specialised educational materials for families, including short video instructions, printed guides, or online courses that explain the basic principles of care, physical and psychological support, and actions

in critical conditions<sup>183</sup>. Such resources could help families better navigate new responsibilities, act more confidently and perform caregiving more safely, both for themselves and for the warrior.

The need for instruction and training may arise even while the warrior is still in the hospital. As loved ones themselves note, they often take over part of the caregiving duties in healthcare facilities.

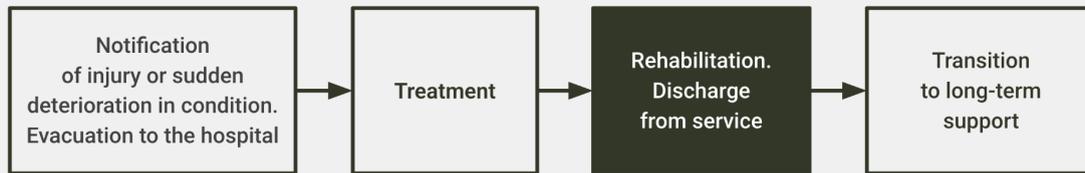
Alongside organisational tasks, the pressure on mental health increases. Constant presence in the hospital and lack of time for recovery may lead to exhaustion. In such conditions, families will require continued psychological support, available from the notification stage.

Psychological support and emotional burden

Challenges	Needs
Emotional exhaustion caused by constant presence in the hospital	Psychological support available from the notification stage and throughout treatment
Emotional stress not just for one’s own warrior but also for other patients	Algorithms for restoring emotional resources and support in situations of high emotional burden

<sup>183</sup> Pryncyp (2024). Behind the scenes of care: Veterans’ loved ones and caregiving work. [pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczva](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczva)

## Stage 3. Rehabilitation. Discharge from service



After the stabilisation of the warrior's condition, a long, multi-component period of rehabilitation begins. It may last from several months to several years. During this time, the family not only supports the person recovering from an injury or an exacerbation of a disease but also continues to engage with the healthcare system, arrange logistics to rehabilitation centres, organise an adaptive environment when necessary, and assist with medical commissions for the determination of disability.

In most cases, rehabilitation takes place after the warrior has been discharged from service, when they find themselves in a civilian environment. Accordingly, the family also loses access to the support that was available during the warrior's service. Families often do not fully understand the mechanisms for further action or who is currently their support contact. For families living in rural areas, the situation may be complicated by logistics: they may be unable to reach a hospital for medical assistance, while their loved one has not yet learned how to manage their care independently. Similarly, transporting a veteran with a disability to a healthcare facility is often physically impossible due to the lack of adapted transport.

From the very beginning of treatment, families often take responsibility for collecting and preserving medical documents: discharge summaries, certificates, and consultation results, and contribute to preparing the document package required for the military medical commission

or the medical and social expert commission<sup>184</sup>. However, in some cases, loved ones are not allowed to attend commission meetings even with the warrior’s consent, which creates additional stress for the family and for the veteran and reflects a lack of recognition of the family’s role in providing support<sup>185</sup>.

Coordination of rehabilitation and medical procedures

Challenges	Needs
<p>Family arranges logistics to rehabilitation centres and medical commissions, and has limited access to commission meetings, even with the warrior’s consent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Clear algorithms and communication channels with rehabilitation institutions, and rules for family participation in document preparation and commission procedures</li> <li>■ Protection of the family’s right to information and involvement in decision-making</li> </ul>
<p>Insufficient understanding of procedures and support contacts</p>	<p>Instructions on undergoing commissions and disability-determination procedures</p>

Rehabilitation services are not always available in the family’s place of residence. If treatment continues in another city or country, the question of relocation arises. Unlike the treatment phase, this may be a long-term solution that requires additional expenses for renting housing, new employment, and organising daily life. These expenses may also become a challenge in cases of widespread chronic illnesses that are not classified as injuries, which prevents some families of veterans from receiving the monthly payment of UAH 100,000. This significantly reduces the family’s financial capacity and creates a sense of inequality in access to support.

<sup>184</sup> Pryncyp (2024). Rehabilitation of Ukrainian Military and Veterans: Navigating Systemic Gaps. P. 95. [pryncyp.org/analytics/rehabilitation](http://pryncyp.org/analytics/rehabilitation)

<sup>185</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One. P. 183. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

Another challenge is that Ukraine currently lacks a systemically regulated free programme for transporting people with severe injuries or illnesses to rehabilitation centres. At the same time, there is also no mechanism for regular home visits to patients by healthcare professionals. This is especially critical when some healthcare facilities remain non-inclusive, in particular inaccessible to people using wheelchairs or crutches, leaving families to organise logistics independently. In this context, it is important to strengthen the development of mobile medical services as a flexible, individually oriented, and accessible form of care and medical support.

#### Logistics and accessibility of services

Challenges	Needs
Lack of transport support to rehabilitation centres	Systemic mechanisms for the free transportation of patients
Rehabilitation services unavailable at the place of residence	Mobile medical services for individual support
Need to relocate to another city or country, additional expenses for housing, transport, and new employment	State assistance for housing and transport during rehabilitation

This stage raises the question of transitioning into a new environment. For some families, this transition is linked to the end of service and the move into a civilian environment, adapting to everyday life outside the military institution. Other families may continue their journey within the military environment if the warrior formally remains in service, for example, during long-term treatment or while holding the status of an injured service member who has not yet been officially discharged. There are also cases of transition into the reserve, when service has been suspended, but there remains a possibility of returning to it after the warrior's treatment and recovery.

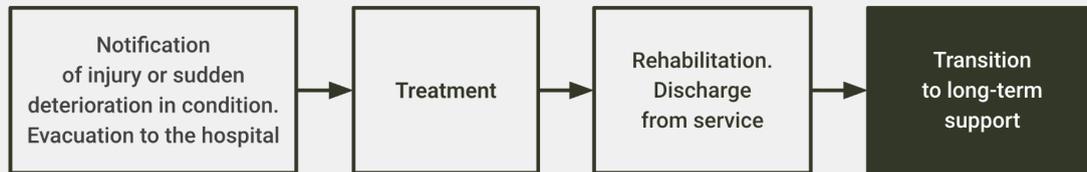
The type of environment determines the nature of support the family receives: in the military environment, internal medical and social mechanisms operate; in the civilian environment, the family mostly interacts with state or municipal services; in the reserve, clear boundaries and definitions are often lacking, creating additional challenges for families.

At this stage, the foundation is laid for a new type of engagement between the family, the warrior, and various institutions and support systems. If the specific characteristics of the environment are not taken into account, the family may find itself exhausted and financially vulnerable at the very start of the long-term caregiving period.

Adaptation to a new environment

Challenges	Needs
Transition from the military environment to the civilian or reserve environment	Support in navigating between military, state, and municipal systems
Family's financial vulnerability at the start of the long-term caregiving period	Information on the rights, available services, and financial support
Possible emotional and physical strain during a prolonged rehabilitation period	Psychological support for managing stress and adapting to civilian life, and access to guidance on organising daily life and caregiving

## Stage 4. Transition to long-term support



After completing early rehabilitation<sup>186</sup>, many families enter the stage of long-term home-based care. At this stage, the loved ones provide systemic support over the years, especially when the person requires continuous healthcare and palliative assistance.

The first challenge a family may face is intensive involvement in document processing, including preparing medical certificates, extracts from medical records, conclusions of the military medical commission (MMC), and referrals to the medical and social expert commission (MSEC). At the same time, within the reform of the medical and social examination, these procedures are gradually being transformed; in particular, the MSEC is being replaced by a new system of comprehensive rehabilitation and assessment of daily functioning. Although some of these procedures begin during treatment, it is mostly at this stage that they are finalised.

During this period, engagement with the civilian healthcare system continues, including the establishment or review of disability status. However, the disability group does not always reflect the real volume of care required: the same status may correspond to significantly different needs, limitations, and challenges that are not taken into account in support planning. For example, a person with a Group II disability due to a musculoskeletal condition may require assistance only with outdoor mobility, while another person with the same group, who has a central nervous system injury, may be unable to independently perform basic self-care tasks such as cooking, bathing, or moving

<sup>186</sup> Early rehabilitation is a stage of rehabilitation care that begins as soon as possible after an injury or acute illness, often while the person is still in the hospital.

even within their home. Although both have the same disability group, the level of required support differs fundamentally.

Some actions at this stage may be performed by the veteran on their own. However, the family often continues to play an active role in collecting documents, engaging with healthcare facilities and administrative institutions, and completing formal procedures. This is particularly relevant when the injury or illness has resulted in functional limitations, when treatment is ongoing, or when the rehabilitation process is not yet complete. Therefore, it is essential to ensure continuous legal support for the family at this stage.

Despite digitalisation, many legal procedures remain non-automated. As a result, family members are obliged to make additional trips, e.g., to apply for assistive rehabilitation devices, confirm disability status, update certificates required for social payments, or arrange entitlement to health resort treatment. Some of these services cannot be obtained remotely, creating additional logistical burdens for the family at a time when they need to focus on their own recovery.

#### Document processing and legal support

Challenges	Needs
Active involvement of the family in collecting and preparing medical certificates, extracts, conclusions, and documents	Continuous legal support for the family
Partial or complete lack of automation of legal procedures, and the need for in-person visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Information materials and consultations on document processing</li> <li>■ Access to remote services to reduce logistical burden</li> </ul>

The nature of care within the family also changes: whereas previously it consisted mainly of intensive treatment or rehabilitation, it now transforms into a long-term process of daily caregiving. For many

families, elements of palliative care become relevant when the focus is no longer on recovery but on long-term, quality support.

**Palliative care** is a set of medical, social, and psychological measures aimed at improving the quality of life of people with incurable illnesses or conditions that significantly limit their daily functioning.

It includes pain management, caregiving, emotional support, and work with the family of a person who requires continuous or end-of-life care. For some families of veterans with severe injuries or illnesses, this stage becomes defining when active treatment is complete, yet everyday support remains critically necessary.

At this stage, families may require systemic palliative care, which is still insufficiently developed in Ukraine. Due to limited access to proper palliative services, some family members are forced to temporarily or permanently leave their jobs and cover additional costs for specialised equipment. This challenge is particularly acute in communities without mobile medical teams (relying instead on emergency services) or where qualified palliative care professionals and basic care equipment, such as functional beds, are unavailable to families<sup>187</sup>.

Beginning long-term or palliative home care also marks a new stage in the family's life - returning to a shared living space and resuming everyday cohabitation. At this point, on the one hand, the need for daily trips to hospitals or rehabilitation centres decreases, but on the other hand, direct access to professional healthcare is lost.

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<sup>187</sup> Pryncyp (2024). Rehabilitation of Ukrainian Military and Veterans: Navigating Systemic Gaps. P. 55. [pryncyp.org/analytics/rehabilitation](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/rehabilitation)

## Home care and medical support

Challenges	Needs
Transition from intensive treatment to long-term daily care, and the need for palliative support, especially in incurable conditions	Systemic palliative care: medical, social, and psychological
Insufficient development of mobile medical and palliative services in communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Specialised equipment and care supplies</li> <li>■ Mobile services and home-based counselling support</li> </ul>

As a result, family members must make new decisions, including the formal recognition of caregiver status, which enables them to receive basic support. Currently, Ukraine has two compensation mechanisms for providers of social care services – on a professional and a non-professional basis. In the case of non-professional care (when the service is provided by a relative or another person without specialised training), compensation is limited by income level. In the case of professional care, the process is complicated by the need to leave one's previous job.

Another challenge for families of veterans with disabilities is the limited state support available to those providing home-based care. In communities without an effective system of mobile or home assistance, families are often left entirely responsible for long-term or intensive care.

## Financial and social support

Challenges	Needs
Limited state support for families providing home care	Social support to reduce financial burden
Need to leave work or reduce working hours in order to provide care	Opportunities for remote work and flexible schedules, and recognition of caregiving in social insurance through compensation

In certain cases, when a family member has an officially recognised disability and requires external care, local governments may initiate the process of placing the person in a residential facility. This may occur if the community lacks the resources to provide alternative forms of support, or if social services submit a relevant request based on an assessment of the person's living conditions. In such situations, community representatives, guided by considerations of economic feasibility and limited funding, may decide in favour of residential placement, even when this contradicts the interests of the person or their family<sup>188</sup>.

Such residential placement is actually an alternative scenario to home-based care. However, it does not align with the principles of inclusiveness, autonomy, and dignity, as it functions as a form of institutional isolation in which the person loses control over their daily life, and the family loses the ability to participate in care, engagement, and shared recovery.

At the same time, families who assume responsibility for caregiving and choose to keep the person at home receive insufficient support. At the regional level, systemic programmes for palliative or health care, as well as psychological, logistical, social, and financial support

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<sup>188</sup> Pryncyp, Cedos (2024). Social Services for Veterans in Communities: Challenges and Needs. P. 43. [pryncyp.org/analytics/soczialni-poslugy-dlya-veteraniv-ta-veteranok-u-gromadah-vyklyky-ta-potreby](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/soczialni-poslugy-dlya-veteraniv-ta-veteranok-u-gromadah-vyklyky-ta-potreby)

for caregiving families, remain lacking<sup>189</sup>. Developing palliative care within communities – with mobile services, specialised equipment, and consulting support – is crucial not only for a dignified life of the veteran but also for the well-being of their family. The family must not be left to face this situation alone and deserves consistent support.

During this period, family roles that were changed due to the need for continuous care for one of the family members also begin to gradually re-establish themselves. This stage creates space for the physical and emotional recovery of caregivers – through opportunities for rest, engagement in support groups, and a clearer understanding of the warrior’s condition – enabling the development of long-term life plans. Despite a possible cumulative effect of fatigue, this transition can become a stabilising moment, when the family recognises itself not only as a helper but also as an active actor shaping its own living and well-being conditions.

#### Restoration of family roles and emotional recovery

Challenge	Needs
Cumulative effect of fatigue and stress caused by long-term caregiving	Opportunities for physical and psychological rest for caregivers, support groups, and counselling

<sup>189</sup> Pryncyp (2024). Behind the scenes of care: Veterans’ loved ones and caregiving work. [pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczva](https://pryncyp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczva)

# Well-being

In this section, we will consider the well-being of families of veterans with disabilities through the lens of their daily experiences and everyday needs. Unlike other journeys, in this case, well-being is shaped under conditions of additional responsibilities: one of the family members often assumes the role of caregiver, either temporarily or on a long-term basis. This also affects the family's overall situation and the distribution of mutual responsibilities within it.

We analyse the current state of family well-being, the existing support, and provide our own recommendations on maintaining or introducing additional benefits in accordance with their journey.

**Important:** We do not provide a comprehensive overview of all possible problems and needs that may arise in families of veterans with disabilities. Instead, we focus on potential solutions that the state can implement to meet their needs, identified based on the analysis of available data and information.

Recommendations are the result of the Coalition of Organisations' work based on expert experience in the field of veterans' affairs and discussions/consultations with experts from various fields. We understand that we could not cover all possible challenges and potential solutions, so it is important to continue exploring this topic to develop effective support for veterans' families.

## Health

The service of a loved one affects the mental and physical health of the family, both during and after their service. The loved ones of veterans with disabilities may experience chronic stress, fatigue, emotional exhaustion, insomnia, and heightened anxiety, as they often take on daily care, medical procedures, and organisational responsibilities.

Such strain may also affect physical health, worsen overall well-being, exacerbate chronic conditions, and reduce the ability to recover.

## Expert Recommendations

- **Preserve the possibility of state compensation for psychotherapeutic services**

A detailed justification of the proposal is provided in [Section 5, The Journey of Veterans' Families, subsection Well-being. Health.](#)

Well-being  
Health

Family Challenges	Recommendation/Solution
Impact of stress, emotional burden, and worry for a loved one on mental health	Continue to provide state compensation for psychotherapy services

## Housing and the physical environment

### Housing

When a veteran undergoes a long period of rehabilitation after an injury or an exacerbation of an illness, family members may also need to relocate temporarily, both to provide care and to live near the healthcare or rehabilitation facility. Often, this requires renting accommodation in another locality or securing adapted, accessible housing, even when the family already owns a home elsewhere.

At the same time, existing state programmes focus primarily on long-term housing solutions – assisting families in purchasing housing, offering preferential loans, or providing compensation for destroyed property, rather than addressing the short-term need for rental housing during caregiving or rehabilitation.

## Expert Recommendations

- **Introduce housing rental compensation for family members providing care for a veteran with a disability**

After an injury or the exacerbation of an illness, the family's financial expenses increase significantly, and the need to rent housing closer to a healthcare facility, rehabilitation centre, or simply in conditions that support recovery becomes critical. Compensation helps reduce the financial burden on the family.

Family members who provide care effectively take on the role of informal caregivers. This is physically and emotionally demanding work that often limits their ability to remain employed. Financial support will enable them to focus on caring for their loved one without simultaneously worrying about housing costs.

Housing rental compensation must be accessible to the family regardless of whether they own housing in another locality. It must take into account the realities faced by Ukrainian families during the war, for example, evacuation, temporary relocation, or the need to accompany the veteran to another region. It may be provided for the duration of caregiving and rehabilitation, for up to three years.

## **Mobility**

Veterans with disabilities often undergo treatment, rehabilitation, or medical examinations at specialised healthcare facilities located far from their place of residence. In such situations, the need to organise transportation becomes especially important – both for the veterans themselves and for the family members who provide care.

Currently, families of veterans with disabilities are often forced to organise and pay for transportation to healthcare facilities on their own. At the same time, not all of them have a private vehicle, whether standard or adapted to the veteran's needs. In this case, they must rely

on taxi services, which may be costly. The problem of transportation can be particularly critical for families living in rural or remote communities where access to health services is limited and public transport is either unavailable or physically inaccessible for people with mobility impairments.

Ukraine still lacks a dedicated legal mechanism that systematically guarantees and regulates the provision of transport services for people with disabilities, including veterans. In some cases, such services may be provided within the framework of social care. Still, typically, they are either not envisaged at all or depend on the initiative of local governments or specific healthcare facilities.

Formally, the Law of Ukraine “On Social Services” already envisages such transport services<sup>190</sup>, provided that they are included in the individual care plan developed by a social worker together with the service recipient and subsequently approved by the case management authorities. Under the current model, this means that none of the support forms, including caregiving services, psychological support for family members, or assistance during rehabilitation, are mandatory or guaranteed by the state. The absence of a transparent and automatic mechanism for involving veterans’ families in the social protection system creates a risk of unequal access to essential services. It requires regulatory solutions within policies concerning families of veterans with disabilities.

During long-term care, especially at the stages of hospitalisation, treatment, or rehabilitation, caregivers and loved ones may need to make independent trips to healthcare facilities, rehabilitation centres, and social services. If care requires full-time involvement of loved ones or leads to partial loss of income, transport-related expenses may constitute a significant share of the family budget.

This is particularly evident in small communities where private vehicles are the only option. If there is no municipal transport route or transport runs at long intervals, the caregiver is forced to rely on costly travel

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<sup>190</sup> Law of Ukraine “On Social Services” No. 2671-VIII (17 January 2019). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2671-19#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2671-19#Text)

options. Paying for logistics in situations where additional expenses for treatment/rehabilitation are already required may hinder access to healthcare facilities and generally worsen the overall well-being of the family.

## Expert Recommendations

- **Ensure free or subsidised transportation for veterans with disabilities and their family members to healthcare facilities, rehabilitation centres, and social services**

Regular access to health, rehabilitation, and social services is crucial for restoring the health and quality of life of veterans, especially those with disabilities. Without transportation, some may be unable to reach appointments on time or may avoid them entirely.

Transport costs, particularly for people living in rural or remote areas, can be substantial. Free or subsidised transport reduces this burden, allowing families to allocate resources to other urgent needs.

Being able to travel independently to a physician or social service is also important for a sense of autonomy, dignity, and control over one's own life. For many veterans, this is not only a matter of logistics but also of reclaiming agency after experiencing trauma.

- **Guarantee the right to home visits by healthcare professionals for veterans with disabilities in cases of limited mobility after surgical interventions, during long-term treatment, or in severe conditions**

During treatment or rehabilitation, veterans with disabilities may have limited mobility, be in a consistently serious condition, or be undergoing postoperative recovery. In such situations, leaving home to travel to a healthcare facility may be physically impossible, risky, or logistically complicated for health. Home visits by medical teams could be an alternative to healthcare<sup>191</sup>. This solution will support families

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<sup>191</sup> At present, this service for veterans and, more generally, for persons with disabilities is not systemically regulated, except in cases of emergency healthcare or, in some instances, palliative care.

in situations where home-based healthcare is the only safe and realistic option for accessing treatment.

Well-being  
Housing and physical environment

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
Need for temporary relocation for care or residence near healthcare/rehabilitation facilities	Housing rental compensation for family members providing care, for the duration of caregiving and rehabilitation (up to 3 years)
Absence or limited availability of transport services in rural/remote communities	Free or subsidised transportation for veterans and their family members to healthcare and rehabilitation facilities and social services
Inability to reach healthcare facilities independently in case of the veteran’s limited mobility	Home visits by healthcare professionals in cases of limited mobility or severe condition

## Material needs

### Payments

Caring for veterans with disabilities is daily work that falls on the shoulders of their families in conditions of insufficient state support. Although current legislation provides for certain compensation mechanisms, e.g., assistance for a family member living with a person with a disability or monetary compensation for providing a social care service, these payments are insufficient.

In 2024, their amount for non-professional care did not exceed UAH 2,920 per month. This sum does not cover even the basic expenses of a family for medication, transport, or housing, which means that care is provided using the family’s own resources – financial, time,

and emotional<sup>192</sup>. In addition, it is not always possible to receive this compensation – its amount is calculated based on income for the previous quarter. If it exceeds UAH 2,920, no compensation is paid.

Caregivers often combine caregiving with employment, which is quite exhausting and may eventually lead to the loss of paid work and, consequently, loss of employment record, as well as a decline in the well-being of both caregivers and the entire family.

Payment for professional care is calculated as 70% of the minimum hourly wage for one hour of care, but not more than 360 hours per month<sup>193</sup>. In 2025, the minimum wage is 8,000 UAH, and the minimum hourly rate is approximately UAH 48 per hour<sup>194</sup>, meaning that the care rate is approximately UAH 34 per hour. The maximum compensation for 360 hours of care is therefore UAH 12,240 per month. This amount may be more suitable for families requiring daily care for a loved one. At the same time, not everyone has the ability or desire to formalise care on a professional basis, leave their previous job, and give up professional development.

## Expert Recommendations

- **Introduce a mechanism of a monthly targeted cash benefit for families of veterans who provide continuous care for their loved ones**

We propose ensuring monthly financial support for families of veterans with disabilities. This is not only financial assistance for caregiving but also recognition of this labour, its constant burden, and the need for support. Since this concerns not one-off help but daily, continuous work, the logic of a fixed monthly payment should place it on par with other forms of employment and take into account not only material expenses

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<sup>192</sup> Prynycp (2024). Behind the scenes of care: Veterans' loved ones and caregiving work. [prynycp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczyna](https://prynycp.org/analytics/za-lashtunkamy-turboty-blyzki-veteraniv-ta-doglyadova-praczyna)

<sup>193</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Social Services" No. 2671-VIII (17 January 2019). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2671-19#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2671-19#Text)

<sup>194</sup> Law of Ukraine "On the State Budget of Ukraine for 2025" No. 4059-IX (19 November 2024). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/4059-20#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/4059-20#Text)

but also the workload and the time invested in learning to improve caregiving skills.

The amount of such support should be calculated by analogy with remuneration in adjacent sectors, particularly healthcare or social care. In Ukraine, the current **Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “Certain Issues of Remuneration for Employees of State and Municipal Healthcare Facilities”** stipulates that from 2025, the minimum remuneration for healthcare workers must be no less than UAH 13,500 per month for full-time work<sup>195</sup>. This amount should serve as the basis for calculating the monthly targeted financial assistance for caregivers.

In the future, this model may be supplemented with mechanisms for monitoring, certification, and accounting for the volume of caregiving work, enabling a transition to a full model of payment for social services on a professional basis.

## **Social insurance**

In some families of veterans with disabilities, family members are forced to terminate formal employment in order to provide continuous care. Such caregiving work is most often informal, without a contract, payments, or legal guarantees.

If loved ones do not have formal guardian status or do not receive state support as caregivers, they may lose not only income but also legal visibility within the social insurance system. In particular, they do not have automatic accrual of the Single Social Contribution (SSC) – a mandatory payment made to the state budget by employers, private entrepreneurs, or individuals who voluntarily participate in the compulsory state social insurance system. This contribution is the foundation of an individual’s right to social insurance: a pension, insurance payments in case of loss of work capacity, temporary disability, or unemployment. SSC accrual is also the mechanism

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<sup>195</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (13 January 2023). Resolution No. 28 “Certain Issues of Remuneration for Employees of State and Municipal Healthcare Facilities.” [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/28-2023-n#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/28-2023-n#Text)

through which the insurance record, required for pension eligibility, is accumulated.

Without SSC payment during the caregiving period, loved ones of veterans do not accumulate an insurance record and therefore lose access to the social guarantees linked to it. In the event of their own illness, loss of work capacity, or unemployment, they will likewise have no insurance benefits.

In the long run, this may have a critical impact on an individual's pension security: even with many years of caregiving experience, the state does not recognise this period as grounds for pension eligibility, or the resulting pension amount will be significantly lower. Thus, caregivers who take responsibility for supporting a veteran with a disability remain unprotected not only now but also in the future.

## Expert Recommendations

### ■ Credit SSC for caregiving work

We propose extending the current provisions on crediting the SSC for caregiving to include family members of veterans with disabilities, and introducing corresponding amendments to the legislation on compulsory state social insurance, in particular, the Law of Ukraine “On Collection and Registration of Single Contribution for Mandatory State Social Insurance”<sup>196</sup>.

The introduction of SSC crediting for caregiving work is also an institutional recognition of this labour as socially significant. It not only creates the basis for long-term social protection of caregivers but also acknowledges their crucial contribution to the recovery of veterans. Such a provision is already applied in certain cases involving care for persons

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<sup>196</sup> Law of Ukraine “On Collection and Registration of Single Contribution for Mandatory State Social Insurance” No. 2464-VI (8 July 2010). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2464-17#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2464-17#Text)

with disabilities (including those with mental disorders). Still, it remains fragmented and does not cover families of veterans with disabilities as a whole.

Well-being  
Material needs

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
Insufficient amount of financial compensation (for example, UAH 2,920 per month for non-professional care)	Monthly targeted financial assistance for families performing regular caregiving work
Combining caregiving with employment leads to loss of income and insurance record	Crediting SSC for caregiving work for veteran’s family members

## Vocation

### Work

After the notification of a warrior’s injury or an exacerbation of illness, family members are usually forced to leave work urgently, travel to another city or region, and respond quickly to the new situation. They must establish the actual circumstances of the warrior’s condition, contact healthcare facilities, organise logistics, and gather initial documents. Loved ones often have no time to formally coordinate their actions with their employer, which forces them to take unpaid leave, negotiate it urgently, or even miss work without prior notice.

As of today, Ukrainian legislation does not provide for a special paid leave in such circumstances: Article 26 of the [Law of Ukraine “On Vacations”](#) guarantees only unpaid leave for family reasons,

subject to the employer’s consent. In cases of urgent absence, this creates a risk of disciplinary consequences or even unauthorised dismissal<sup>197</sup>.

## Expert Recommendations

### ■ Establish a short leave of up to 14 days for clarifying circumstances

We propose introducing a guaranteed short leave in cases of notification about an injury, the development of an illness, or any other critical change in the health condition of the warrior. This decision is based on the ethical and practical need to give the family time for initial stabilisation, and it formalises this pause as a legitimate necessity for loved ones to be near their close person, support them, or simply find out what happened. Such a provision would signal that the state recognises the critical nature of this stage in the family’s life and values their right to be present.

This benefit may be regulated through the Labour Code of Ukraine (LCU)<sup>198</sup> or an appropriate by-law on additional social guarantees for veterans’ families.

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
Inability to urgently coordinate leave with the employer in the event of an injury or an exacerbation of illness	Short guaranteed leave of up to 14 days for clarifying circumstances and initial stabilisation

## Education

The experience of an injured family member affects not only adults but also children. During long-term treatment, rehabilitation, or when

<sup>197</sup> Law of Ukraine “On Vacations” No. 504/96-VR (15 November 1996). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/504/96-bp#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/504/96-bp#Text)

<sup>198</sup> Labour Code of Ukraine (23 July 1996). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/322-08#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/322-08#Text)

continuous care from the family is required, children of veterans with disabilities often take part in caregiving, either by directly looking after the warrior or by supporting another adult family member who bears the main caregiving responsibility. This can significantly affect the child's ability to study effectively or prepare for entrance examinations.

Children may live in conditions where a large share of the time, emotional, and material resources are concentrated on care, rehabilitation, and supporting the veteran's daily life. This can cause ongoing stress, disrupt normal study routines and concentration, and ultimately lead to the child's declining academic performance. The impact is especially severe during admission periods, when maximum attention, preparation, and educational stability are required.

It is important not only to recognise this experience but also to reflect it in educational support policy. It is not about providing an exceptional privilege or lower standards, but to create equal starting opportunities.

Educational support should compensate for structural inequality and allow the child to fulfil their academic potential: choose a profession, find a new community and social connections, and secure stable access to future economic independence. It also enables the family to maintain its caregiving capacity without depriving the child of their own life choices.

## **Expert Recommendations**

We propose providing the following educational guarantees for children of veterans with disabilities:

- **higher education grants;**
- **priority enrolment in kindergartens;**
- **free meals in schools and kindergartens.**

A detailed justification of the proposals is provided in [Section 5, The Journey of Veterans' Families, subsection Well-being. Vocation. Education.](#)

Well-being  
Vocation. Education

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
<p>Children may participate in caregiving, which affects their studies and preparation for entrance examinations; an increased burden may lead to declining academic performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue to provide grants for higher education</li> <li>■ Free tuition for NMT preparatory courses</li> <li>■ Compensation for educational losses in the form of payment for tutoring services</li> </ul>
<p>Additional financial expenses for meals and attending educational institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Priority enrolment in kindergartens and free meals in schools and kindergartens</li> </ul>

# Conclusions

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**1** Families of veterans with disabilities are key participants in the support process, yet they are not currently recognised by the state as subjects of policy. From the moment of receiving notification about an injury to the long period of home-based care, the family assumes numerous responsibilities – coordinating treatment, handling documentation, managing daily living needs, organising logistics, and maintaining communication with institutions – often without adequate support from the healthcare system, social protection services, or the local community. At the same time, the family experiences significant physical and emotional strain, and thus its needs must be recognised and addressed by public policy.

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- 2** Support for families of veterans with disabilities should be based on three key principles:
- recognition of caregiving work as socially significant labour with appropriate guarantees: monthly cash benefits, crediting of employment record, access to leave, flexible employment, and educational benefits;
  - regularity and predictability of state support, including the right to free transportation, home-based health services, access to psychosocial assistance, and legal support during document processing;
  - holistic and coordinated action between the institutions involved in treatment, rehabilitation, and social provision: synchronisation of approaches by the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine.

# SECTION 7

## **The Journey of Families of Veterans Missing in Action**

# Abstract

In this section, we consider the journeys of families of veterans missing in action – a journey marked by prolonged uncertainty, the need for active action, searching for information, and advocacy.

## Here we analyse:

- the needs of loved ones at different stages of the journey: during and after the notification of missing in action, the establishment of the status, the search for information, and long-term life with uncertainty;
- the challenges families face when engaging with military units, TRSSCs, the police, courts, the Coordination Headquarters, and other institutions;
- how prolonged tension and waiting affect different spheres of the loved ones' lives.

We additionally **provide recommendations** on how the state can support families of veterans missing in action across various environments of well-being – health, housing and physical environment, material needs (payments, social insurance and legal protection) and vocation (employment and children's education).

# Introduction

The journeys of families of veterans missing in action are defined by the experience of ambiguous loss. From the moment contact with their loved one is lost until their fate is established, families may live for months or even years in a closed cycle that swings between hope and despair. The very notification of missing in action becomes a profound emotional shock that affects all aspects of life – loved ones of missing veterans repeatedly emphasised that, for some time after receiving the notification, they were unable to maintain conversations or relationships, eat, or care for themselves<sup>199</sup>.

At the same time, immediately after this stage of their journeys, families must begin navigating the legal procedures, engaging with various institutions to formalise the status of their loved one, establish the circumstances of the disappearance, and determine ways to search for information about their fate.

Along this journey, families may encounter varying levels of empathy and communication skills among representatives of these institutions. In the worst cases, this already emotionally difficult experience is further complicated by a lack of sensitivity from the staff they must engage with.

However, even without ethical or communication difficulties, loved ones go through numerous stages: bureaucratic procedures, independent searches for their family members, and constant life in uncertainty. Families mobilise all their resources to search for their loved one while trying not to lose hope and simultaneously continue everyday life despite emotional exhaustion.

Support for families of missing persons must be an integral component of a holistic veteran policy. From the beginning of military service

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<sup>199</sup> Cedos (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of families of military service members who went missing under special circumstances. [cedos.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024\\_cedos\\_doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-rodyn-znyklyh-bezvisty-vijskovosluzhbovcziv.pdf](https://cedos.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024_cedos_doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-rodyn-znyklyh-bezvisty-vijskovosluzhbovcziv.pdf)

and the execution of combat tasks by the warrior, the family becomes part of the veteran community, with all corresponding changes, new challenges, and needs. Missing in action is one of the possible experiences a veteran's family may face. At the same time, public veteran policy currently does not recognise families of missing veterans as its beneficiaries.

Public policy on missing persons began to take shape in 2018 after the Verkhovna Rada adopted the Law "On the Legal Status of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances"<sup>200</sup>. In 2022, Ukraine established the State Register of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances<sup>201</sup> – a database of missing persons sought by law enforcement agencies. As of October 2025, the register includes more than 70,000 missing civilians and service members<sup>202</sup>, most of whom are warriors<sup>203</sup>.

The primary body responsible for safeguarding the rights of missing warriors and their families is the Coordination Headquarters. It collects and verifies information on possible captivity, updates data in the register and in families' personal accounts, and provides initial legal and psychological support to them.

In addition to the Coordination Headquarters, at various stages of their journeys – from receiving the notification of a loved one being missing to document processing, the search process, and accessing social support – families of veterans engage with several other state

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<sup>200</sup> Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances" No. 2505-VIII (12 July 2018). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2505-19#n40](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2505-19#n40)

<sup>201</sup> Order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine "On Approval of the Regulation on the Unified Register of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances" No. 535 (29 August 2022). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0998-22#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0998-22#Text)

<sup>202</sup> Artur Dobroserdov, Commissioner for Persons Missing under Special Circumstances: The Unified Centre for Body Identification May Begin Operating in Ukraine This Year (1 May 2025). Ukrinform. [ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3987798-artur-dobroserdov-upovnovazhenij-z-pitan-osib-zniklih-bezvisti-za-0-soblivih-obstavin.html](https://ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3987798-artur-dobroserdov-upovnovazhenij-z-pitan-osib-zniklih-bezvisti-za-0-soblivih-obstavin.html)

<sup>203</sup> Leonid Tymchenko, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine: Video Monitoring Systems Must Maintain a Balance between Respecting Human Rights and Ensuring Security (26 September 2024). Ukrinform. [ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3909730-leonid-timcenko-zastupnik-ministra-vnutrisnih-sprav-ukraini.html](https://ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3909730-leonid-timcenko-zastupnik-ministra-vnutrisnih-sprav-ukraini.html)

structures: TRSSCs, military units, the police, and courts. Each institution has its own mandates, and there is currently no “single point of access” where a family could centrally formalise their status as relatives of a missing person and get access to state support programmes.

This fragmentation of responsible institutions can heighten the sense of uncertainty for families of service members. Searching for the appropriate institution and travelling between offices makes the situation harder for loved ones who, under great stress, are left to go through bureaucratic processes on their own. While the Coordination Headquarters does inform families about the progress of the search, there is still no body that accompanies the family throughout all stages – from the initial notification of missing in action to obtaining the relevant state guarantees.

In this section, we focus on the experiences and needs of the loved ones of missing veterans. To build an effective support system, it is essential to understand what families require at each stage. Next, we will outline their journeys across four stages: receiving the notification of disappearance, establishing legal status, searching for information, and living with uncertainty. We will also consider the state support available at each stage and how families’ real experiences with institutions affect their material, emotional, and social well-being. Finally, we will share our vision for tailoring state support mechanisms to the needs of families of warriors missing in action.

Below, we provide a detailed explanation of the procedures and stages that families of missing warriors go through after receiving the notification of disappearance. For a better understanding of the process and procedure, we first present key institutions involved at different stages and their corresponding mandates.

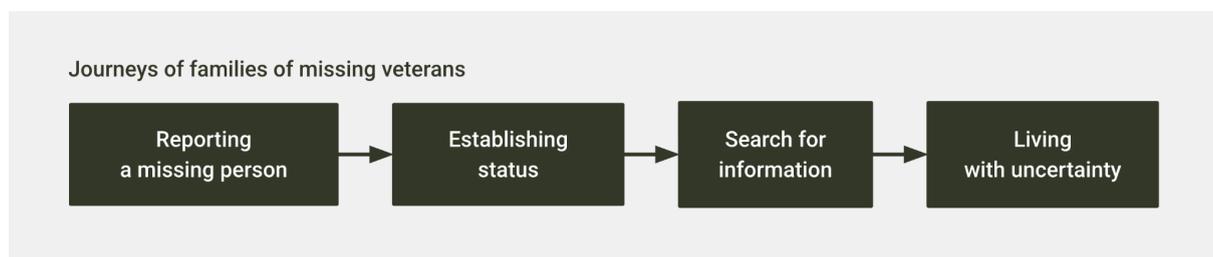
Institutions involved in supporting  
the families of warriors missing in action

Institution	Powers
<b>Military units</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Record the fact of a service member's being missing in action and transmit the information to the TRSSC</li> <li>■ Conduct an internal investigation into the circumstances of the missing in action, which may last up to two months</li> <li>■ If the unit has a patronage service, it may provide guidance to the family, assist with document processing, and participate in the search for the veteran</li> </ul>
<b>Territorial Recruitment and Social Support Centres (TRSSC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Notify the family about the service member missing in action</li> <li>■ Provide recommendations on further steps: initiating the search, applying for benefits</li> <li>■ Issue the family an extract from the internal investigation report conducted by the military unit</li> </ul>
<b>National Police of Ukraine</b>	<p>Opens a criminal case regarding the warrior missing in action, collects DNA samples from relatives, and conducts search activities</p>
<b>Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Coordination Headquarters)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Searches for information about missing warriors among prisoners of war</li> <li>■ Updates information on the search</li> <li>■ Provide legal and psychological assistance to families of service members missing in action</li> </ul>

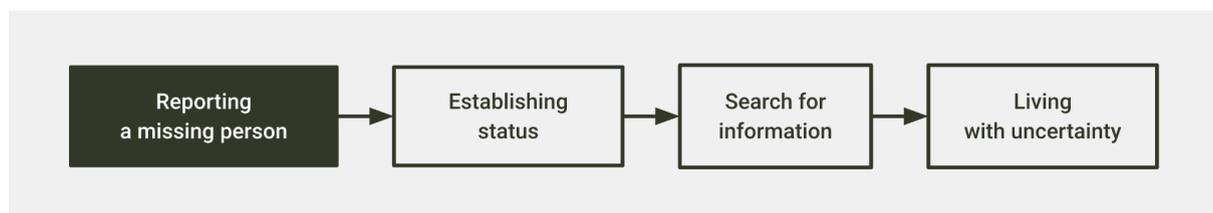
Institution	Powers
<p><b>Office of the Commissioner for Persons Missing under Special Circumstances, Ministry of Internal Affairs</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Coordinates the search for missing persons among the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the MoD, and the Coordination Headquarters</li> <li>■ Ensures the functioning of the Unified Register of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances</li> </ul>
<p><b>National Information Bureau (NIB)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Collects information about missing warriors</li> <li>■ Issue an extract with the current status of the missing person</li> </ul>
<p><b>Central Tracing Agency Bureau of the International Committee of the Red Cross (CTA ICRC)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sends requests to Russia’s public authorities to establish whether missing service members are among prisoners of war</li> <li>■ Confirmation of captivity by the ICRC serves as grounds for updating the status in the register by the Coordination Headquarters</li> </ul>

# Challenges and needs along the journeys of families of veterans missing in action

Families of missing persons simultaneously experience uncertainty and the need to take active steps to search for their loved one. This is an emotionally and physically exhausting experience that requires support.



## Stage 1. Reporting a missing person



The first contact between the state and the families of missing persons is a moment of extreme vulnerability. A family may not yet know or may only suspect the disappearance, and suddenly faces an official notification that shatters their familiar reality. People may be in a state of acute emotional crisis – shock, anxiety, fear, or confusion – and have no idea what to do next: where to turn, how to apply for assistance, or where to seek support.

At this moment, the behaviour of state representatives sets the tone for all further engagement and must be sensitive, as even a single poorly chosen word or lack of support can deepen the trauma. At the same

time, this is the state's opportunity to demonstrate that it stands with the family, understands their pain, and is ready to help.

Usually, commanders of military units are the first to learn of missing in action. After losing contact with the warrior, the military unit must carry out an internal investigation to establish the circumstances of the missing in action. Commanders may interview brothers- and sisters-in-arms, check combat logs, and verify information from healthcare professionals and signal personnel to confirm the fact of missing in action rather than absent without leave or voluntary surrender. The investigation typically lasts one month and may be extended to two. Its results are recorded in a report, which remains an internal document of the unit. The family can obtain an extract from this report only upon a written request submitted to the TRSSC, which then forwards the request to the unit.

The military unit transmits information about the disappearance to the TRSSC. Within seven days, TRSSC representatives must contact the warrior's family and inform them of the disappearance. In addition, service members and TRSSC representatives must also inform the family about available social guarantees and how to access them<sup>204</sup>.

In practice, families' communication and interaction experiences with TRSSCs can differ significantly.

### **Typical challenges at this stage:**

#### **■ Late notification**

If communication with the service member is lost and the family receives no information from the TRSSC, they may begin searching on their own – by contacting brothers- or sisters-in-arms, or the unit's command. In such cases, there is a risk of receiving unverified or incorrect information, including premature reports of death when the warrior is actually missing in action. This is a traumatic experience: families first go through grief as if the person has died, and when they

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<sup>204</sup> Legal Hundred. Status of Persons Missing in Action and Prisoners of War. [legal100.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022\\_status\\_poloneni\\_h\\_i\\_zniklih.pdf](https://legal100.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022_status_poloneni_h_i_zniklih.pdf)

later learn the person is missing, they find themselves caught between uncertainty and hope for the warrior's return<sup>205</sup>.

- **Not all military and TRSSC employees are trained to work with families in crises**

Often, this depends on the initiative of the individual TRSSCs. As a result, families may lack sensitive treatment or psychological support at the moment of notification of missing in action, especially if the notification group does not include healthcare professionals or psychologists who can provide immediate psychological assistance in cases of acute stress reactions.

Sometimes the rules of appropriate communication may be violated. For example, sensitive personal information about the missing in action may be shared with neighbours. In some cases, the news is delivered to minor children, which is not only emotionally traumatic but also contrary to child protection principles, as children should not bear the responsibility of delivering such critical and difficult information<sup>206</sup>.

- **Insufficient information provision**

Amid acute emotional distress – shock, confusion, or despair – loved ones may struggle to fully understand and retain the information provided by TRSSC military personnel. Families are not always clearly informed about the subsequent steps or the actions required to obtain assistance and complete documentation<sup>207</sup>. To address this, **unified standards of steps should be created, such as:**

- develop a clear step-by-step action plan for families, including a brief description of the process for obtaining status and benefits, as well as the mandates of the institutions they will need to interact with;

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<sup>205</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. Pp. 111–112. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. Pp. 10, 12.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. P. 13.

- introduce specialised training for military and TRSSC staff on communicating with families of missing warriors, ensuring ethical and sensitive behaviour;
- involve psychologists and healthcare professionals in notification groups.

These initial steps by the state are not only about providing information but also about building trust. Families must feel that their experiences and needs are recognised and that the state is prepared to be a reliable support during this difficult period.

## Stage 2. Establishing status



After receiving notification from the TRSSC about the warrior missing in action, the family must submit a search application to the police. The application should include a detailed description of the last known location, the circumstances of the disappearance, and distinguishing features of the person, such as tattoos or scars.

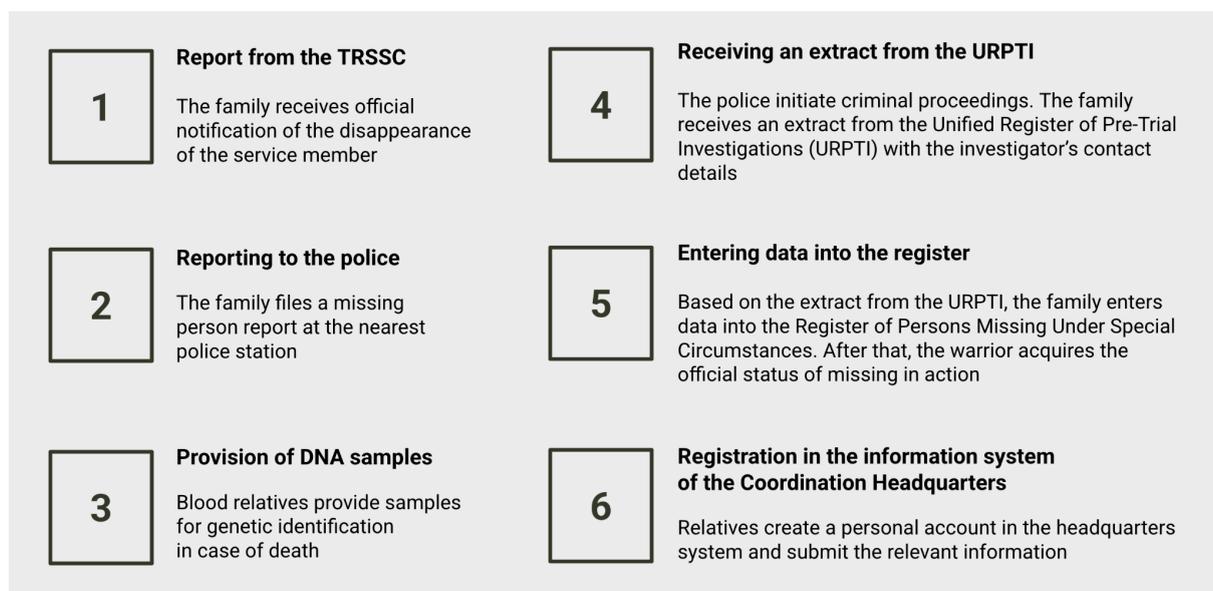
After applying to the police, loved ones receive an extract from the Unified Register of Pre-Trial Investigations (URPTI) with contact details of the investigator in charge of the case. The data about the missing person provided in the search application is entered into the Register of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances. Only after this does the service member acquire the official status of missing in action<sup>208</sup>.

<sup>208</sup> Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances," No. 2505-VIII (12 July 2018). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2505-19#n40](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2505-19#n40)

Relatives must also sign up for the Coordination Headquarters' online personal account and submit information about the missing person to the National Information Bureau<sup>209</sup>. However, this procedure requires an electronic signature, a smartphone or computer, and stable internet access. This places families without sufficient digital skills or technical resources at a disadvantage. They are effectively unable to register the missing person on their own and track the search status in the electronic system.

If there is suspicion that the warrior is in captivity, loved ones may additionally contact the Joint Centre of the Security Service of Ukraine<sup>210</sup>. The International Committee of the Red Cross, responsible for searching for missing persons among prisoners of war, is also available for contact<sup>211</sup>.

#### Procedure for establishing status



<sup>209</sup> How to log in to your personal account on the Coordination Headquarters website. Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War. [koordshtab.gov.ua/submit-application](https://koordshtab.gov.ua/submit-application)

<sup>210</sup> What to do if a service member goes missing in action. Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War. [roadmap.koordshtab.gov.ua/missing-in-action](https://roadmap.koordshtab.gov.ua/missing-in-action)

<sup>211</sup> How to Submit a Request to the ICRC to Search for a Relative: Answers for Families (1 February 2024). International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). [blogs.icrc.org/ua/2024/02/missing/poshuk-znykli-bezvisty-cherwoniy-hrest-2022](https://blogs.icrc.org/ua/2024/02/missing/poshuk-znykli-bezvisty-cherwoniy-hrest-2022)

In practice, establishing the status and finding information often becomes a serious challenge for families. Sometimes military units **prepare service investigation acts incorrectly or superficially**: the documents may lack precise dates, testimonies from brothers- and sisters-in-arms, or details of the last combat mission. Official information about the circumstances of going missing in action may not match the accounts provided by brothers- or sisters-in-arms, and families' requests to military units for clarification often go unanswered or are rejected on the grounds of personal data protection<sup>212</sup>.

Another challenge for relatives of missing persons is the **lack of clear navigation** within the system of institutions they must interact with. The Coordination Headquarters usually process most inquiries for the Treatment of Prisoners of War: it collects and verifies information about a possible captivity, updates data in families' personal accounts, and provides initial legal and psychological support.

At the same time, families of missing warriors do not have a “single window”<sup>213</sup> for processing all the necessary documents. They are often forced to contact various state institutions on their own, search for the responsible organisations, and figure out how to access state support<sup>214</sup>. This creates an additional administrative burden during a difficult period.

Therefore, at this stage, it is crucial to **establish a system of legal support, in particular to assist during the process of formalising official status and benefits**. This approach can help families better understand the system of state support and the division of responsibilities among institutions.

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<sup>212</sup> Media Initiative for Human Rights (2025). Interaction with Military Units and Support for Families of Fallen and Missing Service Members. P. 11. [mipl.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/vzayemodiyaz-vijskovy-my-chastynamy-ta-pidtrymka-rodyn.pdf](https://mipl.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/vzayemodiyaz-vijskovy-my-chastynamy-ta-pidtrymka-rodyn.pdf)

<sup>213</sup> “Single window for citizens” is a set of services for individuals that enables them to request electronic services online and obtain information processed within the Unified Information System of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine.

<sup>214</sup> Media Initiative for Human Rights, ZMINA (2025). How Ukraine Searches for People Who Have Gone Missing as a Result of Russia's Aggression and Supports Their Family Members. Pp. 14–15. [mipl.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/znykli-bezvisty\\_a4\\_ua\\_4.pdf](https://mipl.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/znykli-bezvisty_a4_ua_4.pdf)

## Stage 3. Search for information



Upon receiving a report of a missing person, the National Police of Ukraine opens criminal proceedings and conducts an investigation. It may order the collection of DNA samples from biological relatives to identify a service member in the event of death, as well as gather documentary materials<sup>215</sup>. However, if the service member went missing in action in a combat zone, the police do not carry out direct search operations at the site of hostilities or in temporarily occupied territory. Instead, they conduct investigative actions at the place where the report was submitted and in coordination with other agencies.

A significant workload on investigators is one of the key challenges, particularly in district police departments near the front line. Each specialist is responsible for hundreds of cases, which slows down investigations, complicates communication with families, and delays the timely submission of materials for forensic examinations. Frequent staffing changes further exacerbate the situation, as newly appointed investigators require time to review ongoing cases.

Until December 2024, all materials were automatically forwarded to police departments located at the place where the warrior had gone missing. This often resulted in delays or the loss of documents in transit. Since 2024, a new document-handling procedure has been in force: cases are processed at the place of residence of the applicant's family.

Specialised centres of the National Police have been established in the regions to provide families with prompt access to information

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<sup>215</sup> Who Searches for Missing Service Members and How? Explained (11 March 2025). Radio Svoboda. [radiosvoboda.org/a/khto-shukaye-znyklykh/33320871.html](https://radiosvoboda.org/a/khto-shukaye-znyklykh/33320871.html)

on the progress of investigations<sup>216</sup>. At the same time, proceedings that remain in frontline district departments continue to be handled locally, which increases the workload on investigators and prolongs the investigation timelines.

One of the possible reasons for a service member's being missing in action is captivity. The most reliable source for confirming captivity is considered to be a notification from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). However, it is often difficult for families to get such confirmation: the ICRC does not have full access to detention facilities for prisoners of war in the Russian Federation and therefore cannot always promptly verify the status of a service member as a prisoner of war<sup>217, 218</sup>.

**In conditions of uncertainty and a lack of feedback from the state, families actively undertake the search for their loved ones.** They may independently establish contact with the missing warrior's brothers- or sisters-in-arms, reconstruct the timeline of events, identify witnesses, and pass the collected information to investigators. In doing so, they supplement official materials and contribute to the progress of the case<sup>219</sup>.

In attempting to establish the fate of the missing person, relatives often resort to independently monitoring open sources. They follow Telegram channels where the Russian side publishes photos and videos featuring prisoners of war and the fallen and examine large numbers of images, videos, and screenshots in search of familiar features and confirmation

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<sup>216</sup> Leonid Tymchenko: "Specialised Centres for the Search for Persons Missing under Special Circumstances Operate in Every Oblast Centre" (29 October 2024). Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine. [mvs.gov.ua/news/leonid-timcenko-specializovani-centri-z-rozsuku-zniklix-bezvisti-za-osoblivix-obstavin-diiut-u-koznomu-oblasnomu-centri](https://mvs.gov.ua/news/leonid-timcenko-specializovani-centri-z-rozsuku-zniklix-bezvisti-za-osoblivix-obstavin-diiut-u-koznomu-oblasnomu-centri)

<sup>217</sup> Cedoss (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of families of military service members who went missing under special circumstances. P. 28. [cedos.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024\\_cedoss\\_doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-rodyn-znyklyh-bezvisty-vijskovosluzhbovcziv.pdf](https://cedos.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024_cedoss_doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-rodyn-znyklyh-bezvisty-vijskovosluzhbovcziv.pdf)

<sup>218</sup> We provide a more detailed account of the journeys and experiences of families of prisoners of war in the following section.

<sup>219</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. Pp. 116–117. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

of captivity<sup>220</sup>. Such searches are emotionally exhausting and risky: during this period, families are particularly vulnerable to fraud. Scammers may offer “information” in exchange for money, posing as individuals who have access to confidential sources.

Relatives transmit the collected data to the police and the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Through their personal account, the family submits updates and awaits a change of status. At the same time, changes are reflected only after the Russian side officially confirms the captivity of the warrior missing in action. For this reason, families are compelled to communicate independently with the Coordination Headquarters and submit requests, for example, to initiate a photographic expert examination or to clarify a possible fact of captivity<sup>221</sup>.

Such involvement of the family in the search process is entirely natural: loved ones seek to do everything possible to find their relative. However, their active participation must not replace the responsibilities of the state, which coordinates the search and supports families in navigating between various institutions, formalising statuses, and accessing support.

Coordinated engagement between the family and state institutions can not only make the search more effective but also reduce the emotional burden on relatives. It is important to establish systemic communication in which investigators promptly inform families of any change in the responsible specialist, and military units provide complete information regarding the circumstances of going missing in action. Equally important is the synchronisation of data on missing veterans between all relevant institutions in order to avoid misunderstandings, errors, and duplicate data collection. In such a model, the state can become a source of support for the family – recognising its role, understanding its needs, and providing assistance at every stage.

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<sup>220</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One. Pp. 119–121. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

<sup>221</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One. Pp. 121–124. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

Challenges	Needs
Workload on investigators and staff turnover	Timely notification, prompt examinations, stable communication, and transparency in changing the responsible professional
Lack of prompt information from the ICRC	Reliable confirmations of captivity and access to verified sources
Fraud/risks for the family	Secure official channels, psychological support, and verification of information
Uncertainty of status	Clear statuses, clear updates and action algorithm

## Stage 4. Living with uncertainty



If investigators and relatives are unable to obtain new information about the veteran missing in action – to confirm the fact of capture or death – the family is forced to live with uncertainty.

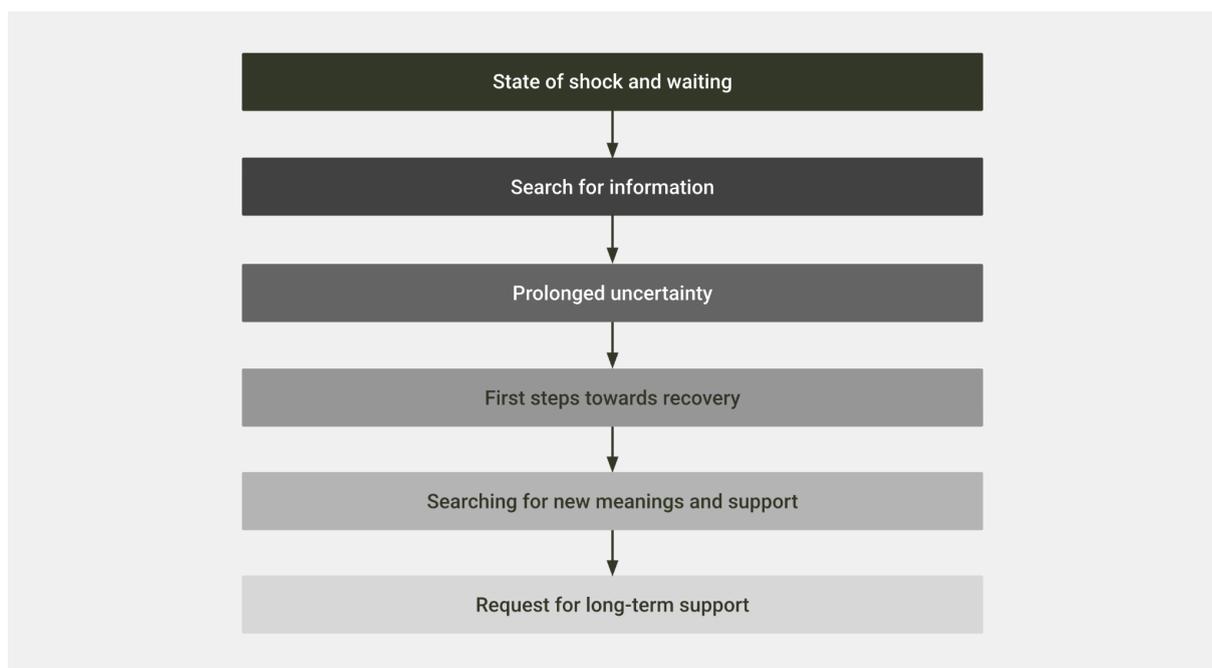
Throughout the entire journey, the psychological state of the families of warriors may be unstable and vulnerable at this stage. Loved ones may experience a range of often conflicting emotions at the same time: hope that their loved one is alive and will return, and grief that they may never see them again<sup>222</sup>.

<sup>222</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. Pp. 126–127. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

Prolonged tension affects all spheres of relatives' well-being. Over time, their physical condition may deteriorate: chronic illnesses may worsen, and new ones may emerge. Stress affects work, relationships, and daily life: concentration may decline, focus may be lost, and the desire to communicate with others may disappear. Families often postpone self-care, as their primary attention is focused on the search, coping with uncertainty, or supporting other loved ones<sup>223</sup>.

Only with time may they find new sources of stability and meaning and build a new routine<sup>224</sup>. At this stage, families are particularly in need of long-term and sensitive support, including psychological assistance. This involves not only helping in searching for their loved one but also support across different areas of life: professional, material, in relationships with their loved ones and in health recovery.

#### Stages of the journey of families of veterans missing in action



<sup>223</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. Pp. 133–134. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. Pp. 134–136.

# Well-being

The journey of families of veterans missing in action is a continual balance between hope and uncertainty. It is essential that they are not left alone to face the challenges of everyday life in these new realities. The state must therefore ensure a comprehensive system of long-term support that encompasses different spheres of life. State guarantees in the environments of health, housing, education, and other needs represent an acknowledgement and recognition of the experiences of families of warriors missing in action. Next, we consider how the state can support families of the missing across different dimensions of well-being.

**Important:** We do not provide a comprehensive overview of all possible problems and needs that may arise in the families of warriors missing in action. Instead, we focus on potential solutions that the state can implement to meet their needs. We identified them by analysing available data and information.

The recommendations are the result of the Coalition of Organisations' work based on expert experience in the field of veterans' affairs and discussions/consultations with experts from the field. We understand that we cannot cover all possible challenges and potential solutions, so it is important to continue exploring these topics to develop effective support for veterans' families.

## Health

The disappearance of a service member inflicts profound trauma on the family, affecting both their mental and physical health. The lack of information, uncertainty, and prolonged waiting may give rise to persistent anxiety, insomnia, panic, intrusive thoughts, and emotional numbness<sup>225</sup>.

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<sup>225</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

Living with the unknown and a constant sense of uncertainty often negatively affects physical health: relatives may feel tired and exhausted, experience the exacerbation of illnesses, or notice an overall deterioration in their state of health.

## Expert Recommendations

- **Provide the possibility of state compensation for psychotherapeutic services**

A detailed justification of the proposal is provided in [Section 5. The Journey of Veterans’ Families, subsection Well-being. Health.](#)

Well-being  
Health

Family Challenges	Recommendation/Solution
The impact of uncertainty, stress and emotional strain on mental health	State compensation for psychotherapy services

## Housing and the physical environment

The disappearance of a service member is both an emotional ordeal for families and a source of everyday challenges at the same time. A family’s housing situation may become more complicated not only due to general difficulties in accessing housing but also because of circumstances linked to the disappearance of their loved one: prolonged stress, reduced income, and the need to take leave in order to clarify the circumstances of going missing in action.

Families who rent their homes, are repaying a mortgage, or have experienced internal displacement may be particularly vulnerable.

Under such conditions, state guarantees in the housing sphere become critically important for maintaining the material stability of families.

Current legislation guarantees families of missing service members a benefit for the payment of housing and utility services, including housing fees and charges for water supply, electricity, gas, and heating. This benefit is granted to the family in place of the missing veteran, provided that the veteran was entered into the Register of Persons Entitled to Benefits<sup>226</sup>. The benefit may be transferred to a spouse, to children, and, if they are unable to work, to the parents of the missing warrior<sup>227</sup>.

However, specific mechanisms for providing housing for the families of veterans missing in action are not yet provided. They do not have access to programmes available, for example, to families of the fallen: the repair of damaged housing, the allocation of an apartment within two years after registration, or loans for construction with deferred repayment<sup>228</sup>, even though they may similarly require support for their housing well-being.

Moreover, if one spouse is missing, the family cannot sell property they own if the missing person is the owner or co-owner<sup>229</sup>. It is also impossible to purchase property while one spouse has the status of missing, since under the Family Code of Ukraine, property acquired during marriage constitutes joint property, and therefore, its purchase requires the consent of both spouses<sup>230</sup>. The introduction of state support mechanisms in the housing sphere is not only a means of ensuring basic needs but also a way for the state to acknowledge the difficult journey of families of the missing and to support them.

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<sup>226</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (13 December 2024). Resolution No. 1420 “On Amending Certain Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on the Use of an Extract from the Unified State Register of War Veterans for the Purpose of Obtaining Benefits by Certain Categories of Persons.” [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1420-2024-r#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1420-2024-r#Text)

<sup>227</sup> Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families.” Article 12(5). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text)

<sup>228</sup> Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection.” Article 15, paras. 8, 15, 16. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text)

<sup>229</sup> Civil Code of Ukraine. Article 361. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15#Text)

<sup>230</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Article 60. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

## Expert Recommendations

### ■ Provide a one-off preferential loan for the purchase of housing

One effective instrument for ensuring access to housing is state credit programmes with preferential terms. In particular, the eOselia housing programme, effective since October 2022, enables citizens to get affordable financing for the purchase of a home – a loan at 7% for the first ten years, followed thereafter by a rate of 10%. Such terms are significantly more favourable than market instruments, for example, mortgage loans at 15–25% annually offered by banks. Certain groups, like contract service members, healthcare professionals, teachers, and scientists, have access to preferential terms: a 3% interest rate for the first ten years, rising to 6% thereafter.

eOselia Affordable Mortgage Programme

Group of borrowers	Annual interest rates	
	First 10 years	Thereafter
Overall	7%	10%
Preferential (including contract service members)	3%	6%

We propose expanding the list of preferential categories that benefit from more accessible conditions under this programme by adding families of veterans missing in action.

Such an expansion is not only socially just but also a necessary step towards supporting families who have experienced loss or prolonged waiting due to the war. Families of the missing may be left without a stable source of income or legal certainty, which complicates long-term planning for the future. Access to a preferential housing

loan will serve as an important stabilising measure, helping them overcome housing insecurity and reduce the economic burden that arises from the loss of support previously provided by the veteran.

#### ■ **Grant priority in the queue for compensation for destroyed housing**

Since families of veterans often continue to live in Ukraine under conditions of war and the constant threat of Russian attacks, even those who already own homes may lose them. We propose granting priority in the compensation queue for destroyed housing to families of missing warriors whose homes were destroyed during Russian attacks.

Currently, such a right is guaranteed to veterans, and their families are therefore able to receive compensation more quickly. In contrast, families of the missing cannot access this mechanism. Extending this support to them would constitute a partial compensation for the assistance they would have received had their loved ones transitioned from the status of missing to the status of veteran.

Priority compensation for destroyed housing is critically important for families of the missing from both a humanitarian and legal perspective. These families live in a state of constant uncertainty, anxiety, and often economic vulnerability. They cannot receive full social payments, obtain the status of a family member of a fallen warrior, or benefit from associated entitlements. At the same time, the loss of housing as a result of hostilities deprives these families of basic conditions necessary for safe and stable living. Priority in the compensation queue is not only a form of recognising their losses but also a vital form of support.

#### ■ **Introduce a compensation mechanism for rental housing for the period of the warrior's absence**

If the veteran provided for the family before and during service, including covering rental housing costs, their loved ones lose not only emotional support but also financial stability after going missing in action.

Compensation for rental costs would enable such families to maintain housing security, avoid forced relocation, and receive meaningful

support during an emotionally difficult period. The amount of support may depend on the city of residence, but should correspond to real rental prices in Ukraine.

■ **Ensure payment of housing and utility services for up to three years, regardless of housing ownership**

We propose introducing financial support for families of missing persons for a period of up to three years to cover housing and utility services, including liquefied gas, solid and liquid heating fuel.

Since many families live in rented accommodation or with relatives, they are unable to access standard support, for example, subsidies or utility benefits granted only to property owners or officially registered residents. We therefore propose that these guarantees be provided regardless of ownership or registration status.

This mechanism is intended to support the financial stability of families during the period of waiting for the warrior's return. The proposed period of up to three years is a rough estimate based on the need to plan life in the context of a prolonged absence of a loved one. Such support will help cover all families of the missing and prevent discrimination.

The model may be based on the principles of the existing Procedure for Granting Subsidies (CMU Resolution No. 848 of 21 October 1995), but it will require separate regulation<sup>231</sup>.

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<sup>231</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (21 October 1995). Resolution No. 848 "On Simplifying the Procedure for Granting Subsidies to the Population for Reimbursement of Expenses for Housing and Utility Services, and for the Purchase of Liquefied Gas, and Solid and Liquid Heating Fuel." [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/848-95-n#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/848-95-n#Text)

Well-being  
Housing and physical environment

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
Families may be unable to purchase or improve housing due to reduced income and legal restrictions concerning property	One-off preferential loan for the purchase of housing
Families may be left unprotected due to the loss of housing and legal uncertainty	Priority in the queue for compensation for destroyed housing
The disappearance of a loved one may lead to a drastic decline in the family's financial stability and difficulties in paying for rented accommodation	Compensation for rental housing for the period of the warrior's absence
Additional financial burden arising from the payment of utility services and the limitation of existing benefits to property owners or registered residents	Payment of housing and utility services for up to three years, regardless of housing ownership

## Material needs

### Payments

The disappearance of a service member may affect the financial security of their family. Despite the severe psychological state and reduced capacity to work caused by stress and uncertainty, relatives are often compelled to support the family's financial well-being on their own and to meet the daily needs of all family members. The state must therefore guarantee support to ensure the financial stability of families of those missing in action.

At present, relatives are entitled to receive a portion of the monthly financial support of the warrior missing in action<sup>232</sup>. As a general rule, a payment totalling no more than 50% of the financial support is divided equally among the closest relatives: the spouse, parents, legal representatives of minor children, and adult children with disabilities acquired before the age of 18. If there are no such close relatives, payments are transferred to other relatives – adult children, siblings, if the veteran was their legal representative. Each of them may receive up to 20% of the monthly support. The remaining funds are retained for the veteran.

Distribution scheme for monthly financial support for veterans missing in action

Primary distribution	If there are no close relatives	Remaining funds
Divided equally among the closest relatives	Payments are transferred to other relatives	Retained for the veteran
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Spouses</li> <li>■ Parents</li> <li>■ Legal representatives of minor children</li> <li>■ Adult children with disabilities acquired before the age of 18</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Adult children</li> <li>■ Siblings, if the veteran was their legal representative</li> </ul>	
Up to 50% of the monthly financial support, divided equally	Up to 20% of the monthly financial support for each	

Another option for distributing financial support is **through a personal directive**, which a warrior may prepare before or during service, specifying in advance to whom and in what proportions payments shall be made if the warrior goes missing in action. Regardless of the will

<sup>232</sup> Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families.” Article 9(6). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text)

of the missing person, the state guarantees payments to the closest dependents, such as the spouse, parents, and children. Thus, even if the service member did not list these relatives in the personal directive, they may still receive up to 50% of the warrior's monthly payments<sup>233</sup>.

The practice of distributing shares of financial support has become an important instrument for supporting families of warriors missing in action. According to the study by the Cedos Think Tank, these payments became the foundation of financial stability for many families<sup>234</sup>. Relatives were able to meet their own needs, maintain an adequate standard of living, and save money for future necessities, such as the service member's rehabilitation after return or the education of children. At the initial stage, many families were hesitant to submit applications for payments because doing so symbolised an acknowledgement of the disappearance of their loved one. However, respondents later admitted that the payments had a positive impact on the overall well-being of the family.

At the same time, families of warriors may face several challenges in receiving payments. According to loved ones, the first payment usually arrives only two to four months after the official notification of being missing in action. Subsequent payments may sometimes be delayed or not received in full. If the family has no savings, even short delays become significant and add financial strain.

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<sup>233</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (28 February 2022). Resolution No. 168 "Issues concerning certain payments to service members, enlisted personnel and officers, police officers and their families during martial law." Paragraph 2. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/168-2022-n#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/168-2022-n#Text)

<sup>234</sup> Cedos (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of families of military service members who went missing under special circumstances. P. 36. [cedos.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024\\_cedos\\_doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-rodyn-znyklyh-bezvisty-vijskovosluzhbovcziv.pdf](https://cedos.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024_cedos_doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-rodyn-znyklyh-bezvisty-vijskovosluzhbovcziv.pdf)

## Expert Recommendations

### ■ Supplement existing payment mechanisms for relatives of missing warriors with a one-off cash benefit

At present, such assistance is provided to families of prisoners of war, both civilians and military<sup>235</sup>. The journeys and experiences of families of prisoners of war and of those missing in action are similar: in both situations, relatives endure prolonged periods of waiting, search for information about the whereabouts of their loved one, and fight for their fate. If a person is held in captivity and this information is not confirmed or is unavailable, the interim status is that of missing. For this reason, it is expedient to extend a one-off cash benefit to the families of the missing as well.

A family may receive this assistance annually for the entire period during which the veteran has the status of missing, without needing to apply to court. If death is later confirmed, the family will obtain the status of the family of a fallen warrior and will be entitled to a one-off financial payment of UAH 15 million. To ensure transparency and consistency in state support, the amount of this payment may be reduced by the amount of support already received.

Introducing such a mechanism will enable consistent and uninterrupted support for families of missing warriors. It will serve as recognition that prolonged waiting and living with uncertainty constitute sufficient grounds for accessing social guarantees. Moreover, this approach will contribute to the flexibility of the system, enabling support mechanisms to be tailored in the event of a change in status.

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<sup>235</sup> Law of Ukraine "On the Social and Legal Protection of Persons Deprived of Their Personal Liberty as a Result of Armed Aggression against Ukraine, and Their Family Members." Article 7.  
[zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2010-20#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2010-20#Text)

## Social insurance

Another form of support for families of the missing currently offered by the state is the **survivor's pension**. It may be received by the closest dependants, regardless of the insurance record of the veteran missing in action<sup>236</sup>:

- the spouse and parents, if they have a disability or have reached retirement age<sup>237</sup>;
- the spouse, or in their absence, one of the parents, siblings, the grandparent, if they are not working and are caring for the child or children of the missing person under the age of eight;
- minor children;
- adult children with disabilities from childhood, or those who are studying and are under the age of 23;
- orphans under the age of 23, regardless of whether they are studying.

Children have a guaranteed right to this pension even if they were not financially dependent on the missing warrior. In contrast, parents or partners may receive it only if they have lost their source of livelihood.

All relatives entitled to a survivor's pension receive one joint payment, which is divided equally among them<sup>238</sup>. The amount depends on the number of dependants in the family: if only one person receives the payment, it amounts to 50% of the old-age pension that the missing person would have received.

If there are two or more such relatives, the payment amounts to 100% and is distributed equally among them. **The following minimum amounts are currently established:**

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<sup>236</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Mandatory State Pension Insurance". Article 36(1). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1058-15#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1058-15#Text)

<sup>237</sup> Retirement age is determined according to insurance record: 60 years with at least 32 years of service; 63 years with at least 22 years of service; 65 years with at least 15 years of service. The Pension Fund of Ukraine. [pfu.gov.ua/33642-umovy-pryznachennya](http://pfu.gov.ua/33642-umovy-pryznachennya)

<sup>238</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Mandatory State Pension Insurance". Article 39. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1058-15#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1058-15#Text)

Number of dependants in the family	Share of payment	Minimum amount (UAH)
1	50% of the pension that the missing person would have received	2,361
2	100%, divided equally	2,833.2
2 or more	100%, divided equally	3,541.5

Monthly payments are made for as long as the warrior is considered missing in action. This means that if information emerges regarding their whereabouts or if death is confirmed, the pension payment is terminated.

The survivor's pension is one of the forms of state assistance available; however, its practical significance for families of the missing is often limited. Most families already receive a share of the veteran's financial support, and therefore, this pension is not always perceived as substantial financial assistance. Although such a pension is provided both to families of missing civilians and to families of service members, its amount is calculated according to general rules, without taking into account the contribution of military service. At present, the amount of payment is often insufficient even to cover basic needs. According to research by the Media Initiative for Human Rights, as of June 2024, the average amount of such a pension was UAH 3,364 per month<sup>239</sup>. In this situation, there is a need to reconsider the approach to this form of support.

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<sup>239</sup> Response of the Department of Pension Provision, Insurance Payments, Social Services, Housing Subsidies and Benefits of the Pension Fund of Ukraine to the letter of the Media Initiative for Human Rights No. 06\_124 of 19 June 2024. Media Initiative for Human Rights, ZMINA (2025). How Ukraine Searches for People Who Have Gone Missing as a Result of Russia's Aggression and Supports Their Family Members. P. 8. [mipl.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/znykli\\_bezvisty\\_a4\\_ua\\_4.pdf](https://mipl.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/znykli_bezvisty_a4_ua_4.pdf)

## Expert Recommendations

- **Introduce an insurance payment in connection with the temporary absence of the breadwinner for children under 23 years of age and relatives who do not receive a share of financial support**

This payment may serve as an alternative to the survivor's pension for the relatives of warriors missing in action.

The Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families"<sup>240</sup> guarantees the distribution of financial support from the missing service member's pay between the spouse, children, and parents in the absence of personal directives. In contrast, the proposed insurance indemnity can provide support to relatives who may also need financial assistance but do not belong to legally protected groups.

It should account for veterans' contributions and be calculated based on their remuneration in the troop. We propose setting this payment at 70% of the veteran's financial provision in the troop (excluding combat payments), but at least UAH 7,800 per month, which would align this support with the payment provided to families of fallen warriors. This level reflects a standard of partial income replacement and enables one to maintain basic well-being without complete financial dependence<sup>241</sup>.

The amount should be set no lower than a guaranteed minimum that reflects average household expenses and inflation, regardless of the previous level of the service member's financial provision that the family may have been receiving.

Children of missing veterans, up to the age of 23, must also receive an insurance payment for the period of temporary absence of the breadwinner. Its amount is calculated using the same principle

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<sup>240</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families" No. 2011-XII (20 December 1991). Article 9(6). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text)

<sup>241</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine 'On Compulsory State Social Insurance' and the Law of Ukraine 'On Compulsory State Pension Insurance'" No. 2620-IX (September 21, 2022). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2620-20#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2620-20#Text)

as for adult family members: 70% of financial support for one child and 50% for two or more minor children. The minimum amount of such a payment must not be lower than UAH 6,100 per child, bringing this support in line with the payment provided to families of fallen warriors.

This measure must cover every month of the family's experience of waiting after the disappearance of the warrior has been confirmed. Such support will enable relatives who are unable to meet their own needs to receive assistance that, under other circumstances, could have been provided by the warriors themselves. Insurance support also takes into account the fact that the family of a missing service member suddenly finds itself in uncertainty, prolonged stress, and grief – conditions that significantly undermine the ability to maintain a dignified standard of living independently.

## **Legal Protection**

When a service member goes missing in action, their relatives find themselves in a situation of uncertainty. This brings not only emotional strain but also the need to resolve a series of legal issues. To apply for benefits, receive payments, or gain access to information, the family must undergo various procedures and apply to multiple state institutions. At moments when all attention is focused on finding solutions and supporting one another, bureaucratic requirements may become an additional source of stress<sup>242</sup>.

Access to legal services is a separate challenge. Even a consultation with a lawyer or the issuance of a power of attorney by a notary may be financially inaccessible for some families. Moreover, families often do not know where to begin or what assistance they are entitled to<sup>243</sup>.

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<sup>242</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. P. 112. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

<sup>243</sup> Cedoss (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of families of military service members who went missing under special circumstances. P. 29. [cedos.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024\\_cedoss\\_doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-rodyn-znyklyh-bezvisty-vijskovosluzhbovcziv.pdf](https://cedos.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024_cedoss_doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-rodyn-znyklyh-bezvisty-vijskovosluzhbovcziv.pdf)

## Expert Recommendations

- **Maintain guarantees of free primary and secondary legal assistance, submission of attorneys' requests, and basic notarial services for the preparation of documents related to benefits or property**

Free legal assistance will enable families of missing veterans to receive support when formalising their status and collecting the necessary information. This stage begins immediately after receiving the news of the loved one going missing, when families are in an emotionally difficult and vulnerable condition, and therefore, legal support is crucial. In addition to its practical value, such state assistance represents a form of recognising the family's needs and a step towards supporting families and protecting their interests.

Well-being  
Material needs

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
Families remain in financial uncertainty: payments may be delayed, and the available assistance is insufficient to cover basic needs during the waiting period	Supplement existing payment mechanisms for relatives of missing warriors with a one-off cash benefit
The survivor's pension is accrued according to general rules and is often too low to meet the family's minimum needs	Introduce an insurance payment for the temporary absence of the breadwinner
Families face excessive bureaucratic procedures and a lack of accessible legal services, which complicates the formalisation of status and benefits	Maintain guarantees of free primary and secondary legal assistance, submission of attorneys' requests, and basic notarial services for the preparation of documents related to benefits or property

## Vocation

### Work

The disappearance of a loved one during the war may affect the relatives' ability to work and their overall condition. In the first weeks or months after receiving the news, they need time to adapt to a new reality. This may affect their capacity to work: concentration declines, and sometimes they need to pause employment in order to regain emotional balance or to begin searching for information about their loved one<sup>244</sup>.

However, not all relatives can afford a prolonged break from work, and some are forced to return to their duties while in a state of crisis, due to the inability to take additional leave, obtain a medical certificate of temporary incapacity for work, or find temporary cover among colleagues. Some continue to work due to financial necessity to support the family, while for others, employment becomes, on the contrary, a source of support, offering a sense of stability, meaning, and partially reducing anxiety.

### Expert Recommendations

- **Grant leave to investigate the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of a family member**

A detailed justification of recommendations is provided in [Section 6. The Journey of Families of Veterans with Disabilities, subsection Well-being. Vocation. Work.](#)

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<sup>244</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. P. 137. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

## **We additionally recommended to:**

### **■ Introduce an additional annual leave entitlement for single parents**

We propose amending legislation to provide a separate annual additional paid leave of up to 14 calendar days for single parents in families of veterans missing in action. This leave should be granted in addition to the main annual leave and should not depend on the length of service or employment conditions.

Single parents may include women or men raising a child without the other spouse. If the parents were not in a registered marriage or paternity has not been established, the relationship between the child and the prisoner of war must be legally confirmed in order to receive the benefit. This guarantee may also be extended to women or men who are daughters or sons of a missing person and are raising children on their own<sup>245</sup>.

This support can help reduce psycho-emotional and physical strain in conditions of prolonged waiting for a loved one and bearing responsibility for children, the well-being of the family, and the fulfilment of all daily duties.

Currently, the provisions governing additional leave are set out in Article 9 of the Law of Ukraine “On Vacations”<sup>246</sup>, but they do not take into account the specific experience of the disappearance of a close relative and the associated impact on the well-being of the parent. A targeted provision is therefore required to ensure that single parents have guaranteed time each year for rest and recovery.

### **■ Guarantee protection from dismissal for parents and carers who are raising a child alone due to the disappearance of the other parent**

At present, single parents with a child under the age of 14, or a child with a disability, cannot be dismissed even at the initiative of the employer

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<sup>245</sup> Letter from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy on granting leave to single mothers No. 5565/0/14-09/13 (19 May 2009). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v5565203-09#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v5565203-09#Text)

<sup>246</sup> Law of Ukraine “On Vacations” No. 504/96-VR (15 November 1996). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/504/96-VR#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/504/96-VR#Text)

(except in the case of full liquidation of the company). This protection also applies to adoptive parents, guardians, and custodians. When a fixed-term contract expires, single parents must be offered alternative employment, and during the job search period, their average salary must be retained (for up to three months). This is regulated by **Article 184 of the Labour Code of Ukraine**<sup>247</sup>.

We propose maintaining the current guarantees and strengthening the dissemination of information for those who find themselves raising a child alone due to the disappearance of their spouse. Such individuals may meet the criteria of a single parent de facto, even if they are not legally recognised as such. It is therefore appropriate to extend to them the benefits already applied to single parents so that they can retain a job in difficult life conditions.

## **Education**

The disappearance of a warrior affects all family members, including children. The absence of contact with one parent, emotional strain, financial difficulties within the family, forced relocation, and adaptation to new conditions – all of these may negatively affect a child’s overall condition, as well as various spheres of life, such as education, motivation, and the ability to learn. Educational losses gradually accumulate, and over time, it becomes increasingly difficult to return to a stable rhythm<sup>248</sup>.

Current legislation provides several educational benefits for children of warriors missing in action, including admission to state and municipal institutions of higher and professional pre-higher education outside the competitive procedure (provided that studies are funded from the state

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<sup>247</sup> Labour Code of Ukraine (23 July 1996). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/322-08#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/322-08#Text)

<sup>248</sup> Olena Zelenska Foundation, Kyiv School of Economics (2023). The Future Index. Pp. 56–57. [zelenskafoundation.org.ua](https://zelenskafoundation.org.ua)

budget)<sup>249</sup>, or compensation of tuition fees for contract-based studies<sup>250</sup>. However, these guarantees cover only those stages of the educational journey at which a child enters the next-level educational institution and do not take into account the needs of children at intermediate stages.

The psycho-emotional state of a child who has lost contact with a parent may temporarily reduce the child's ability to learn. In conditions of emotional exhaustion, the child may lack the internal resources needed to absorb material at the usual pace. If key topics are missed or new knowledge is not mastered in time, this affects the subsequent educational trajectory, including preparation for the NMT, test results, and the overall level of knowledge.

It is important to provide children with tools to restore or strengthen knowledge that may have been lost during the period when their parent went missing. Thus, if the disappearance of one parent occurred while the child was studying at secondary school, the child must be given time for recovery and for returning to the educational trajectory in order to ensure successful admission to a higher education institution. It is precisely during this period that a child may require support in learning school material to compensate for lost knowledge.

The state must become a source of support for children whose parents went missing during service. Children must feel supported during periods of educational loss in crisis conditions and receive assistance in gradually restoring their learning trajectory. It is important not only to provide a benefit but also to create the conditions under which a child will be able to enter a higher education institution independently and successfully.

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<sup>249</sup> Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection." Article 15(23). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text)

<sup>250</sup> Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine. Experimental project on the provision of state assistance for education. [mva.gov.ua/gromadskosti/category/267-derzhavna-dopomoga-na-navchannya/eksperimentalnij-proek](http://mva.gov.ua/gromadskosti/category/267-derzhavna-dopomoga-na-navchannya/eksperimentalnij-proek)

## Expert Recommendations

Provide the following educational guarantees for children of warriors missing in action:

- **continue providing grants for higher education;**
- **free access to NMT preparation courses;**
- **compensation for educational losses in the form of payment for tutoring services;**
- **retain the possibility of priority enrolment in kindergartens;**
- **retain free meals in schools and kindergartens.**

A detailed justification of the proposals is provided in [Section 5. The Journey of Veterans' Families, subsection Well-being. Vocation. Education.](#)

Well-being  
Vocation

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
<p>Families of those missing in action often lack time and resources to adapt to a new reality, but are forced to return to work quickly without additional labour guarantees</p>	<p>The right to leave to investigate the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of a family member</p>
<p>Single parents face emotional and everyday burdens without guaranteed time for rest and recovery</p>	<p>Additional annual leave for single parents</p>
<p>Existing guarantees of protection from dismissal do not always cover parents and carers who are effectively raising a child alone</p>	<p>Protection from dismissal for parents and carers who are raising a child alone due to the disappearance of the other parent</p>
<p>The disappearance of a parent negatively affects the child's psycho-emotional state, reducing the ability to learn and potentially leading to educational losses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue to provide grants for higher education</li> <li>■ Compensation for educational losses in the form of payment for tutoring services</li> <li>■ Free access to NMT preparation courses</li> </ul>
<p>Additional financial expenses for meals and attending educational institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Maintain priority enrolment in kindergartens and free meals in schools and kindergartens</li> </ul>

# Conclusions

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**1** Families of those missing in action live in a state of chronic uncertainty combined with the need for active engagement: searching for information, communicating with the military and state institutions, and carrying out advocacy. Such a condition is emotionally and physically exhausting, affecting health, the ability to work, maintain family relationships, and plan life.

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**2** The needs of families change significantly depending on the stage of the journey they are going through – notification of disappearance, obtaining status, or long-term waiting. Each stage requires specific and comprehensive forms of support – informational, psychological, legal, or material. Available state support is uneven and insufficiently tailored to the real needs of families; it often depends on the initiative of family members rather than on a well-established support system. This intensifies exhaustion and contributes to an overall decline in the well-being of family members.

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**3** The Ministry of Veterans Affairs must play not only an informational but also a coordinating role in supporting families of those missing in action, as part of veteran policy. These families must be recognised as beneficiaries of support on an equal footing with other groups, and such support must provide not episodic responses or information, but sustained follow-up of the families throughout the entire period of disappearance: from the moment of notification to the change of status or the return of the loved one.

# SECTION 8

## **The Journey of Families of Prisoners of War and Veterans Liberated from Captivity**

# Abstract

This section examines the journeys of families of prisoners of war and veterans who were liberated from captivity, experiencing their own realities of loss, anxiety, responsibility, and the struggle to free their loved ones.

## Here we consider:

- the challenges, roles, and needs of families of prisoners of war and of those liberated from captivity at different stages of the experiences: from receiving the news of captivity to the completion of the veteran's service;
- the legal status of families of prisoners of war and its limitations;
- the institutions and bodies with which the relatives of prisoners of war and of those liberated from captivity interact.

We additionally **provide recommendations** on how the state can support such families across various environments of well-being, like health, housing and the physical environment, material needs (payments, social insurance and legal protection) and vocation (employment and children's education).

# Introduction

The journeys of families of prisoners of war and of those liberated from captivity are a distinct, complex, and often invisible part of the experiences lived through by families of warriors in the Russo-Ukrainian war. It begins abruptly – at the moment when contact with the service member is lost or when the family receives notification of captivity. From that point onward, the family's life changes fundamentally: waiting, uncertainty, searching, hope, fear, and struggle become part of everyday life.

Families try to gather any available information – through the military unit, brothers- and sisters-in-arms, the Coordination Headquarters, the police, the Security Service of Ukraine, volunteers, social media, and open sources – hoping to find news about their loved one. Often, they have no clear action algorithm and must navigate the search independently.

Families may wait a long time without official confirmation of captivity, which prevents access to social protection, compensation, or even basic information. They remain in a state of waiting with no clear horizon or understanding of next steps. After additional evidence emerges – from brothers- and sisters-in-arms, the command, international organisations, social media, or interrogation videos – the status of the loved one may change to “prisoner of war.” The family may initiate this change, but it may also occur without their involvement if the military unit or other authorised bodies receive confirmation of captivity. At the same time, there is no single scenario for changing status: different institutions may rely on different sources of verification.

After status confirmation, families may wait months or even years for the release of their loved one. They often have no access to up-to-date information about the circumstances of captivity, the whereabouts, or the health of the prisoner of war, creating a major information gap. Moreover, families have no separate legal status and therefore do not belong to any designated category of assistance. They do not receive

automatic access to psychological or social support, or to guaranteed communication mechanisms. At best, support is provided by charitable and volunteer organisations or human rights defenders; in many cases, families are left alone with uncertainty.

When a loved one is freed from captivity, a new phase starts – a time of relief, but also of intricate challenges for the family. The liberated person may have physical injuries, consequences of torture, sleep disorders, silence, aggression, or apathy. The family does not always know how to act, support, communicate, or respond. Relatives are often unprepared for the return and do not know where to seek help.

Those liberated from captivity may also undergo long-term rehabilitation, health treatment, and recovery. This experience reshapes the entire structure of family life. Relatives leave their jobs, move closer to healthcare facilities, reorganise their daily routines, and may experience stress, chronic fatigue, anxiety, and emotional burnout.

Despite the depth of this experience, current public policy does not provide comprehensive support for families of prisoners of war and of those liberated from captivity as beneficiaries with their own experience of waiting, unique stages, challenges, and needs. Their support is largely limited to isolated response procedures from specialised ministries, institutions, or international organisations. Families must also interact and communicate with a large number of institutions, each responsible for different functions.

When a warrior is considered missing in action or there is suspicion of captivity, various state institutions become involved in the process. For example, the police collect and verify DNA samples, identify bodies, and prepare documentation concerning warriors missing in action. The Security Service of Ukraine may be responsible for verifying information about possible captivity or missing in action, as well as coordinating search measures. The National Information Bureau keeps records of prisoners of war and those missing in action. In contrast, the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War communicates with families, provides explanations regarding procedures, and coordinates interagency cooperation.

None of these institutions bears full responsibility for coordinating the entire process, from the initial notification of the family about the disappearance, confirmation of captivity, to the exchange and return. As a result, the family is compelled to initiate communication independently, collect documents, synchronise data across institutions, and verify the information provided.

Public policy must ensure coherence, clarity, and accessibility of information within this multi-layered engagement. It must provide support at every stage, from the moment contact with the warrior is lost to return from captivity and recovery. Although it would be easier for families of prisoners of war to have a single body that coordinates all matters relating to information about the warrior’s whereabouts in captivity and their liberation, such a model is currently impossible. Nevertheless, responsibility for systemic support of families should be concentrated in a single body, namely the Ministry of Veterans Affairs. This would ensure continuity, order, and predictability in support processes for families.

State support for families of prisoners of war and those liberated from captivity must not be temporary or supplementary, but an integral part of veteran policy. It may be needed by wives and husbands, children, parents, siblings, and other family members affected by this experience.

Key institutions involved in supporting families of prisoners of war

Institution	Powers
<p><b>Military units</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Record the fact of a service member’s disappearance and captivity, and transmit the information to the TRSSC</li> <li>■ Conduct a service investigation (up to two months) into the circumstances of captivity</li> <li>■ If the military unit has a patronage service, it may provide consultation and support to the family in preparing documents and may participate in the search for the warrior</li> </ul>

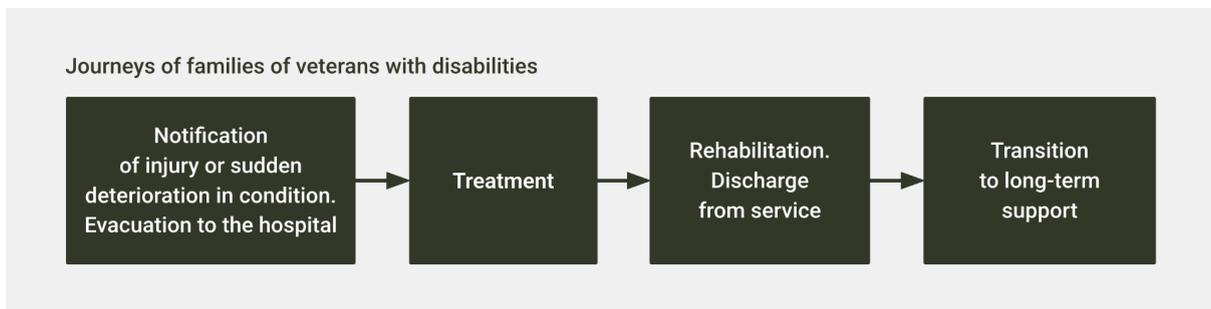
Institution	Powers
<b>Territorial Recruitment and Social Support Centres (TRSSC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Notify the family about the disappearance of the service member and captivity</li> <li>■ Provide recommendations on further actions: initiating a search, applying for benefits</li> <li>■ Issue the family an extract from the internal investigation report conducted by the military unit</li> </ul>
<b>National Police of Ukraine</b>	<p>Records the report of the warrior's disappearance, enters the information into the URPTI, and collects DNA samples from relatives</p>
<b>Security Service of Ukraine</b>	<p>Has access to operational information regarding the circumstances of the warrior's disappearance or captivity through the Joint Centre and may issue a certificate confirming the fact of captivity. Interacts with the National Police, the Coordination Headquarters, and the ICRC</p>
<b>Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Coordination Headquarters)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Central body for supporting families: manages the warrior's personal account, issues extracts upon request, provides action algorithms, and interacts with other agencies</li> <li>■ Provides legal and psychological assistance.</li> </ul>
<b>National Information Bureau (NIB)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Collects information about prisoners of war</li> <li>■ Issues an extract indicating the current status</li> </ul>
<b>Central Tracing Agency Bureau of the International Committee of the Red Cross (CTA ICRC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The only international body whose information is recognised by military units and used by the Coordination Headquarters as grounds for changing a service member's status</li> <li>■ Submits requests to Russia's public authorities regarding the presence of the warrior among prisoners of war, conditions of detention, and state of health</li> </ul>

Institution	Powers
<b>Ministry of Defence of Ukraine</b>	Defines the procedure for formalising service members' statuses, including the status of "prisoner of war," and maintains records of missing persons, prisoners of war, and those liberated from captivity
<b>Ministry of Veterans Affairs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Families may apply for general information on benefits and available services for families of prisoners of war<sup>251</sup></li> <li>■ Families of prisoners of war are currently not included in the beneficiaries of veteran policy. The Ministry does not provide them with systemic support</li> <li>■ The Ministry of Veterans Affairs may serve as the body responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive support policy for families of prisoners of war, from the moment captivity is confirmed to the warrior's full return to life after service</li> </ul>

<sup>251</sup> New initiative of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs: families of prisoners of war or veterans missing in action may obtain information from the Unified State Register of War Veterans through Administrative Service Centres. Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine. [mva.gov.ua/prescenter/category/86-novini/nova-initsiativa-minveteraniv-simi-polonenih-abo-zniklih-bez-visti-veteraniv-mozhut-otrimati-vidomosti-z-edrvv-cherez-tsnap](http://mva.gov.ua/prescenter/category/86-novini/nova-initsiativa-minveteraniv-simi-polonenih-abo-zniklih-bez-visti-veteraniv-mozhut-otrimati-vidomosti-z-edrvv-cherez-tsnap)

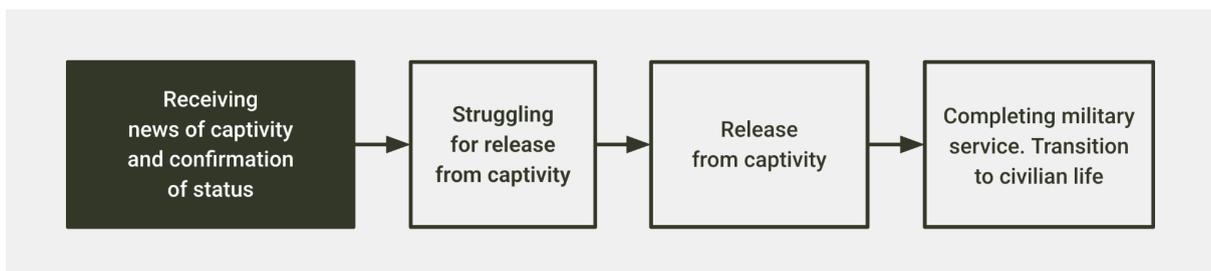
# Challenges and needs along the journey

Families of prisoners of war and veterans liberated from captivity follow their own journeys alongside their loved ones – from the moment of going missing in action, searching and waiting for news, to the struggle for liberation and return home. It is a journey of anxiety, hope, responsibility, and profound emotional experiences, and it requires state support that takes into account the specific nature of this experience.



## Stage 1. Receiving news of captivity and confirmation of the status

Changes in the life of a warrior's family along this journey often begin with the loss of contact. Relatives may know about the combat mission or relocation of their loved one, but then communication suddenly stops for an extended period. This may happen for various reasons and not necessarily because of captivity, yet it creates distressing uncertainty that compels the family to look for answers.



Some time after the loss of contact, the family may receive official notification that the warrior is missing in action. From that moment on, they begin reaching out to various institutions – the military unit, the Territorial Recruitment and Social Support Centre, and sometimes the National Police or the Security Service of Ukraine. They may also register the disappearance with the police or contact the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Later, when confirmed information emerges, e.g., confirmation of captivity or death, the need to change the initial status arises.

Lost contact

Whom the family contacts	Key challenges	Needs
Military unit, brothers- or sisters-in-arms	Distressing uncertainty, lack of verified information	Explanations of possible reasons, basic support

After a period of uncertainty, the family may receive news that their loved one is in captivity. Under the official procedure, such information should come from the military unit or the TRSSC, but in practice, this is not always the case. Some families learn about captivity from unofficial sources: from brothers- or sisters-in-arms who have returned, from the media, or through personal inquiries to public authorities, including the NIB or the Coordination Headquarters<sup>252</sup>.

The change of status from “missing in action” to “prisoner of war” often occurs with delays. At times, there is insufficient timely information exchange between military units, the NIB, and the Coordination Headquarters, which complicates formal confirmation of status. As a result, even when the fact of captivity has already been established, the family may remain without access to timely information, consultation, or support for a long period. To remove this barrier, it would be appropriate to introduce systemic coordination between the NIB,

<sup>252</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One. P. 143. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

the Coordination Headquarters, and military units regarding automatic notification of status changes.

At the same time, the status of “prisoner of war” is not permanent. Later, the person may be liberated from captivity, or recognised as fallen if no information about their fate is available. Each of these changes causes a new wave of legal, emotional, and administrative challenges for the family. This is why they require not only legal support, but also a stable and adaptive support model capable of responding to changing conditions, both from the state and authorised services.

Official confirmation of captivity is based on various documents: testimonies of brothers- or sisters-in-arms, confirmation from the ICRC. The organisation, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, has the mandate to confirm the status of prisoners of war. Still, in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war, it does not always fulfil this task. For example, the ICRC does not have full access to detention facilities on the territory of Russia and does not publicly insist on gaining such access. In addition, the organisation adheres to a policy of neutrality, which involves non-disclosure of violations of detention conditions, even when these are documented. This makes transparent communication with families of prisoners of war impossible and breeds distrust and frustration.

Since there is no single mechanism that determines which evidence is sufficient to establish captivity, military units act according to their own approaches. Some take into account testimonies of brothers- or sisters-in-arms, whereas others insist exclusively on official confirmation from international institutions. This results in legal uncertainty and unequal access to social protection, as the status of captivity may remain unformalised for long periods.

The state must establish a clear and unified procedure for confirming the fact of captivity, which provides for alternative sources of information in situations where the ICRC cannot supply the necessary data.

## Receiving news of captivity and confirmation of status

Whom the family contacts	Key challenges	Needs
Military unit, TRSSC, brothers- and sisters-in-arms, media, NIB, Coordination Headquarters, ICRC	Unofficial sources, lack of operational notification, delays in status changes, absence of a unified mechanism for recognising evidence, and the ICRC lacking full access to detention sites	A single verified notification channel, explanations of next steps, automatic notification of status changes, and a unified procedure for confirming captivity

Tools for tracking and gathering information about prisoners of war already exist, including memos, roadmaps, NIB hotlines<sup>253</sup>, and the personal account. However, these tools require regular updates, clearer wording, and adaptation to the changing conditions of wartime. Families must receive clear instructions: what to do, where to apply, which documents to collect – and they must be able to obtain consultations without unnecessary barriers. The state must strengthen this navigation at the level of regional TRSSCs, military units, hotlines, and online platforms.

Despite the official confirmation of captivity, there is still no separate status for the family, even though it has its own experience, is under stress, and may require support.

After receiving news of captivity, the family's emotional condition changes abruptly: instead of exhausting waiting and prolonged uncertainty, they may experience shock, a sense of loss, emotional paralysis, or, conversely, an impulsive need to act – to contact institutions, search, and demand answers<sup>254</sup>. At this moment, crisis stabilisation is crucial: emergency psychological support, and the

<sup>253</sup> The National Information Bureau (NIB) was established in March 2022 to collect and summarise data on prisoners of war, fallen warriors, missing, and illegally detained on both sides of the conflict. [nib.gov.ua](http://nib.gov.ua)

<sup>254</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. P. 140. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

presence of someone who can clearly explain the next steps and help avoid disorientation.

The family may also require legal support, since relatives often gather information about their loved one, initiate the status change, prepare applications to the Coordination Headquarters, submit requests to the NIB, and prepare the document package for the military unit. A family may independently locate photos or videos confirming the warrior's captivity. If the image is not sufficiently clear, they may initiate portrait analysis within criminal proceedings, obtain an expert opinion, and forward it to the NIB, the Coordination Headquarters, and the Security Service of Ukraine. Once confirmed, these bodies may recommend that the military unit change the status and issue **Certificate No. 55 (On Staying in Places of Detention as a Result of the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation)**<sup>255</sup>.

Situations in which the family has partial or contradictory evidence require special attention: for example, a brother- or sister-in-arms returns from captivity and provides information about the warrior's location, but the military unit refuses to change the status without confirmation from the ICRC. In such cases, the state must demand efficiency from international organisations and require commitments for timely information updates, including on the basis of verified testimonies of brothers- and sisters-in-arms. **Policy must recognise and support the efforts of families in establishing legal status, rather than leaving them alone with procedural uncertainty.**

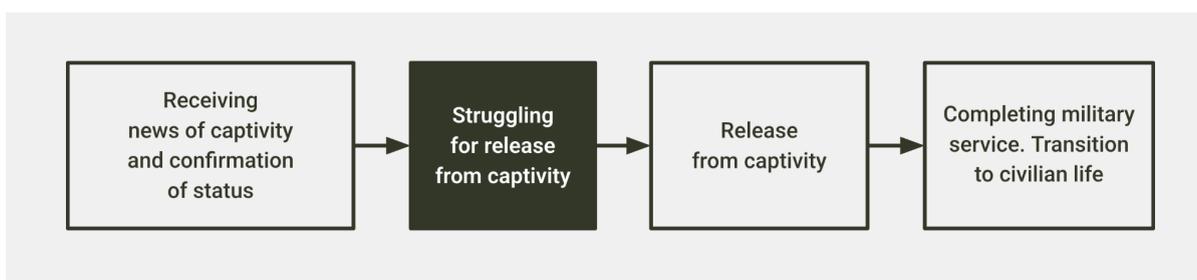
At this stage, the main role of public policy is to provide explanation and navigation for families through different notification systems. Even if the status of prisoner of war has not yet been formally confirmed, support is crucial during the period in which the family experiences uncertainty, concern for their loved one, and waits for their liberation from captivity.

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<sup>255</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (20 January 2023). Resolution No. 55 "On Approval of the Procedure for Issuing Certificates on the Persons' Stay in Places of Detention as a Result of Armed Aggression against Ukraine or Internment in Neutral States." [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/55-2023-п#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/55-2023-п#Text)

Challenges	Needs	Required Support
No separate status for families of prisoners of war	Recognition of the specific situation of the family experiencing stress	Developing approaches to supporting the families of prisoners of war
Emotional shock, sense of loss, paralysis or impulsive actions after receiving news of captivity	Crisis stabilisation, clarification of next steps	Crisis psychological support; the presence of a professional who can explain the required actions
Prolonged period of uncertainty, waiting without a finalised status	Explanation of procedures, navigation, informational and psychological support	Ensuring communication and support for families across different notification systems, even without a finalised status

## Stage 2. Struggling for release from captivity



After confirmation of captivity, a new stage begins for the family – the period of waiting for liberation. During this time, relatives may try to learn more details about the warrior’s stay in captivity, maintain at least indirect contact through authorised bodies, and adapt to a new, unstable mode of uncertainty in daily life. Some partners and relatives

of prisoners of war take on an active public role as representatives of the interests of the person deprived of liberty<sup>256</sup>.

At this stage, loved ones of warriors in captivity may experience particularly acute psychological and physical exhaustion. They are often forced to combine several roles: working or studying, caring for children, looking after elderly relatives, communicating with state institutions, participating in civic initiatives, or supporting other families of prisoners of war. This often happens while their own health deteriorates: families deprioritise their own well-being and focus solely on whatever might bring their loved one closer to being liberated from captivity.

Partners of prisoners of war often remain in a state of emotional numbness – life feels on hold until the warrior returns. Many cannot imagine the future or make decisions until they know what is happening to their loved one. If the family has children, an additional challenge arises – maintaining the child’s connection with their father or mother and explaining the circumstances of captivity ethically and carefully.

At this stage, it is important to ensure access to psychological support – individual therapy or group meetings that help reduce feelings of isolation and confusion.

Challenges	Needs	Required Support
Prolonged period of uncertainty, unstable daily routine	Information on the warrior’s whereabouts, maintaining contact through authorised bodies	Ensuring the possibility of receiving information through official channels and bodies
Psychological and physical exhaustion of families, emotional numbness, and loss of a sense of the future	Psychological support, opportunities for emotional relief, stabilisation, and support of personal resources	Individual therapy and group meetings to reduce isolation and confusion, psychological support and follow-up throughout the entire period of captivity

<sup>256</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

Advocacy by families of prisoners of war requires special attention<sup>257</sup>. A family may face a constant need to organise logistics – regular trips to various institutions, military units, governmental authorities, including local governments or offices of international organisations. All this is done to get at least some information about the whereabouts of the service member, the circumstances of captivity, and to confirm that the person is alive and has access to humanitarian assistance. Families look, for example, for references in ICRC reports or other confirmations, as well as possibilities for correspondence or video communication.

Such activity often lasts for years and takes place under conditions of uncertainty, without any guarantee of result, but with continuous expenditure of the family’s time, money, and emotional resources. For this reason, targeted assistance is particularly crucial at this stage – financial or material support provided to a specific family according to its needs (e.g., a one-off payment or housing assistance). Equally important are leave entitlements and mechanisms for compensating expenses, including travel to places relevant to the search, to institutions, or for participation in investigative or legal procedures.

Challenges	Needs	Required Support
Combining multiple roles (work, caregiving, communication with state institutions, and participation in initiatives)	Reducing the burden, support with everyday and social matters	Targeted assistance – financial or material (one-off payments, housing assistance, compensation for expenses, and leave entitlements)
Ongoing advocacy, numerous requests to institutions, and logistical burden	Convenient engagement with public authorities, access to legal information	Legal support, compensation for travel expenses, participation in investigative or legal procedures

<sup>257</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

It is also important to streamline mechanisms for the public recognition and representation of the experience of captivity. The state must establish consistent rules for presenting this topic in the media, in the educational environment, and at public events. This concerns both official institutional recognition and symbolic practices, such as using the flag of prisoners of war as a sign of solidarity and support. Initiatives to create and raise flags in honour of prisoners of war and warriors missing in action are already emerging in Ukraine<sup>258</sup> – symbols of hope for the return of Ukrainian prisoners and missing warriors. Such symbolism, especially when endorsed at the state level, acknowledges and makes visible the experience of families of prisoners of war and can serve as symbolic support for them by emphasising that the state remembers each and every person.

Another challenge at this stage involves court proceedings initiated by the occupying authorities against prisoners of war (a violation of international humanitarian law). In these conditions, families must engage with the media and international human rights organisations. This is often a psychologically difficult and prolonged experience. Therefore, the state must ensure systemic institutional support for families throughout the entire period during which the warrior remains in captivity. This includes legal navigation, giving information about rights, access to consultations, and regular provision of information on available forms of psychological and other support. Such support should not only respond to individual requests but actively accompany the family, taking into account changes in conditions, the duration of captivity, and the needs of a family living through the experience of waiting.

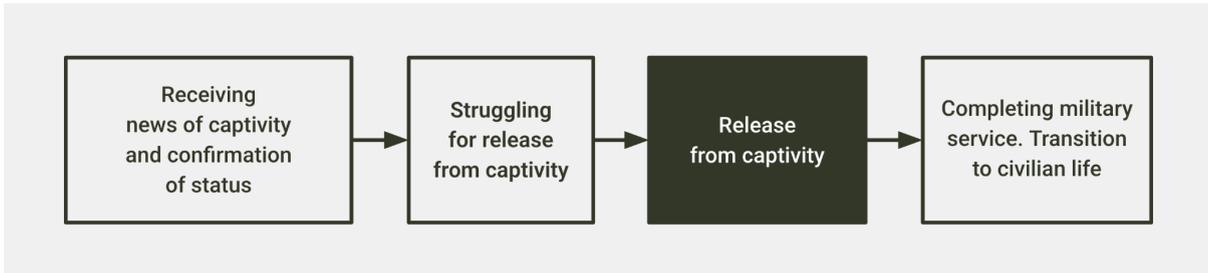
The stage at which a family fights for the liberation of a warrior from captivity is not only a waiting period, but also one of highly proactive and exhausting activity. For this reason, support policies at this stage must focus on strengthening the family's everyday well-being.

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<sup>258</sup> Ukraine Proposes to Honour Prisoners of War and the Missing with a Special Flag (8 July 2024). Ukrinform. [ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3883168-v-ukraini-proponuut-vsanovuvati-polonenih-i-zniklih-bezvisti-specialnim-praporom.html](https://ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3883168-v-ukraini-proponuut-vsanovuvati-polonenih-i-zniklih-bezvisti-specialnim-praporom.html)

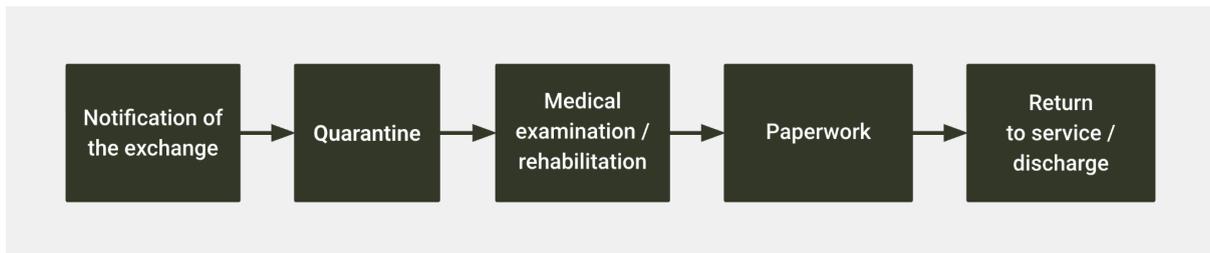
Challenges	Needs	Required Support
Absence of established forms of public recognition of the experience of captivity	Symbolic and public recognition, support through shared symbols of remembrance	Establishing rules for the coverage of the topic in the media, educational environments, and at public events; official approval of symbols (including the flag)
Prolonged exhausting activity of the family without guaranteed results	Ongoing support and follow-up throughout the entire period of captivity	Systemic support policy focused on strengthening the family's everyday well-being

## Stage 3. Release from captivity



After the notification and the warrior's liberation from captivity, the family enters a new stage, which may involve either a return to military service or its completion. The process of liberation, although a positive development that alleviates some of the difficult stress, uncertainty, and prolonged waiting, does not signify the end of all difficulties. It requires complex logistics for the family: travel to the quarantine location after the prisoner exchange, relocation to a healthcare or rehabilitation facility, and is accompanied by bureaucratic challenges related to paperwork and preparing for long-term adaptation.

## Stages of release from captivity



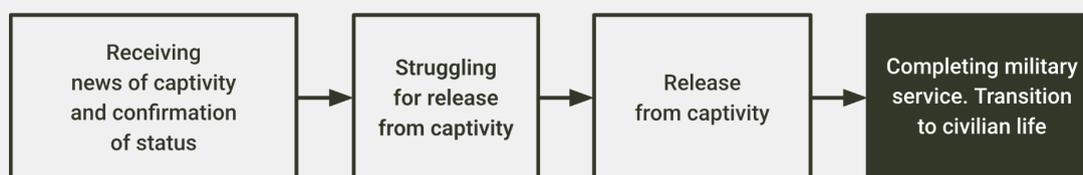
After receiving information about the whereabouts and date of the warrior's return, families typically try to arrive as early as possible, sometimes even before the quarantine period ends, in order to be close to their loved one. Occasionally, meetings with psychologists and military unit representatives are organised for families, where they are informed about legal, medical, and social procedures, as well as how to interact with warriors in the first days after liberation from captivity. This includes basic knowledge about the psychological and physical state of the person after captivity: reluctance to speak or be around others, possible fear reactions to touch, silence, or emotional detachment – all of this can be a normal reaction in the initial days.

At the same time, such information is not always provided, and often families are left without an understanding of how to communicate appropriately and sensitively with their loved one after their return. Therefore, the state must ensure the systemic distribution of such materials not only after liberation from captivity, but also during the waiting period before the exchange and preparations for the meeting. It is also important to inform the family about the next steps after the exchange: the specifics of quarantine, possible treatment and rehabilitation, movement within the country, return to service, or discharge.

When waiting for the exchange, during exchange, treatment, and rehabilitation, family members may take leave from work or even resign, rent accommodation near a healthcare facility to be close to their loved one during initial rehabilitation, accompany them to physicians, and support them in daily life and adaptation. This is why it is crucial to provide housing and employment support during this period in the form of compensation for housing and utility bills, as well as guaranteed leave entitlements.

Challenges	Needs	Required Support
Logistical challenges: travel to quarantine locations, healthcare or rehabilitation facilities	Organising movement and staying close to the warrior	Compensation for housing costs, assistance with renting accommodation
Bureaucratic challenges: paperwork, preparation for adaptation	Legal and administrative support	Guaranteed assistance with preparing documents, procedural support
Insufficient information about the psychological and the physical state of the person after captivity	Knowledge of possible reactions and communication specifics	Systemic distribution of informational materials on adaptation, preparation for the meeting, interaction during quarantine, treatment, and rehabilitation
Limited ability to be with the loved one during treatment and rehabilitation	Ability to support the warrior during initial adaptation	Providing leave, employment support, and ensuring family participation in the treatment and the rehabilitation process

## Stage 4. Completing military service. Transition to civilian life



The end of service after release from captivity marks not the end, but the continuation of the journey for the family. During this time, the family may assist the warrior in completing paperwork, coordinate the rehabilitation plan, and support the restoration of shared daily life.

The number of these responsibilities also complicates the process of family recovery after the experience of waiting for the warrior's return.

Recovery, both physical and psychological, involves the whole family, regardless of the formal course of medical rehabilitation. It concerns not only the adaptation and needs of the veteran liberated from captivity, but also psychoeducation for loved ones, participation in support groups, and access to individual therapy.

The visibility and understanding of the family's experience are important. For example, in the study "The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One," partners of veterans liberated from captivity noted that they felt societal expectations regarding their behaviour, particularly restraint, emotional stability, and selfless support<sup>259</sup>. This could create pressure, especially against the backdrop of deep exhaustion and confusion. Therefore, it is important to recognise the family's experience and provide psychological support during this period to help them find new sources of strength and self-care.

After liberation from captivity, the family gradually enters the sphere of public veteran policy: they gain the right to maintain housing and utility compensations, pension benefits if disability is established, and guaranteed access to social and educational services for children. This is especially relevant in situations where the rehabilitation of the loved one takes place away from home, requires additional expenses, or impacts the ability of family members to continue their education or work. The state must ensure conditions where the family is not forced to choose between supporting the warrior and maintaining their own well-being.

It is also important to note that if the person liberated from captivity is found to have injuries, illness, or disability, this marks the beginning of the journey of the family of a veteran with a disability. More details about this experience and the necessary support are provided in [Section 7](#).

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<sup>259</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

Challenges	Needs	Required Support
<p>Heavy burden on the family due to paperwork, rehabilitation coordination, and restoring daily life</p>	<p>Alleviating administrative and daily burdens</p>	<p>Assistance with paperwork, support in rehabilitation procedures</p>
<p>Physical and psychological recovery of the entire family after prolonged stress and waiting, social pressure, and expectations of “restraint” and “selflessness” from the families</p>	<p>Psychoeducation for the family, psychological support, teaching self-support to find personal resources, and recognition of the family’s experience</p>	<p>Support groups, psychological support programmes to restore resources, and experience visibility programmes</p>

# Well-being

The journeys of families of prisoners of war and those liberated from captivity are marked by prolonged uncertainty, emotional strain, and the need to independently search for answers in a situation where transparency and support are lacking. It requires considerable resilience from families – legal, psychological, and organisational.

At the same time, the state should not be a mere observer but an active partner that builds a clear system of actions, assistance, and recognition, encompassing various aspects of life. State guarantees concerning health, housing, education, and other needs are a form of recognition of their experience. Below, we will explore how the state can support these families across different dimensions of well-being.

**Important:** We do not provide a comprehensive overview of all possible problems and needs that may arise in families of prisoners of war and those released from captivity. Instead, we focus on potential solutions that the state can implement to meet their needs. We identified them by analysing available data and information.

The recommendations are the result of the Coalition of Organisations' work based on expert experience in the field of veterans' affairs and discussions/consultations with experts from various fields. We understand that we cannot cover all possible challenges and potential solutions, so it is important to continue exploring these topics to develop effective support for veterans' families.

## Health

The life of families of prisoners of war and warriors liberated from captivity often involves prolonged stress and significant challenges to their mental and physical health. Waiting for news about a loved one in captivity, the fear for their life and safety, helplessness, and constant anxiety create deep psycho-emotional tension.

After liberation from captivity, the next challenge is adaptation. Families may lack knowledge on how to support their loved ones in the course of recovery, while also dealing with the effects of their own traumatic experiences, often neglecting their own well-being.

## Expert Recommendations

- **Provide the possibility of state compensation for psychotherapeutic services**

A detailed justification of the proposal is provided in [Section 5. The Journey of Veterans' Families, subsection Well-being. Health.](#)

Well-being  
Health

Family Challenges	Recommendation/Solution
The impact of uncertainty, stress and emotional strain on mental health	Continue to provide state compensation for psychotherapy services

## Housing and the physical environment

Housing stability is one of the key components of a family's well-being. Families of prisoners of war are often forced to travel to various institutions, such as the Coordination Headquarters, military units, law enforcement agencies, and judicial bodies, to provide testimony, clarify information, or confirm status. Stable housing is a fundamental condition for organising such logistical efforts. Furthermore, after returning from captivity, the veteran will need a safe space for rehabilitation and recovery. Therefore, access to housing impacts the well-being of the family both during the waiting period and after the return of the loved one.

Currently, families of veterans who are either in captivity or have been liberated from captivity do not have a specific state support mechanism for purchasing housing. Most housing programmes, such as the eOselia program, provide subsidised mortgage loans only for service members, not for their families. In the case of captivity, they cannot access this right.

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale aggression, many Ukrainian families have lost their homes. To support these families, the state has introduced compensation mechanisms. For example, **CMU Resolution No. 600 of 30 May 2023** approved the **Procedure for Compensation for Destroyed Real Estate**<sup>260</sup>. However, families of prisoners of war and warriors liberated from captivity often have to wait for compensation on general grounds, without consideration of their experiences and urgent housing needs.

They may also find themselves in difficult housing conditions if they were forced to evacuate, their home was destroyed, or their property is located in currently occupied territories. The prolonged waiting period for liberation from captivity, complex engagement with institutions, and the need for recovery after the warrior's return all contribute to the heightened need for stable access to housing.

Today, current legislation does not provide compensation for rental (sublease) expenses for families of prisoners of war. Some support programmes for internally displaced persons may partially cover such expenses, but these do not take into account the specific experience of families of prisoners of war and are not a systemic solution within the broader policy of supporting families.

However, specific housing provision for families of veterans missing in action is not yet provided. They do not have access to programmes available, for example, to families of the fallen – the repair of damaged housing, the allocation of an apartment within two years after registration, or the opportunity to be granted loans for construction

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<sup>260</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (30 May 2023). Resolution No. 600 "On Approving the Procedure for Compensation for Destroyed Real Estate." [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/600-2023-n#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/600-2023-n#Text)

with deferred repayment<sup>261</sup>, even though they may similarly require support to ensure their housing well-being.

Moreover, if one spouse is in captivity, the family cannot sell property they own if this person is the owner or co-owner<sup>262</sup>. It is also impossible to purchase property while one spouse has the status of a prisoner of war, since under the **Family Code of Ukraine**, property acquired during marriage constitutes joint property, and therefore, its purchase requires the consent of both spouses<sup>263</sup>.

## Expert Recommendations

- **Provide a one-off subsidised loan for purchasing housing, i.e., add to the list of privileged groups the families of prisoners of war**
- **Ensure priority in the queue for compensation for destroyed housing**
- **Ensure payment of housing and utility services for up to three years, regardless of housing ownership**

A detailed justification of proposals is provided in [Section 7. The Journey of Families of Veterans Missing in Action, subsection Well-being. Housing and physical environment.](#)

### **We additionally propose to:**

- **Introduce compensation for rental housing costs during the period of a service member's captivity and for one year after their liberation from captivity**

If the veteran provided for the family before and during service, including covering rental housing costs, their loved ones lose not only emotional support but also financial stability after the veteran goes missing in action and is captured.

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<sup>261</sup> Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection." Article 15, paras. 8, 15, 16. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text)

<sup>262</sup> Civil Code of Ukraine. Article 361. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/435-15#Text)

<sup>263</sup> Family Code of Ukraine. Article 60. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2947-14#Text)

We propose to introduce a separate mechanism for compensating rental housing costs for the families of prisoners of war and those liberated from captivity for the entire period of captivity and for one year after their return. This will allow the family to stabilise their daily life, support the recovery process, and avoid additional financial burdens during the period of rehabilitation.

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
Families may be unable to purchase or improve housing due to reduced income and legal restrictions concerning property	One-off preferential loan for the purchase of housing
Families may be left unprotected due to the loss of housing and legal uncertainty	Priority in the queue for compensation for destroyed housing
Additional financial burden arising from the payment of utility services and the limitation of existing benefits to property owners or registered residents	Payment of housing and utility services for up to three years, regardless of housing ownership
The captivity of a loved one may lead to a drastic decline in the family's financial stability and difficulties in paying for rented accommodation	Compensation for rental housing costs during the period of captivity and for one year after the liberation from captivity of a service member

## Material needs

### Payments

In a situation where a service member is in captivity, the financial burden on the family increases dramatically. This is especially felt if the warrior was the sole or primary breadwinner in the family, as well as if the family has children or elderly individuals under their care.

Families often need to cover additional expenses related to logistics to state institutions or exchange location, as well as psychological or medical support. Currently, support for families of prisoners of war does not guarantee access to state compensation, which can further deepen the financial instability in the family.

Currently, families of prisoners of war, like families of warriors missing in action, are entitled to receive part of their monetary provision at a rate of 50%. This right is regulated by the provisions set out in **MoD Order No. 330 (as amended)**<sup>264</sup> and the **Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families”**<sup>265</sup>.

Monetary support for prisoners of war is paid to individuals whom the warrior previously designated in a written directive. In the absence of such a directive (which is not a mandatory element of service documentation), it is divided equally among the closest relatives: one of the spouses, parents, legal representatives of minor children, and adult children with disabilities acquired before the age of 18. If there are no immediate relatives, the payments go to other relatives – adult children, brothers, or sisters, whose legal representative was the service member. In such cases, each of them may receive up to 20% of the monthly provision of the prisoner of war. The remaining funds are retained for the veteran.

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<sup>264</sup> Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine “On Amending the Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 595/DSK of 8 November 2016” No. 330 (23 October 2021). [mod.gov.ua/diyalnist/normativno-pravova-baza/dsk](http://mod.gov.ua/diyalnist/normativno-pravova-baza/dsk)

<sup>265</sup> Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families” No. 2011-XII (20 December 1991). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text)

Distribution scheme of monthly monetary provision for prisoners of war

Primary distribution	If there are no close relatives	Remaining funds
<p><b>Divided equally among the closest relatives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Spouses</li> <li>■ Parents</li> <li>■ Legal representatives of minor children</li> <li>■ Adult children with disabilities acquired before the age of 18</li> </ul> <p>Up to 50% of the monthly financial support, divided equally</p>	<p><b>Payments are transferred to other relatives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Adult children</li> <li>■ Siblings, if the veteran was their legal representative</li> </ul> <p>Up to 20% of the monthly financial support for each</p>	<p><b>Retained for the veteran</b></p>

In practice, difficulties may arise during the implementation of this guarantee. The process of formalising payments is often accompanied by delays or a lack of coordination between various authorities (military units, recruitment centres, and social protection bodies), and families may not have sufficient information about the procedure or their status<sup>266</sup>.

Another systemic problem with payments to families is the current model of providing financial support through the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine. This mechanism has emerged because this ministry is responsible for issues related to temporary occupation and the associated humanitarian consequences. However, this approach treats the experience of captivity only as part of the reintegration policy, neglecting the need for systemic social support for families of prisoners of war.

<sup>266</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

## Expert Recommendations

- **Introduce an annual one-off cash benefit to the family for each full year of the military service member's captivity**

We propose maintaining the 50% payment of the monetary provision for families of prisoners of war, but enhancing it with additional support in the form of a one-off payment. Currently, this payment is provided by the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, but it applies to both families of civilians and prisoners of war<sup>267</sup>. However, the experience of families of veterans in captivity has its own specificities and, therefore, requires a separate approach.

Families of prisoners of war are essentially living in a prolonged psychological crisis, social isolation, and economic vulnerability. For months or even years, they live in constant anxiety about the life and health of their loved one, without verified information about their condition. This experience creates chronic stress, emotional burnout, difficulties with concentration and life planning, especially if there are children in the family.

Economic vulnerability also increases: the family often loses not only the daily presence of the service member but also their contribution to the household budget, particularly if the service member was the sole or primary breadwinner.

That is why they need targeted and regular support from the state, which acknowledges these challenges. Introducing the annual one-off cash benefit is a form of such support – not only material but also moral. The compensation mechanism takes into account the lost time of shared life and mutual support, which can last for years. Such a benefit demonstrates that the state sees and values the family's experience, recognising its complexity and the need for support.

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<sup>267</sup> Law of Ukraine "On the Social and Legal Protection of Persons Deprived of Their Personal Liberty as a Result of Armed Aggression against Ukraine, and Their Family Members" No. 2010-IX (26 January 2022). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2010-20#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2010-20#Text)

## Social insurance

Families of prisoners of war often face a sudden and complete loss of financial support. In situations where a service member is in captivity, the family loses access to their income, which may have been the sole or primary source of livelihood. This is especially critical for individuals who are unable to work and were dependent on the service member, such as pensioners, persons with disabilities, or those who care for young children. This is not only a loss of financial support but also of basic life stability.

### Expert Recommendations

- **Introduce an insurance payment due to the temporary absence of the breadwinner, starting from the first month of the service member's absence**

More details on the implementation mechanism of this guarantee are provided in [Section 7. The Journey of Families of Veterans Missing in Action, subsection Well-being. Material Needs.](#)

## Legal Protection

Families of prisoners of war often face complex legal procedures that require specialist support. These include the confirmation of prisoner-of-war status, access to financial entitlements, the execution of powers of attorney, engagement with governmental authorities, and the protection of interests in the course of advocacy. Most of these actions require not only professional expertise but also specific support in conditions of prolonged waiting and the struggle for the liberation of their loved one from captivity.

At present, the provision of legal assistance to families of prisoners of war is regulated by CMU Resolution No. 1281 of 15 November 2022<sup>268</sup>, the Law of Ukraine “On Free Civil Legal Aid,”<sup>269</sup> and resolutions of the Ministry of Justice concerning the mechanisms for providing legal services. Relatives are entitled to free legal aid: legal consultations, the preparation of documents and representation before courts as a form of guaranteed advocacy services. They may also use free notarial services, including the execution of powers of attorney, certificates and other necessary documents. Importantly, lawyers may submit requests to public authorities and other institutions in order to obtain information concerning the status of the service member and the place and conditions of their captivity.

In addition, families may receive reimbursement of expenses related to legal assistance, for example, where they engage lawyers to submit international complaints or to represent the interests of a prisoner of war in the jurisdiction of the aggressor state for the purpose of advocacy. These expenses are currently reimbursed by the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine.

If a warrior has no family, or if relatives are unable to carry out legal acts, for example, if they live abroad or are legally incapacitated, the state must appoint representatives. This function may be performed by staff of the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, the National Information Bureau, lawyers within the free legal aid system, or other authorised persons. In complex cases, a special state representative may be appointed to submit applications, complaints, or to ensure protection at international institutions.

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<sup>268</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (15 November 2022). Resolution No. 1281 “Certain Issues of the Implementation of the Law of Ukraine ‘On the Social and Legal Protection of Persons Deprived of Their Personal Liberty as a Result of Armed Aggression against Ukraine, and Their Family Members’”. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1281-2022-n#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1281-2022-n#Text)

<sup>269</sup> Law of Ukraine “On Free Civil Legal Aid” No. 3460-VI (2 June 2011). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3460-17#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3460-17#Text)

## Expert Recommendations

- **Maintain state guarantees of legal aid and reimbursement of legal service costs**

More details on the implementation mechanism of this guarantee are provided in [Section 7. The Journey of Families of Veterans Missing in Action, subsection Well-being. Material Needs.](#)

Well-being  
Material needs

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
Families remain in financial uncertainty: payments may be delayed, and the available assistance is insufficient to cover basic needs during the waiting period	An annual one-off payment to the family for each full year the service member remains in captivity
Families suddenly lose their main source of income, and there are no mechanisms for rapid financial support after the warrior is taken captive	An insurance payment due to the temporary absence of the breadwinner, starting from the first month of the service member's absence
Families face excessive bureaucratic procedures and a lack of accessible legal services, which complicates the formalisation of status and benefits	Maintain state guarantees of legal aid and reimbursement of legal service costs

## Vocation

### Work

The family of a prisoner of war lives in a new reality – a life marked by constant uncertainty and prolonged stress. Relatives are often forced to search independently for information about the place of detention, state of health, or legal status of the person in captivity. This process requires active involvement, time, energy, and physical presence – visiting coordination centres, communicating with public authorities or international institutions, and taking part in advocacy activities. For many, this becomes a daily “second job” that cannot be performed in one’s spare time.

To manage all of this, families often have to take leave, either paid or unpaid, obtain sick leave certificates, or seek other formal grounds for absence from work.

### Expert Recommendations

- **Ensure leave to clarify circumstances – within one year after the service member is taken captive**
- **Introduce additional annual leave for single parents**
- **Guarantee protection from dismissal for parents and carers who are raising a child alone due to the captivity of the other parent**

A detailed justification and mechanisms for the implementation of guarantees are provided in [Section 7. The Journey of Families of Veterans Missing in Action, subsection Well-being. Vocation. Work.](#)

## **We additionally propose to:**

- **Ensure targeted leave after the liberation of a service member from captivity**

We propose introducing a special form of targeted leave for family members of a service member liberated from captivity, which may be used within one year of their return. This provision can be regulated through the Labour Code of Ukraine, in particular, the norms concerning additional social guarantees in specific life conditions (Articles 25 and 76).

Such leave would allow family members to fulfil these responsibilities without risking job loss or being forced to take unpaid leave. It also recognises the family as an essential part of settling back into civilian life and guarantees labour protection during a period of heightened strain.

## **Education**

When a service member is taken captive, children lose not only the emotional connection and support of a parent, but often their opportunity for stable development and access to quality education due to financial hardship and prolonged stress.

Waiting for the return of a loved one from captivity is a long and exhausting process that may affect a child's psycho-emotional state and their ability to prepare fully for entrance examinations or demonstrate strong academic performance. To prevent educational inequality, we propose introducing two support mechanisms for the families of prisoners of war.

## Expert Recommendations

Provide the following educational guarantees for children of prisoners of war and veterans liberated from captivity:

- **continue providing a grant for higher education;**
- **free access to NMT preparation courses;**
- **compensation for educational losses in the form of payment for tutoring services;**
- **retain the possibility of priority enrolment in kindergartens;**
- **retain free meals in schools and kindergartens.**

A detailed justification of the need for such proposals is provided in [Section 5. The Journey of Veterans' Families, subsection Well-being. Vocation. Education.](#)

Well-being  
Vocation

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
<p>Families of prisoners of war often lack time and resources to adapt to a new reality, but are forced to return to work quickly without additional labour guarantees</p>	<p>The right to leave to investigate the circumstances surrounding the captivity of a family member</p>
<p>Single parents face emotional and everyday burdens without guaranteed time for rest and recovery</p>	<p>Additional annual leave for single parents</p>
<p>Parents and carers who are effectively raising a child alone are not always covered by existing guarantees of protection from dismissal</p>	<p>Protection from dismissal for parents and carers who are raising a child alone due to the captivity of the other parent</p>
<p>Families of those liberated from captivity do not have guaranteed time to recover and support their loved ones without the risk of losing their jobs or income</p>	<p>Targeted leave after the warrior's liberation from captivity</p>
<p>A parent's captivity adversely impacts a child's psycho-emotional state, diminishing their learning ability and possibly resulting in educational setbacks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue to provide grants for higher education</li> <li>■ Compensation for educational losses in the form of payment for tutoring services</li> <li>■ Free access to NMT preparation courses</li> </ul>
<p>Additional financial expenses for meals and attending educational institutions</p>	<p>Priority enrolment in kindergartens, meals in schools and kindergartens</p>

# Conclusions

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**1** Families of service members who have been taken captive or liberated from captivity are an integral part of the state's policy in support of veterans' families. They are distinct actors who experience their own loss, anxiety, responsibility and the struggle for the liberation of their loved one. Therefore, policy must focus not only on the rehabilitation of the warrior but also on the well-being and resilience of the family as a whole.

Such families should not receive help as an exception or as a reaction to a crisis. They require a public policy that recognises the specificity of their experience and provides continuous and comprehensive support for their needs. This must be a system of measures that influences the well-being and resilience of the family at every stage: from the moment of captivity to the return home and subsequent recovery.

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**2** The period of captivity is an active phase of pressure on the family. When a service member is in captivity, it is the family who performs the core functions of household support and representation, communicates with the state, public authorities and international institutions, ensures legal representation, and maintains the family's financial stability and housing. This period is not passive waiting. It is a complex phase of struggle for a loved one held in captivity. If the focus of state support is placed only on the stage after the warrior is liberated from captivity, the state leaves the family alone with critical challenges that often determine the family's resilience and well-being as a whole.

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**3** The Ministry of Veterans Affairs should become the lead body in shaping and implementing policy on the families of prisoners of war. Only a single responsible institution can ensure coherent support throughout the entire journey of the family. This is particularly required in the experience of families of prisoners of war, as they receive information from multiple sources, interact with numerous institutions, and lack comprehensive support.

# SECTION 9

## **The Journey of Fallen Veterans' Families**

# Abstract

In this section of the concept, we consider the experience and needs of families of fallen veterans: from the notification of a loved one's death to living with this new reality.

## **In this part, we:**

- describe the journey the family goes through and the challenges they face when formalising the status, organising the burial and accessing state support;
- outline available mechanisms of state support: financial payments, social and labour guarantees, housing programmes, and educational opportunities;
- identify the limitations of the current policy and the need for long-term guarantees that take into account both the experience and the impact suffered by relatives following the loss of a loved one.

We additionally **provide recommendations** on how the state can support such families across various areas of well-being – health, housing and the physical environment, material needs (payments), vocation (employment and children's education) and recognition.

# Introduction

The journeys of families of fallen veterans begin with one of the most painful events in life – the notification of a loved one’s death. This moment is not only the culmination of the fear that has lived within families from the beginning of their loved one’s service, but also the beginning of a complex, multi-layered experience of grief, acceptance and the search for meaning in life without the one who died.

In the first days after receiving the news, families face deep shock and are often unable to organise daily life, communicate or make any decisions. Despite this, they are immediately confronted with a number of responsibilities linked to the burial, the formalisation of the deceased’s status and the resolution of legal and social matters.

At every stage – from the news of death to the formalisation of benefits and the continuation of life – families may repeatedly experience the loss time and again. At times, the body of the fallen cannot be returned or identified, and in such cases, the loss intertwines with the experience of uncertainty. In other situations, the burial takes place hastily, under stress, and without proper support. Sometimes families discover the death on their own, and at times, with a delay.

The family of a fallen veteran faces profound changes in their life: personal, social, and material. The loss of a loved one brings not only grief, but often the need to drastically rearrange daily life, make difficult decisions under shock, and assume new roles.

Despite the existence of several legal acts regulating statuses and benefits for families of the fallen, many families lack complete information about their rights in practice. The absence of unified support can complicate access to assistance. At the same time, families of the fallen have their own specific needs, which differ depending on the moment of loss, life stage, family structure (whether there are children, elderly parents), social situation or place of residence (particularly in cases of internal displacement).

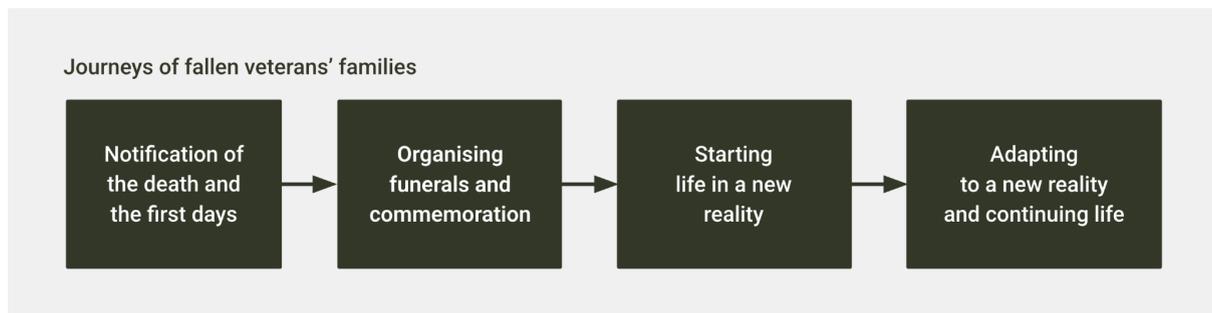
Today, within public veteran policy, families of the fallen are recognised as one of the target groups. However, the actual mechanisms are rather limited or do not account for the broad spectrum of needs: long-term psychosocial support, access to legal assistance, mechanisms of collective memory and recognition, support in employment, education or childcare. Those who have lost their sole breadwinner, or who themselves have a disability or face other difficult conditions, are particularly vulnerable.

Families of the fallen play an important societal role: they preserve memory and pass on history. Therefore, they need to receive long-term, coherent and sensitive support across different spheres of life – from legal and social to educational, psychological and economic. Such families need not only one-off assistance, but also long-term guarantees that enable them, in time, to adapt successfully to the new reality and build a new life, while preserving and cherishing the memory of their loss.

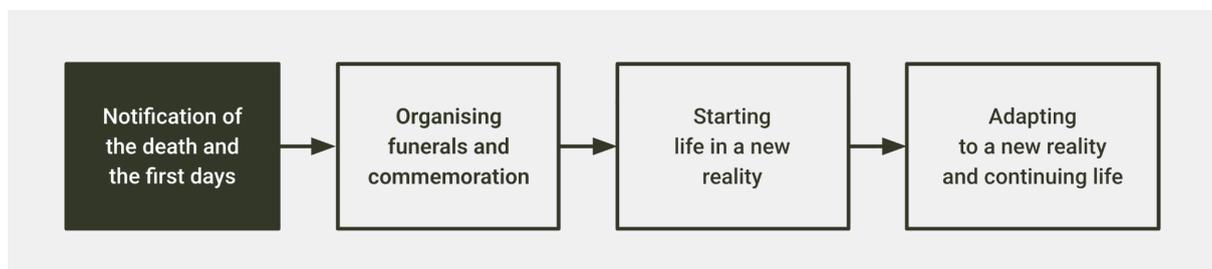
In this section, we will consider the experience and needs of families of fallen veterans at key stages: from notification, burial and commemoration to the beginning of life in a new reality. We will also outline the types of support that families of the fallen may require, and provide recommendations for developing and implementing a sensitive and coherent policy.

# Challenges and needs along the journey

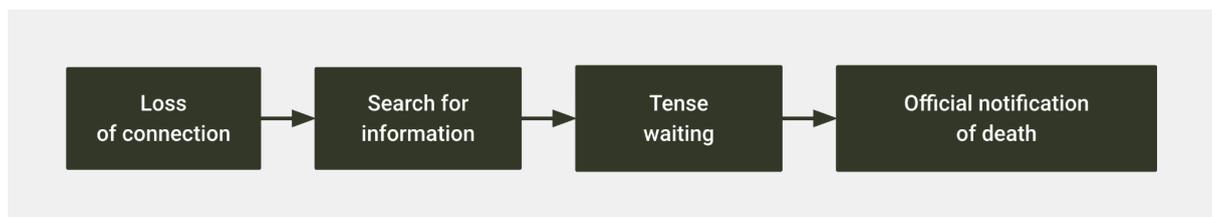
Until the moment of death, the family follows a parallel journey alongside the veteran: conscription, service, rotations, injuries, and evacuation – all of this already becomes part of their experience. Yet the moment of loss is a separate and particularly traumatic part of that journey.



## Stage 1. Death notification and the first days



The experiences of families of fallen veterans may begin with the loss of contact, the search for information, anxiety, tense waiting and, ultimately, official notification.



MoD Order No. 280<sup>270</sup> stipulates that the commander of the unit must convey information about the death of the service member to the place of residence. If this is not possible, the responsibility is transferred to the territorial recruitment and social support centres at the place of conscription.

In most cases, it is the TRSSCs that notify the family of the death. The first notification is crucial and must support the family amidst the chaos: to explain the next steps in the process of farewell and burial, to assist in the preparation of documents and to help with the transportation of the fallen. Sensitivity in this communication is important and enables the family to feel that they have not been left alone with their loss.

Who provides the notification (according to MoD Order No. 280)	Tasks during the notification
Unit commander. If this is not possible, the TRSSC at the place of conscription	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Explain the next steps (farewell, burial)</li> <li>■ Assist with documentation</li> <li>■ Arrange the transportation of the fallen</li> <li>■ Provide support</li> </ul>

In the Veteran Hub study “The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One,” partners of fallen warriors noted that, in most cases, the TRSSCs duly fulfil their role in delivering death notifications. However, partners also recalled instances in which the official notification arrived only after the person had already been buried, or was delivered at different times, with delays, to different family members<sup>271</sup>.

According to the study by Cedos<sup>272</sup>, the moment of notification is one of the most painful experiences for the relatives of the fallen. Not only

<sup>270</sup> Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine “On Approving the Instruction on the Organisation of Personnel Accounting within the System of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine” No. 280 (15 September 2022). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z1407-22#top](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z1407-22#top)

<sup>271</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. Pp. 85–86. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliakh-kohanoi-voyna.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliakh-kohanoi-voyna.pdf)

<sup>272</sup> Cedos (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of relatives of the fallen. [cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovykh](http://cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovykh)

the fact of death itself, but also the manner in which the news is delivered may have a profound impact on the family's subsequent well-being.

**We identify a number of key challenges associated with notifying families about the death of veterans:**

■ **Insensitive or unethical notification**

In some cases, families are informed of the death without prior preparation or adherence to ethical principles of respect for grief and shock, predictability, sensitive follow-up and psychological support during and after receiving the news.

In certain situations, relatives may learn about the loss informally – from brothers- or sisters-in-arms, through the media or even on social media. The official notice may arrive without warning, be duplicated, or fail to reach some family members at all.

■ **Information isolation of certain relatives**

Usually, the TRSSC notifies the person listed in the service member's record – most often the spouse. However, communication within the veteran's family may sometimes be strained or absent. For example, if the wife does not maintain contact with the parents, they may remain in an information vacuum, learning about the death of their child by chance – from neighbours, acquaintances, or through the media or on social media. If they then approach the TRSSC themselves, they may be denied information on the grounds that notification has already been given. This violates their right to access information about the death of their close relative.

Even when military records include family details, this information may be outdated. There were cases when relatives themselves had died, or the person had married. In some cases, TRSSCs lost data, contacting unrelated people or acquaintances in search of the family.

## ■ **Notifying children**

Ukraine currently has no clear or regulated standard for notifying children about the death of their parents. This creates situations in which children are either excluded from the process entirely or have a traumatic experience without any professional support.

Sometimes relatives deliberately delay informing a child, at times for many months, due to fear of causing harm, uncertainty, or lack of support or clear guidance.

Parents, guardians, teachers and TRSSC staff/service members often do not know how to correctly inform a child. Every adult who may be involved in this process must have access to consultations or guidance on how to notify minors. It is also essential that TRSSC staff/service members do not deliver the news in the presence of a child without preparation or without involving a responsible adult.

A separate issue arises when the fallen had children from a previous marriage. There is currently no protocol for notifying such children, especially when they live with the other parent (the former spouse). In such cases, the guardian should be the primary person involved in informing the child.

It is also necessary to clearly define age thresholds. If a child has reached the age of 18 but is still the son or daughter of the fallen, they preserve the right to information and notification.

## ■ **Limitations of notification in situations of displacement and evacuation**

Due to the war, families of veterans may be living in different regions of the country or in temporary evacuation. If the TRSSC does not have up-to-date information on the family's place of residence, they may notify relatives of the death by telephone. This method does not align with ethical standards or practices of dignified interaction with the families

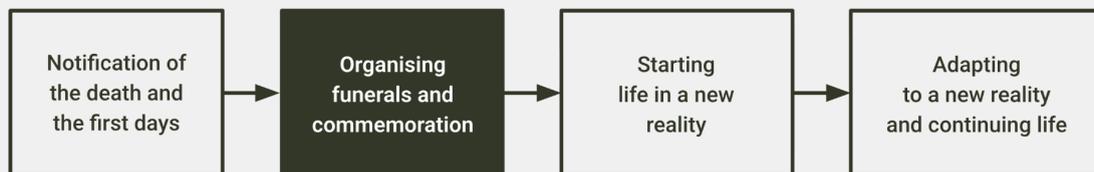
of the fallen. There is also no established procedure for notification, follow-up, representation or navigation for families living abroad.

To ensure that the notification of families about a death becomes not only formally defined and clearly regulated, but also more sensitive and humane, it is essential to develop an updated procedural protocol. As identified during expert discussions conducted for the purpose of preparing this Concept, certain brigades and TRSSCs already apply improved approaches and protocols for notifying families of a death. These include access to psychological support at the moment of notification, as well as procedures grounded in humane and empathetic interpersonal communication.

One of the steps is to draw attention to effective practices and establish them as the standard throughout the entire system of work with the families of the fallen. Protocols ensuring dignified notification, involvement of psychologists, and clear instructions must become the rule rather than the exception. Their implementation at the state level will help create conditions for a stable, sensitive and predictable beginning of the family’s journey after loss.

Required Measure/Support	Goal
Updating and standardising notification protocols	Make the procedure sensitive and predictable
Studying and disseminating best practices in brigades and TRSSCs	Establish them as a general standard
Involving psychologists in the notification process	Provide support to the family at the moment of grief
Developing clear instructions and protocols	Ensure humanity and dignity in the procedure

## Stage 2. Arranging funerals and commemoration



Burial is one of the most significant moments for the family of a fallen warrior. **It is not only a formal farewell ceremony, but also a deeply personal, sensitive and emotionally challenging stage that carries great importance for the further process of grieving.** It is a moment that draws the attention of both the state and the community: through rituals of commemoration, support from military units and the involvement of local authorities.

In Ukraine, the burial of warriors holds not only ceremonial importance but also significant institutional value, serving as a concrete expression of state memory policy and a means of acknowledging the contributions of warriors and supporting the families of those who have died. The burials are not only personal or local rituals but also part of the public space and the social and political process.

Currently, Ukraine lacks a unified state approach to the arrangement, format, and procedure of warriors' burials, as well as the responsible entities and standardised guidelines that would ensure a basic level of respect, dignity, and awareness of burial sites in any region of the country. Although the general approach is enshrined in legislation<sup>273</sup>, it has not yet been implemented due to the lack of appropriate by-laws and clear mechanisms for its application at the local level. Ceremonies in different communities vary greatly, depending on the decisions of the family of the fallen, the community's initiative, or the burial procedures carried out by the TRSSCs.

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<sup>273</sup> Law of Ukraine "On the Burial and the Burial Business" 1102-IV (10 July 2003). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1102-15#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1102-15#Text)

During expert discussions held as part of the development of this concept, we recorded testimonies from representatives of the families of the fallen about the significant impact of the human factor on the quality of the burial process. When families, communities, brothers- and sisters-in-arms, and friends of the fallen are involved, farewells take place with dignity. They may become formal and fail to reflect the depth of gratitude and respect that such involvement would convey.

Families also noted the lack of informational support from the state and communication regarding the specifics of military burial rituals. For example, the unexpected appearance of an honour guard or gunshots during the ceremony could be emotionally distressing and even traumatic, highlighting the need for a transparent and sensitive information policy in commemoration.

Challenges	Needs	Required Support
Lack of a unified state approach to the organisation, form and procedure of the burial of warriors	Unified instructions and designated responsible actors	Developing a single national approach and mechanisms for its implementation
Variation of ceremonies across different communities	Consistency of actions and a guaranteed basic level of respect and dignity	Application of clear rules and burial algorithms by the TRSSCs
Lack of information support from the state	Transparent communication regarding the specifics of the military ritual	Providing families with information about the course of the ceremony
Unexpected or emotionally distressing elements of the ceremony (honour guard, gunshots)	Preparing the family for the ceremony	Ensuring a sensitive and predictable information policy of commemoration

For the family, a burial requires making a series of practical decisions during an extremely difficult period. The organisation of a service member's burial is formally regulated: part of the costs is covered by the military unit, and if the family covers these expenses themselves, compensation is provided. Current policy stipulates that a family which takes responsibility for arranging the funeral ceremony is entitled to compensation amounting to five subsistence minimums (UAH 15,140 in 2025). Additional support includes the purchase of a uniform set, coffin, transportation of the body and ritual services.

Experiences of families during the organisation of the farewell and burial can vary significantly. Some participants of studies by Cedos<sup>274</sup> and Veteran Hub<sup>275</sup> reported an attentive attitude of the military unit or the TRSSC: timely communication, help with coordination and organisation, and participation in the farewell ceremony. At the same time, there were situations in which families had to resolve numerous issues on their own due to a lack of information, delays or difficulties when interacting with institutions. Such circumstances may arise in wartime conditions, when delays or disruptions are not always the result of negligence, yet they still impose additional stress on the family.

Among additional challenges families may face at the burial stage is the lack of clarity regarding the option of cremation. The study "The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One" highlights isolated cases where relatives encountered restrictions because the burial of an urn with ashes was prohibited under cemetery rules in certain settlements<sup>276</sup>. Issues with documentation or transfer of the body were also mentioned – rare but deeply traumatic situations.

The situation may be even more vulnerable for partners of the fallen who were not in a registered marriage. In such cases, they may formally

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<sup>274</sup> Cedos (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of relatives of the fallen. [cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovykh](https://cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovykh)

<sup>275</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior's Beloved One. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliakh-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliakh-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

<sup>276</sup> Ibid. P. 90.

be excluded from the burial process, have no access to documents or even be sidelined by other family members<sup>277</sup>.

A sensitive attitude is also required regarding the respect for the religious beliefs of the fallen. In some instances, participants of the study “The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One” reported negative experiences when communicating with the TRSSCs about respecting religious rites, even when the fallen person was an atheist<sup>278</sup>. This underscores the importance of a personalised approach that respects the will of the fallen, their family and their beliefs.

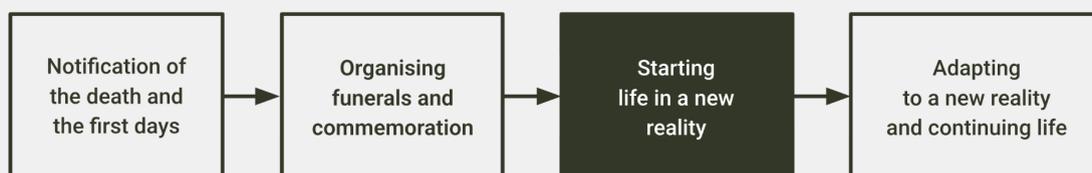
Despite the challenges, this stage often becomes a focal point of attention from both the state and the community. Therefore, it is important to treat it as a space of recognition, dignity, and support. Families must have the opportunity to choose which forms of assistance to receive, in what volume, and be provided with full information about their guarantees.

Challenges	Needs	Required Support
Lack of information, delays or difficulties in interaction with institutions	Timely coordination and assistance	Support from the military unit or the TRSSC in arranging the burial
The need to make practical decisions during a difficult period	Full awareness of available assistance and guarantees	Providing the family with information about existing guarantees and the possibility of choosing the format of assistance

<sup>277</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One. P. 90. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](http://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

<sup>278</sup> Ibid. P. 89.

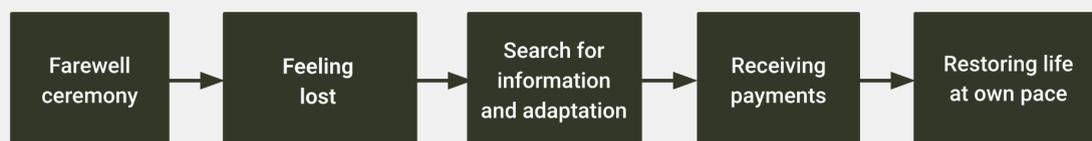
## Stage 3. Starting life in a new reality



After the burial, the life of the family of the fallen continues, but in new realities. The loss of a loved one reshapes daily life: familiar roles and routines shift, and new responsibilities and challenges emerge. During this period, families often experience dual feelings: on the one hand, the desire to preserve memory and carry the loss with dignity, and on the other, the need to adapt to a new reality, make decisions and build new life plans.

Although the state fulfils its obligations regarding the organisation of the burial and provides a range of benefits and payments, it is precisely after the farewell ceremony that a family may first feel disoriented by the need to start building an entirely new life. It is at this stage that long-term support is required – not only in the form of compensation, but as recognition that the family of the fallen is going through a distinct and difficult journey.

### The family's journey after loss



One of the key mechanisms of material support for families of the fallen is the one-off cash benefit (OCB) in the amount of UAH 15 million. Its payment is the responsibility of the military unit or the TRSSC, which must determine the circle of persons entitled to receive it under the law. In the standard case, this assistance is divided equally among all family

members belonging to the first line of succession: the spouse, children, and parents. If there are several such persons, the sum is divided accordingly.

One-off cash benefit for the relatives of the fallen

Amount	Responsible Body	Recipients	Method of Distribution
UAH 15 million	Military unit or TRSSC	Spouse, children, parents (first line of succession)	Equally among all in the first line of succession

The mechanisms of support at this stage, both financial and social, must ensure that the family can adapt without excessive overload. Current public policy provides 100% compensation for temporary incapacity (sick leave) regardless of employment record, as well as unpaid bereavement leave, which is granted on general grounds and not exclusively to families of service members. These instruments allow the family to experience the loss at their own pace, without forcing them to return to professional or social activity before they are internally ready. However, the state approach could be improved through the introduction of paid bereavement leave at this stage, which would strengthen the financial security of families.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that every case is unique. Some families report coordinated and clear work of social protection bodies or the Pension Fund. Others describe fragmented information, the need to search for answers independently, or difficulties in accessing benefits<sup>279</sup>. When it comes to partners without a registered marriage, the challenges may intensify, for example, due to the need to legally prove the closeness of the relationship or due to limited access to state services.

In addition to administrative and material challenges, families face a heavy emotional burden. The study by Cedos shows that loss often

<sup>279</sup> Cedos (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of relatives of the fallen. [cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovykh](https://cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovykh)

leads to worsening psychological and physical conditions and may result in isolation. Social interaction may become another source of stress due to pity, indifference, or inappropriate reactions from others<sup>280</sup>. In some situations, it is communities, brothers- or sisters-in-arms, or civil society organisations that become the first sources of support. For this reason, it is important that the state system also provides accessible avenues for seeking help – without stigma, excessive formalisation, and with an understanding of the context of loss.

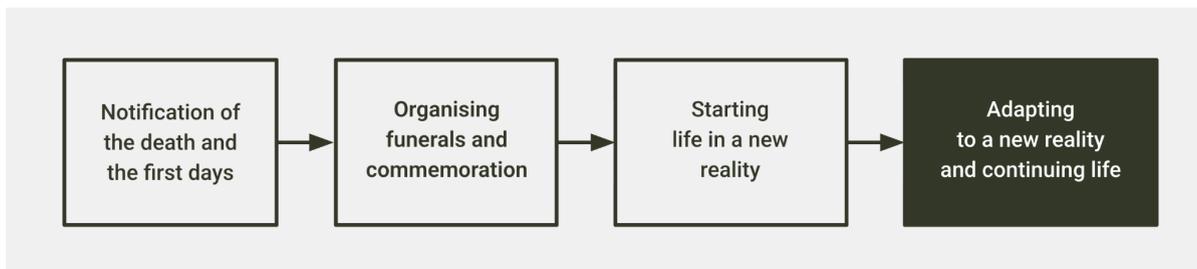
The period after the funeral is not the end of support, but its continuation in a new form. It is a moment when it is especially important that the family is not left alone with the loss but has tools to begin rebuilding their life: gradually, at their own pace, and with the level of support that matches their needs and conditions.

Challenges	Needs	Required Support
Change in daily life after the loss: new roles, responsibilities, and rhythm	Adaptation to the new reality	Long-term support after the funeral
Disorientation after the farewell ceremony	Guidance for the beginning of a new stage of life	Recognition of the complexity of the family's journey after the loss
The need to begin a new life after completing state procedures	Support not only in the form of compensation	Comprehensive social and psychological assistance
The need to search independently for information on support mechanisms	Consolidated informational support	Access to consultations and assistance in obtaining benefits

<sup>280</sup> Cedos (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of relatives of the fallen. [cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovyh](https://cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovyh)

Challenges	Needs	Required Support
Deterioration of psychological and physical condition after the loss	Psychological stabilisation	Possibility to seek help without stigma
Limited financial security during the grieving period	Opportunity to have time to live with loss without material risks	Introduction of paid bereavement leave

## Stage 4. Adapting to a new reality and continuing life



The moment when a family begins rebuilding its life in a new reality marks a long and demanding stage of adaptation. This does not signify the end of grief – for many, it only begins after the farewell rituals. Families face the fact that life will never be as it was before, and they may require long-term and consistent support – not only emotional, but also material, social, and professional. At the centre is the dignity of the family and its right not only to have its loss recognised but also to restore its own well-being.

The state must not just compensate families for their loss, but help them build their future. Families, partners, children, and parents of the fallen have the right to recognition not only through formal status but through practical support, e.g., in education, employment, health, social protection, and housing. This is also a matter of fair public policy: when contribution and loss are acknowledged not only symbolically, but through stability and quality of life.

# Well-being

The studies by Cedos<sup>281</sup> and Veteran Hub<sup>282</sup> show that relatives of fallen service members often find themselves in unforeseen situations, face complex bureaucratic procedures, experience emotional isolation, and lose their internal sense of stability. This is why each sphere of life – material, housing, educational, medical, or employment – must include clear, long-term guarantees and be adapted to the needs of families of the fallen. Such support is not assistance in hardship; it is a form of respect and acknowledgement of the family’s contribution to the common good of the state. Therefore, we will consider different dimensions of well-being and possible forms of support for the families of fallen warriors in the following sections.

**Important:** We do not provide a comprehensive overview of all possible problems and needs that may arise in families of fallen warriors. Instead, we focus on potential solutions that the state can implement to meet the families’ needs. We identified them by analysing available data and information.

The recommendations are the result of the Coalition of Organisations’ work based on expert experience in the field of veterans’ affairs and consultations/discussions with experts from various fields. We understand that we cannot cover all possible challenges and potential solutions, so it is important to continue exploring these topics to develop effective support for veterans’ families.

## Health

Losing a loved one in war is both a physical and psychological shock. Families of the fallen experience multi-layered effects and consequences for the body: emotional, physical, and cognitive.

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<sup>281</sup> Cedos (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of relatives of the fallen. [cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovyh](https://cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovyh)

<sup>282</sup> Veteran Hub (2024). The Journey of the Warrior’s Beloved One. [kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf](https://kohani.veteranhub.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/shliah-kohanoi-voina.pdf)

The study by Cedos shows that grieving after the death of a warrior can be accompanied by sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, and the worsening of chronic illnesses<sup>283</sup>. These symptoms may persist for years, negatively affecting the overall condition and quality of life of family members.

An additional challenge is the need to rebuild life without the support of the fallen: caring for children, providing financially for the family, and finding inner strength and meaning. Families often focus on survival, neglecting their own psychological needs.

## Expert Recommendations

- **Provide the possibility of state compensation for psychotherapeutic services**

A detailed justification of the proposal is provided in [Section 5. The Journey of Veterans' Families, subsection Well-being. Health.](#)

Well-being  
Health

Family Challenges	Recommendation/Solution
Families of fallen warriors experience profound stress, prolonged exhaustion, and a loss of vital resources	State compensation for psychotherapy services

<sup>283</sup> Cedos (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of relatives of the fallen. [cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovyh/](https://cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovyh/)

## Housing and the physical environment

Safety and stability for a family can begin at home. The loss of a service member, especially if that person was the primary breadwinner, often undermines this basic support. Some families may not have their own housing at all due to forced displacement. Others may have had their home destroyed by hostilities, or may still be repaying a mortgage. For these reasons, families of the fallen must have access to housing support programmes.

The state should offer families of the fallen the same level of support that the veteran or service member would have received upon completing their service. This includes, inter alia, access to the full spectrum of housing programmes, including compensation for the cost of housing, support with rent, preferential mortgage loans, and reimbursement of housing and utility costs. Families of the fallen already receive certain state housing support, such as repairs to damaged housing, allocation of a flat within two years of being placed on the register, or the possibility of obtaining a deferred-repayment loan for construction<sup>284</sup>. We propose expanding this support.

### Expert Recommendations

- **Ensure priority in the queue for compensation for destroyed housing**
- **Ensure payment of housing and utility services for up to three years, regardless of housing ownership**

A detailed justification of the proposals is provided in [Section 7. The Journey of Families of Veterans Missing in Action, subsection Well-being. Housing and physical environment](#)

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<sup>284</sup> Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection.” Article 15, paras. 8, 15, 16. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text](http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text)

Well-being  
Housing

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
Families may be left unprotected due to the loss of housing and legal uncertainty	Priority in the queue for compensation for destroyed housing
Additional financial burden arising from the payment of utility services and the limitation of existing benefits to property owners or registered residents	Payment of housing and utility services for up to three years, regardless of housing ownership

## Material needs

### Payments

The death of a service member often means not only a profound personal loss, but also a significant decline in a family’s well-being. In the initial period after the death, a family may experience considerable financial pressure due to burial expenses, reduced capacity to work, or, in some cases, the complete loss of the ability to work. Against this background, state support must be accessible, timely and long-term.

One of the main instruments of material support for the families of fallen service members today is the **one-off cash benefit (OCB)**. During martial law, it amounts to UAH 15 million where the service member’s death occurred as a result of a wound, blast injury, mutilation or other health damage sustained during direct participation in hostilities<sup>285</sup>. The same amount is paid in the event of death from a wound sustained during

<sup>285</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (28 February 2022). Resolution No. 168 “Issues of Certain Allowances to Service Members, Rank-and-File Personnel and Senior Officers, Police Officers and Their Families during Martial Law.” [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/168-2022-D0BF#n14](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/168-2022-D0BF#n14)

hostilities, if death occurs within one year of the trauma<sup>286</sup>. If death occurs after discharge as a result of disability or illness, the military medical commission must establish a link with the performance of military duties<sup>287</sup>, in which case the family is entitled to 750 subsistence minimums<sup>288</sup>, or simply with the fact of military service – 500 subsistence minimums<sup>289</sup>.

At the same time, the one-year time limit for death has neither sufficient medical nor social justification. Some combat injuries and the effects of participation in hostilities on mental and physical health may manifest with time, have a delayed course and may become fatal even several years after returning from the front.

#### Terms of receiving the OCB

Veteran's Death			
During hostilities	Within one year after a combat-related injury	After completing service	
		Link to the performance of military duties	Link to the passage of military service
UAH 15 million		750 subsistence minimums	500 subsistence minimums

<sup>286</sup> Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine "On Approving the Procedure and Conditions for Awarding and Paying One-Off Cash Benefit in the Event of the Death of Service Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine During Martial Law" No. 45 (25 January 2023). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0176-23#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0176-23#Text)

<sup>287</sup> Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families." Article 16(2)(1-3). [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#n321](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#n321)

<sup>288</sup> 750 subsistence minimums amount to UAH 2,271,000 (based on the subsistence minimum for able-bodied persons as of 1 January 2025 – UAH 3,028).

<sup>289</sup> 500 subsistence minimums amount to UAH 1,514,000 (based on the same calculation).

## Expert Recommendations

- **Review the “within one year” limit after an injury as a condition for receiving the OCB, and extend the timeframe established by law**

This would strengthen guarantees for families and reduce legal uncertainty in cases where death is caused by the long-term consequences of hostilities.

**Furthermore**, we wish to highlight situations that are not covered by the current legislation. At present, families of fallen veterans are not entitled to receive the OCB if the cause of death was suicide. Formally, such a death is not considered to be connected with the performance of duties or participation in hostilities, and therefore is not covered by existing state support mechanisms.

However, we believe this issue must not remain outside public policy or be marginalised. Suicide is often a direct or indirect consequence of combat experience: prolonged psychological exhaustion, post-traumatic stress disorder, and a lack of timely support. Ignoring this connection is a dangerous denial of the reality faced by service members and their families.

We emphasise the need to launch a public discussion about suicide in the context of combat experience and to reconsider the approach to supporting the families of warriors who have committed suicide. Loss through suicide must not place a family in a position of lesser entitlement to support. On the contrary, it is a challenge that requires a sensitive, professional, and systemic response, both in terms of prevention and in policies that support their loved ones.

## Vocation

### Work

After the veteran's death, their loved ones may be unable to return to work immediately due to psychological and physical exhaustion, as well as new responsibilities, such as caring for children, completing paperwork, participating in burial procedures, and commemorating the fallen.

During the period of grieving, people may also experience emotional isolation or a desire to avoid social contact, including at work. Colleagues often do not know how to behave, expressing pity or remaining silently distant, which may only deepen the sense of alienation.

This is why the sphere of employment must include sensitive labour guarantees that take into account a person's condition after experiencing loss and provide time to adapt without the risk of losing their job or being left without income.

### Expert Recommendations

- **Provide a right to bereavement leave of up to two weeks with full pay**

After receiving news of a loved one's death, loved ones are often required to complete numerous formalities: arranging the farewell ceremony, preparing documents, transporting the body, and coordinating with military structures or local authorities. At the same time, they are grieving for a fallen loved one and may need time alone or with their family: children, parents, or other relatives.

Current legislation offers only short leave periods, which often do not cover the actual time needed for basic recovery after shock, especially

if the fallen service member is buried in another region and the farewell takes place later.

Bereavement leave is a basic need for a dignified experience of loss. This benefit allows family members not to return to work “the next day,” but to take the necessary time not only for arranging the burial, but also for a minimal pause to gather strength and live through the experience.

This solution is important not only from an ethical perspective; it also protects against potential emotional exhaustion in the future. Forcing someone to return immediately to work without time to grieve may lead to deeper psychological consequences, including depressive conditions, reluctance or even an inability to return to employment at all.

- **Provide the right to take annual paid leave at a time convenient for family members, within three years after the death**

Family members of fallen warriors face long-term psycho-emotional consequences of loss, which may affect their general physical condition or ability to work. This is also due to domestic burdens, for example, when a family member raises children without the other parent or does not have enough time to recover after the loss. Standard annual leave may not cover these needs and may be complicated by the requirement to coordinate dates with the employer in advance.

The right to choose the time of annual paid leave independently will help minimise risks of possible deterioration in mental or physical health, reduced productivity, or job loss. Additional unpaid leave is a way to legally enshrine the possibility of recovery without the risk of dismissal.

Introducing such a guarantee does not require significant budget expenditure, yet it provides a real tool for supporting the well-being of families of the fallen. It will also help preserve jobs, reduce emotional burnout among family members of the fallen, and ensure a more sustainable return of employees to work.

- **Guarantee an annual paid day off on the date of a loved one’s death**

The date of a loved one’s death is a personal day of remembrance for a person who has experienced loss. For many, this day is marked

each year by emotional strain, visiting the burial site, or organising a remembrance gathering. At the same time, the need to perform professional duties on this day often becomes a source of additional psychological pressure – the feeling that the loss must be hidden or remain unnoticed.

A guaranteed annual paid day off on the date of a loved one's death is an expression of support and understanding of this experience, and a sign of state recognition that the life of the fallen mattered and that their loss is not merely a private family matter. It is a form of respect for memory that can become part of a broader culture of public commemoration.

- **Guarantee the preferential right to remain in employment in the event of staff reductions, as well as the preferential right to re-employment in the event of liquidation of a company, institution, or organisation, for three years after the warrior's death**

Family members of the fallen may find themselves in diverse social conditions – with limited access to additional sources of income, with responsibilities to care for children or elderly relatives, or after being forced to relocate. Losing stable employment following the death of a loved one creates a risk not only of financial instability but may also trigger social isolation.

Establishing a preferential right to remain in employment or to be re-employed in the event of organisational liquidation is a protective mechanism that strengthens the economic security of families of the fallen. Such a guarantee helps prevent additional pressure on individuals who have already experienced loss.

- **Ensure a 100% temporary disability benefit based on average salary, regardless of insurance record, for three years after the warrior's death**

After the loss of a loved one, family members of the fallen may find themselves in a state of acute psycho-emotional or physical exhaustion, making sustained employment impossible for a considerable period. However, under current legislation, the size of temporary disability benefits depends on the length of the insurance record. When this

record is short, e.g., due to breaks in employment or short employment history among young people, individuals are left without adequate financial support precisely when it is most needed.

A guaranteed benefit equal to 100% of the average salary prevents a double burden on relatives, due to the loss of work capacity and the loss of income. It provides a basic level of material stability during periods of adaptation and recovery, regardless of employment record. This benefit also acknowledges the experience of families of the fallen, whose ability to work or accrue a previous employment record may have been limited by objective circumstances.

These guarantees create conditions in which family members of the fallen can have the necessary space for recovery and adaptation, gradually returning to professional life when they feel ready. This is a space of dignity and recovery that recognises the right to vulnerability and respect for the experience of loss.

## **Education**

The parent's loss is a deeply traumatic experience that can affect concentration, motivation, psycho-emotional well-being and, overall, a child's ability to learn. As a result, children may temporarily fall out of the educational process or face difficulties with adaptation. Therefore, educational benefits for them are a tool for ensuring equal opportunities and supporting long-term development.

The state must create conditions that enable children to restore their educational trajectory: attend free preparatory courses for the EIE/NMT, access tutoring services, receive a grant to cover higher education costs, or use the right to non-competitive admission. Support for children of fallen veterans must be based not only on the idea of commemorating their parents' contribution, but also on understanding the specific challenges the children themselves face.

## Expert Recommendations

Provide the children of fallen veterans with the following educational guarantees:

- **continue providing grants for higher education;**
- **free access to NMT preparation courses;**
- **compensation for educational losses in the form of payment for tutoring services;**
- **retain the possibility of priority enrolment in kindergartens;**
- **retain free meals in schools and kindergartens.**

A detailed justification of the need for such proposals is provided in [Section 5. The Journey of Veterans' Families, subsection Well-being. Vocation. Education.](#)

Well-being  
Vocation

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
After the loss of a loved one, families have no time for recovery: current legislation does not guarantee paid leave for bereavement	The right to bereavement leave of up to two weeks with full pay
Returning to work happens prematurely: people are forced to work while exhausted, which deepens psychological consequences	The right to take annual paid leave at a time convenient for family members, within three years after the death

Family Challenges	Recommendations/Solutions
<p>The day of remembering a loved one currently has no official acknowledgement, so families cannot always spend it peacefully and with dignity</p>	<p>An annual paid day off on the date of a loved one's death</p>
<p>Families of the fallen risk losing their jobs at a time when they particularly need stability</p>	<p>A preferential right to remain in employment in the event of staff reductions, as well as the preferential right to re-employment in the event of liquidation of a company, institution, or organisation, for three years after the warrior's death</p>
<p>Benefit amounts depend on employment record, leaving families without financial support while in a state of exhaustion.</p>	<p>A 100% temporary disability benefit based on average salary, regardless of insurance record, for three years after the warrior's death</p>
<p>The loss of a parent negatively affects the child's state, reduces the ability to learn, and potentially leads to educational losses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue to provide grants for higher education</li> <li>■ Compensation for educational losses in the form of payment for tutoring services</li> <li>■ Free access to NMT preparation courses</li> </ul>
<p>Additional financial expenses for meals and attending educational institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Retain the possibility of priority enrolment in kindergartens and free meals in schools and kindergartens.</li> </ul>

## Recognition

Commemorating a fallen veteran does not end with the burial. For families, this may continue throughout their entire lives, taking different forms, from personal daily rituals to participation in public commemorative events. Through these practices, loved ones maintain a connection with the fallen, integrate the loss into their lives, and preserve the sense of significance of the fallen warrior's service.

However, the state does not always support families in this process. The study shows that it is after the burial that families are often left alone with the need to preserve and contemplate the memory, without institutional support, coordination, or recognition of this as a value<sup>290</sup>. Families who lost their veteran loved ones before 2022 also often feel forgotten, insufficiently represented at public events, and face reduced attention from the community.

Public policy in the sphere of commemoration should be grounded in the understanding that this is not just a tradition, but an important instrument of recovery, symbolic completion of grieving and civic recognition of the sacrifice, both of the warrior and of their family. This concerns not only memorial events, but also the everyday support of the family in its choice to preserve memory at the personal, family, local, and national levels.

### Expert Recommendations

#### Three key areas of state support:

##### 1. Assistance in organising the burial

The state must ensure guaranteed assistance to those who have undertaken responsibility for arranging the burial, including individuals

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<sup>290</sup> Cedos (2024). Study on the experiences and needs of relatives of the fallen. [cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovyh](https://cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-blyzkyh-zagyblyh-vijskovyh)

who do not have an official status but who, in practice, perform the role of the closest family member. This support must include coordination by military units, local authorities and social services, as well as the provision of practical and logistical assistance.

## **2. Financial compensation**

The compensation for financial expenses related to funeral services and the construction of headstones must amount to five subsistence minimums as defined by law on the date of the service member's death (UAH 15,140 in 2025). This support must be genuinely accessible, with a clear procedure and transparent timelines for receiving the compensation.

## **3. Public commemoration**

Public commemoration policy includes the creation of memorials, remembrance avenues, plaques, school programmes, and anniversary events. All such work should be coordinated with the families of the fallen, taking into account their wishes and level of readiness to participate. It is unacceptable for remembrance to be merely symbolic or fixed once and for all – it must remain living, evolving, personally sensitive and inclusive for everyone who has experienced loss, regardless of formal status.

Commemoration is not only about those who have fallen. It is also about the living, who continue their life's journey carrying this loss. Therefore, support must be long-term, institutional, and must recognise the family not only as keepers of memory, but as full subjects of public policy.

# Conclusions

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**1** The journey of the family of a fallen service member describes an experience in which the emotional pain of losing a loved one is interwoven with the need to carry out specific legal and organisational actions. This journey is one of the most acute and vulnerable, as it combines deep personal trauma with prolonged administrative and social burden.

A family that has lost a loved one in the war finds itself in a situation where its dignity, stability and well-being must be protected through tangible instruments of state support.

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**2** Living with loss involves several key stages: receiving the notification of death, the burial, the formalisation of statuses and benefits, and the gradual recovery of life. At each of these stages, the family faces not only grief, but also systemic challenges: a lack of coordinated support, complex procedures, and the absence of a sensitive approach from the state. Those without a formalised status (e.g., partners without an official marriage) may be particularly vulnerable, as they may be deprived of access to support and recognition.

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**3** The experience of families of the fallen is not only about loss, but it is also about responsibility, memory, dignity and the continuation of life. The state must acknowledge that the family of the fallen is not only a keeper of memory, but a full subject of policy, with its own needs across all dimensions of well-being: health, education, housing, work, and commemoration.

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**4** Adaptation for such families is not about returning to a “normal life,” but about building a new one: under difficult conditions, with new challenges, and with a need for dignified long-term support. This journey must guide a rethinking of the state’s role: its function is not limited to providing a one-off benefit or organising a burial, but includes creating a long-term system of support that recognises the value and significance of the family’s loss and its contribution to the common fight against the aggressor.

# SECTION 10

## **Stakeholder Map**

# Introduction

Despite the profound impact of combat experience and military service on the identity and needs of veterans, many aspects of their lives remain shared with the civilian population. Their new status may give rise to specific needs, yet they continue to be citizens of the state.

After completing their service, they return to their families and loved ones, once again becoming part of the community: they engage with others in public spaces, at work, in educational and healthcare institutions, and in government and private-sector settings. Veterans also represent diverse social groups and use the same services as other members of society.

Similarly, the families of veterans – partners, parents, children, siblings – maintain ongoing interactions with the state and the broader community. They continue to live in their communities, work, study, seek medical care, and access public and private services. At the same time, their unique experiences – coping with the realities of war, separation, managing household responsibilities alone, sustaining emotional stability, and, in some cases, facing loss, captivity, or the disappearance of a loved one – shape their needs, well-being, and way of life.

All of this requires a comprehensive, multisectoral response from the state, local communities, and society as a whole. Public policy on veterans and their families must follow an open-system approach, identifying all those who seek to support and who naturally interact with them along their journey. Such a policy must also be cross-cutting – integrated into the broader policy framework.

Implementing an effective and holistic veteran policy requires the participation of a wide range of actors, both governmental and non-governmental. Each plays a unique role in providing support to veterans and their families at different stages and under varying conditions: from the end of military service and adaptation to civilian life to situations where a person remains in captivity, is missing in action, or has been killed.

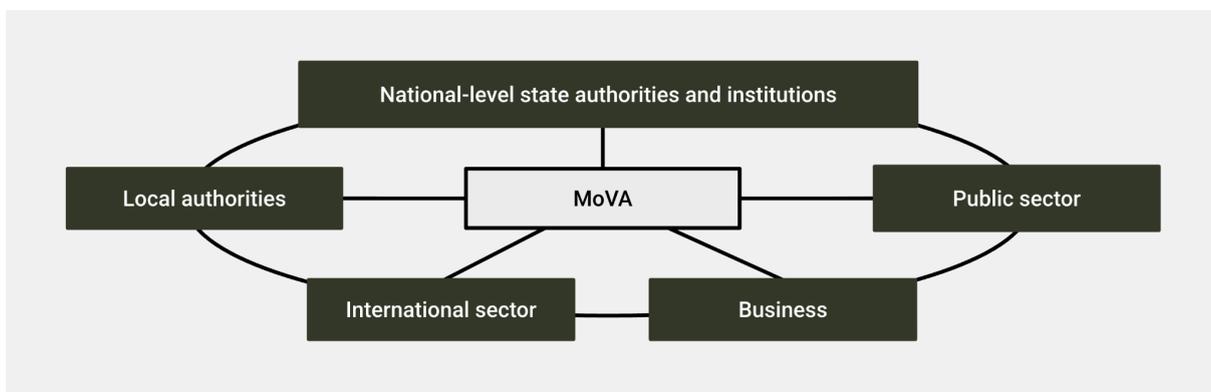
In Ukraine, a unified strategic vision and a coordinated system of support for veterans and their families by various stakeholders are still underway. The efforts of state authorities, local governments, civil society organisations (CSOs), businesses, and international partners are not always aligned – at times, they overlap or diverge in their approaches. This can lead to inefficient use of resources, complicate access to services, and affect the level of public trust in institutions.

When designing and implementing public veteran policy, it is crucial not only to identify its stakeholders but also to clearly understand the functional role of each actor, from policy formation to its practical implementation and strengthening. Such differentiation helps delineate the areas of responsibility for each stakeholder, ensures alignment of actions, systematises the existing support infrastructure, and identifies potential points for collaboration and interaction, as well as gaps within this infrastructure.

Within this Concept, we have developed a **stakeholder map** that organises and identifies the key “players” in veteran policy (state authorities, local governments, businesses, CSOs, and international partners) and defines their functions, areas of responsibility, and potential influence. This map visualises stakeholders and also enables all participants in veteran policy, from state officials to businesses and donor organisations, to better understand how they are interconnected, how they can complement one another, and where their actions could be more coordinated, effective, and sustainable.

# How to Use the Map

The stakeholder map is presented in the form of a table that outlines the areas of responsibility and potential influence of each stakeholder. **It identifies five main stakeholder groups:** national-level state authorities and institutions, local governments, businesses, the civil sector and international sectors. The table provides a description of each stakeholder, their primary function, and their specific role in implementing veteran policy.



We also categorise stakeholders into three types based on their functions in building an effective support system for veterans and their families. None of these groups is given priority or deemed more important than the others, as only collective and well-coordinated efforts from all participants can ensure the successful implementation of veteran policy.

Stakeholders by Role

Shape and implement the policy	Implement policy at the national and local levels	Complement policy, provide services, resources, or expertise, and strengthen state efforts
Legislative and executive authorities, President of Ukraine	Central executive authorities and local governments	Non-state actors: CSOs, businesses, international partners

**In the table, stakeholders can be sorted by several criteria:**

## **1. Well-being component**

The well-being model is a framework for categorising human needs. When these needs are met, the level of well-being is considered high; when they are unmet, the level is low. The model consists of 6 components:

- **Health** (physical and mental);
- **Material needs** (income, housing, legal security);
- **Relationships and recognition** (close social connections, sense of belonging to a community);
- **Vocation** (work, hobbies, education, personal growth);
- **Life skills and spirituality** (resilience, faith, values);
- **Physical environment** (living conditions, home, spaces for interaction).

It is crucial that support for veterans and their families is comprehensive and covers all well-being components. This is why we have categorised each stakeholder according to the component they support.

This makes it easy to quickly identify which stakeholders assist in specific environments. For instance, if you are searching for a local authority that offers support in the environment of material needs, select the sorting option, search among local governments, and choose the “Material Needs” option. This method helps quickly identify relevant stakeholders and clearly indicates where support is provided.

## **2. Type of activity**

To better understand the specific role each stakeholder plays in the field of veteran policy, we also categorised them based on their type of activity. This helps reveal how the support system is structured, including who sets the strategic framework, who coordinates efforts, who works directly with individuals, and who evaluates the quality.

### 3. Target audience (veterans, family members)

Although the needs of veterans and their families sometimes overlap, not all stakeholders work with both groups. Some are focused solely on supporting veterans, while others are only concerned with working with their families. At the same time, there are those who engage with both groups.

To ensure a clear understanding of which group each stakeholder targets, we classified them on the map by target audience type.

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The tool can be used to navigate the realm of veteran policy: the map helps swiftly identify those who offer support to veterans and their families and at which level, pinpointing key roles by activity type, well-being component, and target audience, spotting system gaps, forming cross-sector partnerships, or devising advocacy campaigns.



This map is not final or static. Over time, the context in which veteran policy is implemented may change, influencing its structure. Below is a condensed list of stakeholder types and roles. The full table is available [via the link](#) or QR code.

## Stakeholders by Type of Activity

Stakeholders	Area of responsibility	Examples of institutions
<b>Political/ Strategic</b>	Define the overall framework of veteran policy: goals, values, directions, and rules of engagement. They determine priorities, create legislative and financial foundations, approve programmes, and influence other sectors and the overall effectiveness of support	Ministry of Veterans Affairs, intergovernmental organisations, Parliament, oblast military administrations, and others
<b>Coordination/ Administrative</b>	Responsible for policy and programme implementation. Align actions across levels of government and manage resources	Pension Fund, departments of social protection, local health administration offices, and others
<b>Service delivery/ Work with people</b>	Institutions that directly interact with veterans and their families. They provide support, help, advise, and accompany	National Police, Social Service Centres (SSC), Administrative Service Centres (ASC), and others
<b>Analytics/ Monitoring/ Oversight</b>	Conduct independent evaluations, collect data, analyse policies, and monitor respect for rights. Their work helps improve state policies and local support programmes	Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, analytical centres, media outlets, etc.

## **Stakeholder 1:**

### **National-Level State Authorities and Institutions**

State authorities and institutions bear a special responsibility for ensuring a systematic and high-quality policy that meets the needs of veterans and their families. These bodies define the overall framework and strategic direction of veteran policy, ensure the integrity of policies designed to support beneficiaries, and coordinate cross-sectoral initiatives and interagency collaboration. We divide them into two categories:

#### **1. Legislative, executive, and judicial bodies**

- Legislative bodies establish the legal foundation of veteran policy.
- Executive bodies develop and implement policies.
- Judicial bodies ensure every person's right to a fair trial and the protection of rights and freedoms as guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of Ukraine.

#### **2. Institutions representing state structures responsible for the functioning of the state and the protection of human rights and freedoms as guaranteed by the Constitution of Ukraine**

- Develop the strategy for veteran policy, including regulatory frameworks and financial mechanisms for its implementation at the national and local levels.
- Integrate veteran policy into all areas of public administration, create and modernise service delivery standards to address the needs of veterans and their families, and monitor compliance with these standards within their area of competence.

## **Stakeholder 2:**

### **Local Governments**

Local authorities consist of local governments at oblast, raion, and local levels, along with local executive bodies and territorial branches of central executive authorities.

They play a vital role in supporting veterans after their discharge from service, serving as spaces for recovery and support during their return to civilian life. They also serve as a source of support and stability for veterans' loved ones while the veterans are still serving and defending the country.

Local governments have the capacity to adapt the national strategy to their local context, taking into account the specific needs of veterans and their families. They can develop additional support programmes at the local level and respond promptly to individual requests. This enables them to implement targeted solutions that the state may be unable to cover at the national level due to limited resources, particularly financial ones. Such targeted solutions can also account for local specificities and the needs of veterans and their families residing in these territorial communities or regions.

#### **Local authorities also must:**

- ensure access for veterans and their families to social, healthcare, educational, administrative, and rehabilitation services guaranteed by the state;
- provide consultations on available programmes and opportunities;
- create or restore public spaces that are accessible to all veterans;
- arrange training programmes for professionals who work directly with veterans and their families;
- facilitate initiatives aimed at preserving the memory of warriors, foster a culture of gratitude, and strengthen social cohesion within the community;

- provide feedback to central authorities responsible for designing policies and service standards to improve support mechanisms and increase the overall effectiveness of veteran policy implementation.

### **Stakeholder 3:** **Businesses**

Upon discharging from military service, veterans often seek new employment opportunities, financial stability, and access to support and services. In these areas, businesses can become an essential partner to the state and communities by providing practical solutions both in the sphere of employment and through the provision of goods and services tailored to the needs of veterans.

It also plays a crucial role in supporting their families, particularly in its capacity as an employer, both during military service and after the return to civilian life. While a warrior is on service, their loved ones often face increased emotional, household, and financial burdens. Thus, businesses can offer support and consider the needs of family members, such as leave to care for an injured veteran or to investigate the circumstances in cases of a missing person, captivity, or the loss of a loved one. Such consideration from an employer helps families feel supported and secure even during the most difficult times.

**The map highlights two main roles of the business sector:  
an employer and a supplier of goods and services.**

Role	Action
<b>Employer</b>	Creates barrier-free conditions for employing veterans
	Fosters a friendly work environment and supports veterans throughout all stages – from mobilisation to return and adaptation to civilian life, as well as supports their families during the service member’s active duty
	Adapts workplaces to meet the needs of employees with disabilities, including by procuring necessary equipment funded by local budgets or the Fund for Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities
<b>Provider of goods and services</b>	Adapts products and services to meet the needs of veterans, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity
	Implements support programmes for veterans and their families
	Provides specialised services for veterans and their families, including healthcare, psychological, legal, financial, social, educational, transportation, and recreational services

## **Stakeholder 4:**

### **Civil Society Sector**

Civil society organisations are also participants in veteran policy. Here, we primarily refer to organisations that directly engage with veterans and their families by providing services, offering support, studying their needs, and interacting with them in various formats. Thanks to their flexibility and close connection to communities, they can respond quickly to challenges that may fall outside the scope of state programmes.

Direct contact with the target audience enables CSOs to deeply understand the needs, challenges, and experiences of veterans and their families. This understanding allows them to respond promptly to individual requests and strengthen the state's efforts in shaping the strategic vision for veteran policy.

The civil society sector can prepare analytics and research the needs, adaptation processes, and well-being of veterans and their families, providing a strong empirical foundation for developing effective state programmes and solutions.

Such organisations can also introduce practices of recognition and commemoration at the local level, lobby for changes at the national level, advocate for the interests of their target audience, and actively participate in implementing veteran policy, including as service providers.

## **Stakeholder 5:**

### **International Sector**

The international sector plays a significant role in providing material and technical support for the field of veterans' affairs, directing resources to priority areas of veteran policy and expanding opportunities for creating programmes and providing high-quality services to veterans and their families.

#### **The role of the international sector is realised in several key areas:**

- **Financial support:** both direct contributions to the state budget and funding for programmes that support the civil society and private sectors.
- **Expert support:** sharing experiences, providing recommendations for policy development, and devising standards and procedures based on international best practices.
- **Analytics and research:** supporting local research and analytical centres or organisations, as well as conducting independent studies and analytical work.
- **Partnerships with non-governmental organisations** that implement projects directly within communities.
- **International business investments:** implementing projects that directly or indirectly support veterans and their families at the national and local levels.
- **Engagement of diplomatic institutions:** embassies, foreign governments, and international agencies support targeted programmes, cultural initiatives, exchanges, and advocacy efforts.

# Role of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine

The Ministry of Veterans Affairs is the central executive authority responsible for developing and implementing veteran policy. It coordinates the operation of all state institutions and stakeholders in this field.

While veteran policy is implemented through the collective efforts of many stakeholders, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine serves as the key coordinator of this process. It is responsible not only for shaping policy at the national level but also for ensuring its coherence across all state authorities, communities, and the civil society and international sectors.

For this reason, the Ministry's role is highlighted separately on the stakeholder map as a central actor responsible for the coherence, coordination, and sustainability of veteran policy.

This role aims to ensure a comprehensive public veteran policy by effectively coordinating the efforts of all involved parties and mobilising available resources toward its priority areas. This entails creating conditions for the successful return of veterans to civilian life, protecting their rights and dignity within their communities and the state as a whole, and providing meaningful support to their families.

The Ministry must maintain a leadership role in developing and implementing policies that support veterans and their families at the national and international levels. **We outline the primary functions and responsibilities of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine as follows:**

- **Developing the architecture, philosophy, and framework of public policy on veterans and their families**

The Ministry serves as the primary developer and coordinator of policy across all implementation levels. It ensures the cross-cutting nature

of veteran policy and advocates for its prioritisation across all state authorities. The Ministry defines the core principles that underpin support for veterans and their families, including the development of an overall support strategy at both national and local levels.

#### ■ **Coordinating stakeholders**

The Ministry is authorised to engage with other state authorities, the civil society sector, local communities, international donors and organisations, and businesses. Its goal is to coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders involved in implementing policy on veterans and their families.

#### ■ **Monitoring, verifying, and controlling the compliance of policies with the principles of public veteran policy**

The Ministry is responsible for reviewing and verifying whether policies developed by all executive authorities and local governments adhere to the core principles of public veteran policy. It also tracks and oversees the integration of policy principles into regulatory legal acts of other state authorities, ensuring alignment with the overarching objectives.

#### ■ **Consulting and coordinating with state authorities during the decision-making process**

With access to analytics, data, and experiences of veterans and their families, the Ministry acts as a source of expertise, supporting the development of related policies across various sectors.

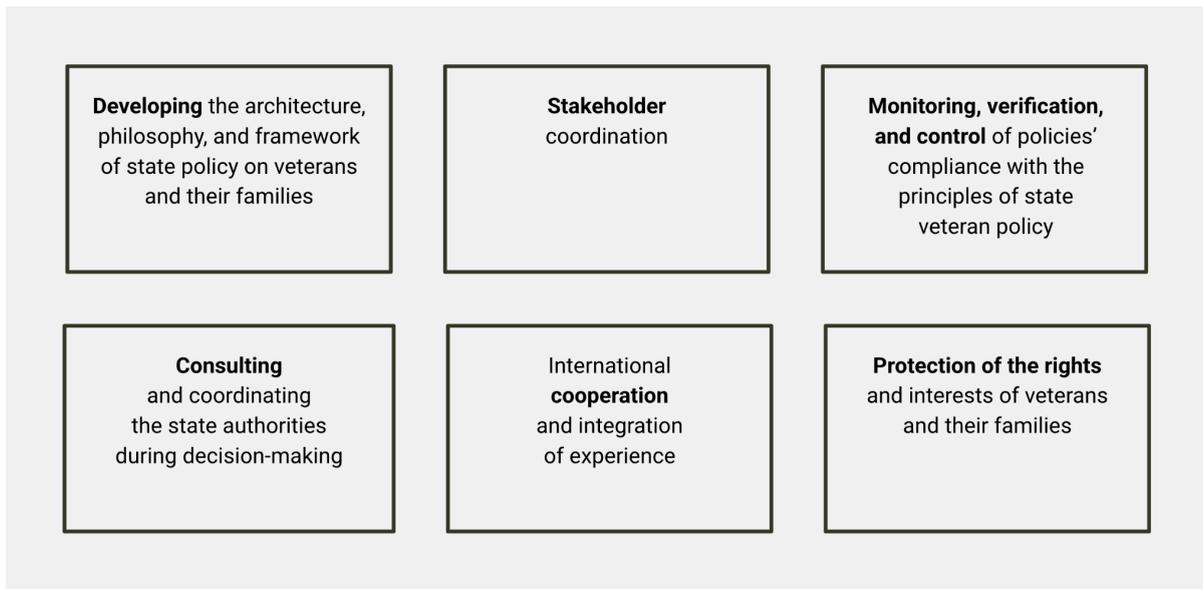
#### ■ **International cooperation and integration of experience**

The Ministry represents the interests of veterans and their families at the international level and incorporates the experience of international partners into policy development.

#### ■ **Protecting the rights and interests of veterans and their families**

The Ministry ensures the safety and support of veterans and their families, particularly during crises. It also emphasises the importance of recognising the contribution of veterans to national history.

## Functions and Tasks of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine



**Given the growing number of veterans and the interagency nature of veteran policy,** it is advisable to consider the introduction of the position of a Deputy Prime Minister – Minister for Veterans Affairs.

Establishing this position would significantly enhance interagency cooperation. Unlike a regular minister who oversees only their own ministry, a Deputy Prime Minister would have broader authority to coordinate actions across multiple ministries, launch comprehensive programmes, and ensure the coherence of policy on veterans and their families across the entire government. This step is crucial to make veteran policy truly cross-cutting and systemic.

# Budgeting

Veteran policy in Ukraine is funded by state and local budgets and may be supplemented with resources from the private sector and international partners. Expenditures are allocated across different ministries and government bodies, providing opportunities for targeted assistance to veterans and their family members, but this may also lead to risks of uneven funding and insufficient coordination.

## State budget

According to **Article 87 of the Budget Code**<sup>291</sup>, the state budget provides annual one-off cash assistance to war veterans, state support for public associations to implement nationwide programmes, housing subsidies, and benefits for paying housing and utility services. Moreover, distinct programmes funded by state and local budgets provide scholarships, compensation, and services for veterans and their families.

**Veteran policy is cross-departmental and funded through different ministries within their respective budget programmes. For example:**

- rehabilitation and healthcare services are funded from the Ministry of Health's budget;
- the Ministry of Economy offers grant schemes for businesses and reskilling.

Consequently, the majority of funding for veteran policy is secured not through the dedicated Ministry of Veterans Affairs but through other central executive authorities responsible for specific services. Meanwhile, its implementation is hindered by the lack of an adequate mechanism to monitor and assess spending on veteran support across departments, as these costs are often not accounted for.

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<sup>291</sup> Budget Code of Ukraine (8 July 2010, No. 2456-VI) (2025). Legislation of Ukraine. [zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2456-17](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2456-17)

## **Local budgets**

Local budgets differ from state budgets, as they reflect the degree of autonomy and decentralisation in Ukraine. The benefit is that community representatives decide on priority spending in a particular area. This enables veterans' associations to exert greater influence over the local budget than over the state budget, as they can participate in its planning.

Simultaneously, budget decentralisation poses the risk of unequal funding for veteran initiatives. The level of support for veterans can vary greatly across communities: some offer travel reimbursements, additional benefits, and family support programmes, while others may lack such initiatives or be underfunded. The amount of funding is also heavily influenced by the community's economic capacity and management priorities, as well as the initiative of local authorities.

**Local budgets are also supported by the state budget through targeted subventions. They are allocated for:**

- the work of professionals in assisting war veterans and demobilised individuals;
- financial compensation for acquiring housing for individuals with groups I-II war-related disabilities;
- development of veteran spaces.

## Other potential funding sources

Veteran policy extends beyond funding from state and local budgets.

Eligible participants for the support programmes include:

- **private sector** – can offer retraining programmes for veterans, assist them in adapting to a new workplace, and partially lower the cost of services for veterans from private providers;
- **international programmes** – can fund infrastructure or social services either through specific projects or via the state budget;
- **public associations and charitable foundations** – implement support programmes, arrange training, consultations, and social initiatives/events funded by international aid, the state budget, or the private sector.

# Conclusions

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**1** Policy regarding veterans and their families is a crucial element of national security, resilience, and recovery. The stakeholder map demonstrates that supporting veterans and their families is not the responsibility of a single ministry, but the result of collective efforts – from those who design the policy framework to those who work directly with people. The effectiveness of veteran policy depends on the ability of the state to ensure its comprehensiveness, consistency, and sustainability.

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**2** Given the number of parties involved, coordination among all stakeholders – state authorities, local governments, the civil society sector, businesses, and international partners – is essential. Resources can only be effectively utilised, duplication avoided, and support provided to meet real challenges through collaborative work and clear role allocation.

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**3** **State authorities** set the strategic direction, develop policies, laws, and standards, and ensure their implementation and oversight. They play a crucial role in establishing a comprehensive framework of veteran policy and benefits for beneficiaries.

**Local governments** are the first to welcome veterans after service, provide access to services, and create a safe environment for their return to civilian life.

**The business sector** provides barrier-free employment, supports families of service members, and offers services adapted to the needs of veterans. Its participation is essential for economic stability and well-being.

**The civil society sector** responds rapidly to emerging needs, fills gaps not covered by the state, and generates knowledge that can underpin effective policymaking.

**International partners** provide resources and expertise and strengthen the capacity of national institutions through training, joint programmes, and knowledge exchange.

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- 4** The Ministry of Veterans Affairs plays a central role as the body responsible for policy development, its integration into nationwide strategies, coordination of efforts of all stakeholders, and oversight of compliance with defined principles and standards. This leadership ensures that the combined efforts of all stakeholders result in a unified, effective, and dignified policy for those who have defended and continue to defend Ukraine.

# Afterword

This concept marks the beginning of important work on shaping public policy on the families of veterans. In it, we, the expert community of civil society organisations, outline the basic approaches, principles, and directions on which the state may rely when developing its policies of recognition and support for families' experiences.

We are aware that our current knowledge is limited and that substantial research, data collection, and institutional capacity-building lie ahead. However, we wish to emphasise the most important thing already now: families cannot be viewed merely as an environment for supporting veterans.

They follow their own parallel journey: they bear responsibility, live in uncertainty, wait and lose, care for children and elderly family members. They are autonomous subjects of policy, individuals with their own needs and experiences requiring proper recognition.

This document is not a completed narrative, but rather a dynamic basis for future changes and an invitation to broader dialogue. We establish guidelines for government institutions, local authorities, businesses, international partners, and civil society, which help see the experiences of veterans' families.

The concept lays the foundation, and the next steps and actions must turn it into a living policy that offers dignified support to every person who is going or has gone through their journey alongside service members.