

VETERANS IN MILITARY SERVICE

Analysing Guarantees and Needs.
Recommendations for Public Policy

2026

This material was made possible with the support of the UK Government, provided through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, within the Concept of Ukraine's State Policy on Veterans and Their Families project. It is implemented by the following civil society organisations: Veteran Hub, Pryncyp, Legal Hundred and the Human Capital Recovery Platform. Restart (formerly the team of the Space of Opportunities). The information presented in this material does not necessarily reflect the views of the UK Government.

Abstract

This document is devoted to an analysis of ensuring the well-being of veterans who continue military service and taking their needs into account within the personnel policy of Ukraine's defence sector. It examines international approaches to supporting military personnel with combat experience, the current legal and regulatory framework in Ukraine and the specific needs of veterans in the military environment.

As part of the study, the authors conducted a desk review of international experience and national legislation, and mapped the needs of veterans who remain in service, taking into account their combat experience and overlapping statuses. Based on the study's findings, recommendations have been developed to improve public policy and enhance the well-being of veterans in the military environment.

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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 service members/veterans themselves.

Website: pryncyp.org

Facebook: fb.com/pryncypua

Veteran Hub is a sustainable support network for veterans and families of warriors. 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 warriors and their loved ones.

Website: veteranhub.com.ua

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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.

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Human Capital Recovery Platform. ReStart is an organisation involved in the development and localisation of veteran policy. Its expert team partnered in launching and supervising the Veteran Support Specialist project by developing professional standards, primary and backup documentation, and a training course and preparing both trainers and support specialists. ReStart's Training Centre focuses on training specialists from various fields who work with or provide services to veterans.

Another area of the organisation's work is engagement with communities: from strategy development to the implementation of high-quality veteran policy, including the formulation of a community development strategy and a support programme for veterans and their families, taking into account their needs, the establishment of a management hierarchy, specialist training and mentoring in the opening of veteran spaces. The organisation coordinates the Coalition of Veteran Spaces, an association of 29 service organisations and veteran spaces across different regions of Ukraine.

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Target audience

This document will be useful for stakeholders involved in the development, implementation or improvement of military personnel policy, as well as related areas, including veteran policy, healthcare and pension provision:

- Representatives of state institutions and authorities at the national level
- Representatives of the senior military leadership, military units, training centres and higher military educational institutions
- Warriors and veterans
- Families of warriors, veterans and their close people
- Academics, analysts and researchers
- The international community and donors
- The general public, the media and anyone else interested in military personnel policy

List of abbreviations

ABT	acoustic barotrauma
AD	air defence
AFU	Armed Forces of Ukraine
AMA	additional monetary allowance
AMR	additional monetary reward
ATO	Anti-Terrorist Operation
AWOL	absence without leave
BCAT	basic combined arms training
BDA	battalion defence area
BMS	basic military service
CMU	Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine
CO	combat order
COP	command and observation post
CT	computed tomography
CZ	combat zone
DIU	Defence Intelligence of Ukraine
EW	electronic warfare
FIS	Foreign Intelligence Service
GAB	guided aerial bomb
GS	General Staff
HMEI	higher military educational institution
JFO	Joint Forces Operation

LC	line of contact
MA	monetary allowance
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MMC	military medical commission
MoD	Ministry of Defence of Ukraine
MOS	military occupational speciality
MSEC	Medical and Social Expert Commission
NABU	National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
Navy	Naval Forces
NGU	National Guard of Ukraine
NHSU	National Health Service of Ukraine
OCB	one-off cash benefit
PH	participant in hostilities
PKM	modernised Kalashnikov machine gun
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
PWDW	person with a disability resulting from war
SBI	State Bureau of Investigation
SBGSU	State Border Guard Service of Ukraine
SCESU	State Criminal-Executive Service of Ukraine
SES	State Emergency Service
SFS	State Fiscal Service
SIGINT	signals intelligence
SM salary	service member's salary

SOF	Special Operations Forces
SPSU	State Penitentiary Service of Ukraine
SSU	Security Service of Ukraine
TRSSC	Territorial Recruitment and Social Support Centre
UAVs	unmanned aerial vehicles
UN	United Nations
Ultrasound	Ultrasound examination

Glossary

Awards system	A set of state, departmental and other distinctions, procedures and criteria for awarding them, aimed at recognising the merits of service members.
Martial law	A special legal regime introduced in Ukraine or in certain areas of Ukraine in the event of armed aggression or threat of attack, a threat to Ukraine's state independence or its territorial integrity, which provides for granting the relevant governmental authorities, military command and local governments the powers necessary to avert the threat and ensure national security, as well as temporary, threat-related restrictions on the constitutional rights and freedoms of individuals and citizens and the rights and lawful interests of legal entities, with an indication of the period of such restrictions.
Medical provision	A system for organising and providing healthcare, covering prevention, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and medical support during and after service.
Military career	Professional journey of a service member, which includes service itself, the development of expertise, promotion in rank, holding higher positions, motivation and rewards within the military system.
Military service	A special public service, consisting of the professional activity of Ukrainian citizens who are fit for military service by health and age, except in cases defined by law, as well as foreigners and stateless persons, related to the defence of Ukraine, its independence and territorial integrity.
Mobilisation	A set of measures taken by the state to shift the national economy, the activities of governmental authorities, other state bodies, local governments, enterprises, institutions and organisations to functioning under the conditions of a special period, and to shift military formations and civil protection forces to wartime organisation and staffing.
Monetary allowance	The totality of payments received by a service member during service, including the basic salary, salary based on military

	rank, monthly additional types of monetary allowance, such as increases in basic salary, allowances, additional payments, permanent rewards, and bonuses, as well as one-off additional types of monetary allowance.
Motivation for service	A set of internal and external factors that determine readiness to enter service, continue it, perform tasks and develop, including through a combination of material incentives, service conditions, recognition, career growth opportunities and a personal sense of meaning in the activity.
Needs mapping	An analytical approach to identifying and structuring the needs of a target group (veterans in military service in this document) across different areas of life.
Peacetime	A period of state functioning in the absence of open armed conflicts, war or hostilities against other states or non-state armed formations, when the activities of public authorities, the economy and society are carried out under the ordinary legal regime.
Recognition	A component of well-being that reflects public and institutional acknowledgement of the contribution of a service member or veteran, including through awards, statuses, public respect and fair treatment by the state, command and society.
Rehabilitation	A set of medical, psychological and social measures aimed at restoring the physical and mental functions, working capacity and quality of life of a service member or veteran after a wound, injury or illness.
Social protection	A system of state guarantees and support mechanisms aimed at meeting the basic needs and ensuring the well-being of service members, veterans and their families, including through payments, benefits, services and legal instruments.
Special period	A period that begins from the moment a decision on mobilisation, except targeted mobilisation, is announced or communicated to the relevant executors in relation to covert mobilisation, or from the moment martial law is introduced in Ukraine or in certain areas of Ukraine, and includes the period of mobilisation, wartime and, in part, the period of reconstruction after the end of hostilities.

Transition	A short-term transitional period during which a service member is discharged from service and integrates into civilian life.
Troop personnel policy	A system of approaches, decisions and practices for managing human resources in the troop, covering recruitment, development, training, effective use of personnel in accordance with the needs of military formations, retention and discharge of service members and veterans, as well as consideration of their needs and experiences during service.
Veteran	A person who directly participated in combat operations to defend the Homeland, as well as in other states where this forms part of Ukraine's international obligations.
Vocation	A component of well-being that reflects a person's fulfilment through meaningful activity, such as service, work, education or other forms of employment, as well as the opportunity for development, professional growth and understanding one's own role and the value of this activity.
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 well-being in the military environment, meaning during military service, and well-being in the civilian environment.

Methodology

Relevance

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine resulted in many individuals enlisting in military service to protect the country's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. According to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, there were approximately 1.5 million veterans in Ukraine as of December 2025. This refers not only to persons with combat experience (PCE), but also to those who have been granted the status of a person with a disability resulting from war (PWDW)¹.

When working on the Concept of the Public Veteran Policy, we established that their needs change depending on the environment: military service, military reserve/general conscription pool or civilian life².

In the current circumstances, a significant number of veterans continue military service, combining their status of the participant in hostilities with the role of an active service member. Now, when it is critically necessary for experienced service members to remain in the Defence Forces of Ukraine, it is particularly important to have a holistic understanding of their well-being, specifically in the military environment. However, current policies largely fail to account for the full range of needs arising at the intersection of these two statuses. This complicates the development of effective personnel policy and creates risks of professional burnout, loss of motivation and, as a result, possible personnel outflow from the troop.

¹ Veremieieva, T., & Honcharova, K. (2 December 2025). The Number of Veterans in Ukraine Is Growing: How Will Their Number Change Once the War Ends. RBC-Ukraine. rbc.ua/rus/news/veteraniv-ukrayini-stae-bilshe-k-zminitsya-1764664391.html

² Coalition of Civil Society Organisations. (2025). Concept of the Public Veteran Policy: Expert Review and Recommendations. runcyp.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/derzhavna-veteranska-polityka-1.pdf

Problem statement

Experience of participation in hostilities affects the well-being of veterans in both the military and civilian environments. Needs emerge that are partially covered by state guarantees and benefits after being granted status of the participant in hostilities. At the same time, some veterans continue military service and also have needs related to their military careers. State benefits and services are aimed primarily at improving a person's civilian well-being, while the needs that arise at the intersection of the statuses of service member and veteran remain understudied.

Goal

To identify the needs of veterans remaining in military service and develop recommendations for ensuring their well-being in the military environment within the personnel policy of the defence sector.

Subject

Meeting the needs of veterans during military service.

Objectives

1. Identify the approaches used by other countries to ensure the well-being of veterans who participated in combat operations and remained in military service or returned to it, as well as the tools used to meet their needs.
2. Establish practices for the application of legal acts of Ukraine that regulate or affect the well-being of veterans in military service.
3. Outline the range and content of the needs of veterans who continue military service.
4. Develop recommendations for stakeholders on how to take into account the needs of veterans in military service within the Defence Forces' personnel policy.

Focus

Attention is focused only on those aspects of the legal and regulatory framework for military service and the needs of veterans that are directly related to their combat experience and arise from holding the status of the participant in hostilities or the status of a person with a disability resulting from war. We did not analyse general social guarantees for all service members of the Defence Forces, including separate issues of career development, monetary allowance and pension provision, healthcare or housing provision. Instead, we considered only additional guarantees, forms of recognition, and benefits specifically related to participation in hostilities.

Theoretical foundation

The theoretical foundation of the study is the concept of **Well-Being**, a categorisation of various human needs that enables a comprehensive assessment of a person's condition, functioning and level of satisfaction across different areas of life. It 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.

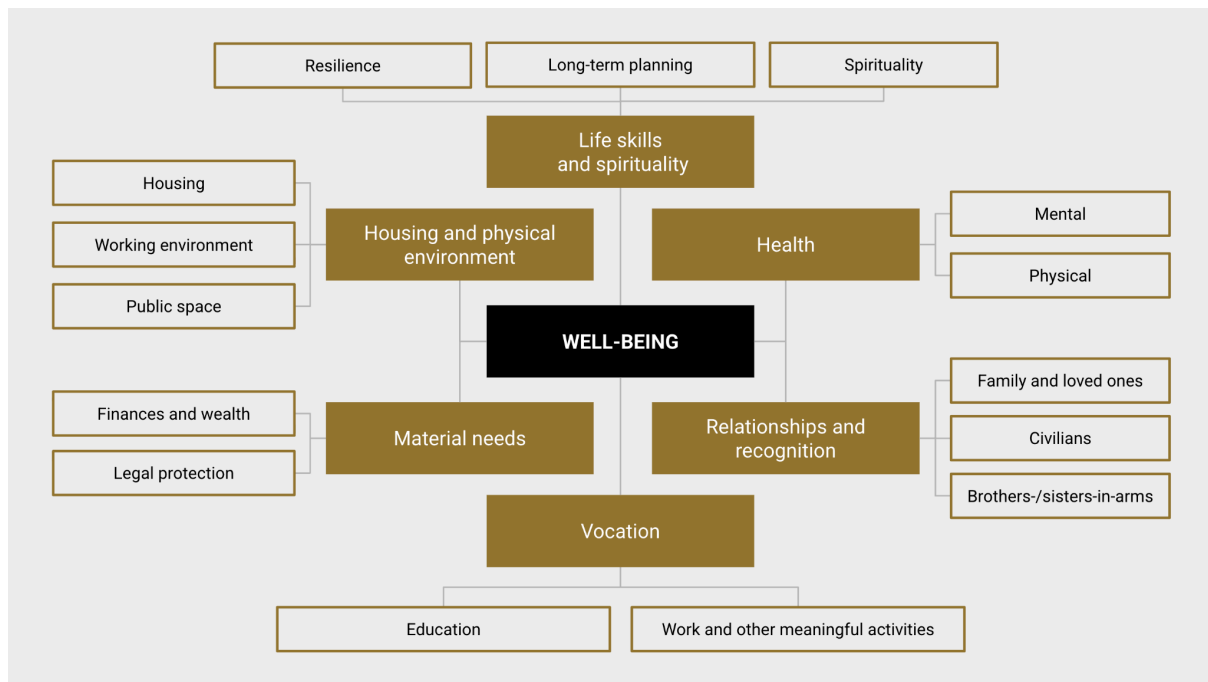
In 2023, the Veteran Hub team developed its own model of veteran well-being, on which we rely in this document. It covers the key components of satisfaction with quality of life: vocation, material needs, health, relationships, housing and the physical environment, life skills and spirituality³.

In this document, we paid particular attention to the components of well-being that are directly related to military service and developed **within the military environment**. We identified them based on an analysis of the legal status of service members, the specific features of the exercise of their professional rights and duties, and service conditions that affect access to certain opportunities and guarantees.

³ Veteran Hub. The Journeys of Veterans. veteranhub.com.ua/dobrobut

These aspects of well-being are the main focus of the further analysis, as they develop during service and change most significantly during the transition to civilian life.

Visualisation of the Well-Being Model



Vocation

Vocation is an important component of veteran well-being, linked to a sense of meaning, self-fulfilment, and social inclusion. It affects motivation, psychological resilience and a person's ability to build long-term life trajectories both during and after service.

The main general elements of this component are:

- education (formal, non-formal and self-education);
- employment;
- hobbies;
- entrepreneurship;
- volunteering.

In the military environment, we consider this component of well-being in the HR dimension of service as a form of employment: career progression, recognition for service, military career planning, education and training, and opportunities for rest.

Material needs

Financial capacity is an important component of veteran well-being, affecting other components, including health, housing conditions, and relationships with loved ones. **This component includes:**

- assets (transport, real estate and land);
- finances (income and social payments);
- legal protection.

In the military environment, financial capacity depends directly on a guaranteed monetary allowance and additional rewards. The possibility of having other income, in addition to official income within service, also remains an important issue.

Health

Health is one of the main elements of veteran well-being, encompassing physical and mental aspects, as well as the ability to participate in various activities. Health assessment may be objective (presence of illnesses or wounds) and subjective (self-assessment and level of satisfaction). Some models of veteran well-being, such as the Canadian and American models, take into account a wide range of factors: physical and mental condition, chronic pain, stress, quality of life, the ability to fulfil life roles, as well as continuous access to health services during the transition from the military to the civilian healthcare system.

In the military environment, this component covers access to necessary services and the ability to compensate for health consequences of participation in combat operations. It is also important how

a veteran's health condition is taken into account when personnel decisions are made, particularly regarding fitness for service.

Relationships

Social connections, such as family, close circles and colleagues, are an important component of veteran well-being. The transition from military to civilian life involves restoring pre-war relationships or building new ones. Combat experience may complicate this process. At the same time, veterans gain a unique experience of social interaction with comrades-in-arms during service, and these connections are preserved in civilian life, transformed or lost. According to the Canadian model of well-being, social integration is a key challenge for veterans, as psychological well-being is closely linked to the quality of relationships and expected social support⁴.

In the military environment, it is important to have the opportunity to build stable social connections, such as family relationships, both during and after service. Confidence that these loved ones will be cared for, including in the event of negative scenarios during service, is also important.

Housing and the physical environment

During service, veterans have limited influence over their housing conditions, as they may live in barracks with minimal personal space or in field conditions, such as dugouts and trenches. After the transition to civilian life, they may return to their previous owned or rented housing, the conditions of which may have changed during their service, and in some cases, they may need to look for new housing due to the absence of their own housing, its loss or occupation.

In the military environment, we distinguish between temporary accommodation during combat missions and permanent housing

⁴ Hatch, S. L., Harvey, S. B., Dandeker, C., Burdett, H., Greenberg, N., Fear, N. T., & Wessely, S. (2013). Life in and after the Armed Forces: Social networks and mental health in the UK military. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 35(7), 1045–1064. pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23356827

for the duration of service. Permanent housing is an important part of well-being, as it provides a service member with privacy, basic comfort, and the opportunity to maintain relationships outside service.

Life skills and spirituality

Life skills and adaptability are components of well-being that reflect the extent to which veterans can adjust to civilian life after military service.

A Stanford University study indicates that constant stress affects the ability to plan⁵. In this context, two elements are important: management of one's career and further service, which is linked to vocation, as well as spiritual resilience and soft skills that affect mental health and the ability to withstand external factors. Therefore, we assume that the ability to plan for the long term is among the key indicators of well-being and adaptation to civilian life.

In the military environment, it is important that a service member with combat experience is able to build and reflect on their military career not only as preparation for civilian life, but also as a source of resilience, vocation and spiritual support during service.

Methodological framework

The methodological framework of the study was a **desk review combined with interviews** to examine international experience and Ukraine's legal and regulatory framework for ensuring the well-being of veterans in the military environment. To map the needs of veterans who remain in military service, we used **focus group discussions**.

Field data collection took place in January–February 2026.

⁵ Kulshreshtha, A., Alonso, A., McClure, L. A., Hajjar, I., Manly, J. J., & Judd, S. (2023). Association of stress with cognitive function among older Black and White US adults. *JAMA Network Open*, 6(3). pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36881411

To analyse international experience, we conducted **nine expert interviews** with former service members, representatives of senior officer corps and state institutions, namely with:

- a retired Lieutenant General of the French Armed Forces, professor at the Institute of Political Studies;
- a Brigadier General, Chief of Personnel of the Finnish Defence Forces;
- a retired Air Commodore of the Royal Air Force, Commander of the Order of the British Empire;
- a representative of the UK defence sector;
- four representatives of the United States, including a senior executive at the Department of Veterans Affairs, a developer of the US National Veterans Strategy, a Marine Corps officer and an expert in veteran services;
- a service member of the State of Israel.

To supplement the analysis of Ukrainian legislation on personnel policy in the Defence Forces of Ukraine concerning service members with combat experience, we conducted **12 in-depth interviews**, in particular with:

- three representatives of the departments of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine;
- the Chief of Personnel of a corps of the Land Forces of the AFU;
- a head of the department for recruitment of enlisted and non-commissioned personnel of the corps of the Land Forces of the AFU;
- the former Head of a Personnel Group of the brigade of the Land Forces of the AFU;
- the Chief of Staff of the brigade of the Land Forces of the AFU;
- a Medical Service Officer of a military unit of the Defence Forces;

- the Head of the Financial Service of a military unit of the Defence Forces;
- a female commissioned officer;
- a female lawyer specialising in pension provision;
- a female veteran and lawyer specialising in the protection of the rights of service members and their families.

For the needs mapping component, we conducted **three focus group discussions** involving **12 service members** with combat experience. When selecting informants, we took into account the following characteristics: age, branch of troops, period of obtaining PSH and military rank. In terms of combat experience (presence of status of the participant in hostilities) and sex, the sample is homogeneous. We invited participants who obtained status of the participant in hostilities from 2014 until the full-scale invasion (four informants) and after 24 February 2022 (eight informants).

Distribution of informants in focus group discussions

Military rank	Service/branch	Age				
		18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	Total
Commissioned officers	Naval Forces			1		1
	Air Assault Forces			1		1
	Air Force		1			1
	Land Forces			2	1	3
Total for category			1	4	1	6
Enlisted personnel	Naval Forces			1		1
	General Staff	1				1
	Land Forces				1	1

Military rank	Service/branch	Age				
		18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	Total
Total for category		1		1	1	3
Non-commissioned officers	Unmanned Systems Forces	1				1
	Territorial Defence Forces			1		1
	Land Forces			1		1
Total for category		1		2		3
Total		2	1	7	2	12

We used triangulation to deepen the findings. To this end, we processed **48 questionnaires** completed by service members that repeated or supplemented the questions used in the focus group discussions. The survey was conducted in a targeted manner among participants who had registered to take part in the focus groups.

Distribution of informants in written responses

Military rank	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Total
Commissioned officers		3	7	9	2	21
Enlisted personnel	1	1	5	5		12
Non-commissioned officer		4	6	3	2	15
Total	1	8	18	17	4	48

Among the informants, 14 obtained status of the participant in hostilities between 2014 and the full-scale invasion, while 34 obtained it afterwards. Most participants who provided written responses are currently part of the Land Forces (29 informants).

Limitations

1. Data were collected from informants during January–February 2026. Therefore, the needs and problematic aspects described are relevant primarily as of that period.
2. The numerical data used in this report have been summarised from informants' written responses and reflect the views of a limited number of people.

Structure

This report consists of an introduction and three sections, covering an analysis of international practices for ensuring veteran well-being in service; an analysis of the legal and regulatory framework for meeting the needs of veterans in service in Ukraine; and needs mapping for veterans in service. The report concludes with recommendations developed from this study.

SECTION 1

Overview of international practice

Introduction

Each country has its own support system for service members who take part in hostilities. In this section, we compared the current practices of France, the United States, Israel, Finland and the United Kingdom concerning the establishment of status of the participant in hostilities, approaches to career advancement, the system of financial payments, medical and psychological support and mechanisms for assisting families.

The differences between them are shaped by historical experience, the intensity of participation in armed conflicts and the specific features of national social security systems. At the same time, all of them show an aspiration towards comprehensive support for service members at all stages, from service itself and participation in combat operations to long-term rehabilitation and veteran policy.

France

At present, the French Republic (France) is not directly involved in armed conflicts but maintains a significant military presence in strategic regions worldwide to protect its interests amid global instability. Current operations outside metropolitan France (abbreviated as OPEX⁶) and operational missions (MISOPS) include:

- Europe (the AIGLE mission in Romania⁷, LYNX in Estonia⁸)
- Middle East (Operation Chammal⁹ in Iraq, Daman in Lebanon)
- Africa (missions in Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Djibouti)¹⁰

As of 2025

The French Army,
the largest component
of the French Armed
Forces

110,000 service members, including:

- 3,300 involved in OPEX;
- 5,700 serving in sovereignty and presence forces (France's overseas territories and bilateral defence agreements with other states)

⁶ OPEX (Opérations Extérieures) are external military operations of the French Armed Forces outside national territory.

⁷ The AIGLE mission is an operation of the French Army deployed in Romania on 28 February 2022, four days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where the French Armed Forces established a "spearhead" battalion of the NATO Response Force. Since 1 May 2022, France has been the framework nation for the multinational battalion deployed in Cincu, Romania.

⁸ Operation Lynx is the name of the French military contribution to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States (eFP), aimed at strengthening the Alliance's defence posture on its eastern flank.

⁹ Operation Chammal is a French military operation in Iraq and Syria, launched to contain the expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and support the Iraqi army.

¹⁰ Ministère des Armées. (n.d.). Opérations extérieures (OPEX) et missions opérationnelles (MISOPS) (External Operations and Operational Missions). defense.gouv.fr/terre/missions-larmee-terre/operations-exterieures-opex-missions-operationnelles-misops

Status

In the French system, a service member's activity is recorded in the ESS (État Signalétique et des Services), the main registration document in the personal military service record book (livret de matricule). This document records the dates of departure for and return from operations, as well as the assigned unit and a description of combat distinctions (faites d'armes)¹¹. On this basis, the National Office for Veterans and Victims of War (Office national des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre) decides whether to issue the card.

Status of OPEX participants¹²

Status for OPEX participants	Status of the participant in hostilities, confirmed by the card (Carte du Combattant)
Issuing authority	National Office for Veterans and Victims of War (Office national des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre, ONACVG)
Eligibility criteria (alternative)	1. Participation in nine combat operations as part of a unit. 2. Personal participation in five combat engagements. 3. At least 112 days of service in a conflict zone.
Social benefits	Social assistance and access to mechanisms reserved for persons with combat experience
Tax benefits	Additional demi-part when calculating income tax (for persons over the age of 74)
Additional financial mechanisms	Access to the mutual pension programme for persons with combat experience (Retraite Mutualiste du Combattant)
Symbolic and status privileges	The right to wear the PCE's Cross; ONACVG ward status; the right to have the coffin covered with the national flag during burial

¹¹ Expert interview with Michel Yakovlev, retired Lieutenant General of the French Army and professor at the Institute of Political Studies, conducted on 7 January 2026.

¹² Quels sont les avantages des militaires en OPEX ? (n.d.). Mutuelle Epargne Retraite. mutuelleepargneretraite.fr/actualites/avantages-militaires-opex

Since such a card does not provide any new benefits beyond those available to a service member, it is usually not obtained during service but rather, if desired, after retirement.

For French service members, the main identifiers of status in society and during ceremonies are awards, e.g., “For Military Valour” (la valeur militaire) or the “War Cross” (croix de guerre). According to Lieutenant General Michel Yakovleff, French service members are often more interested in recognition than purely in money¹³.

Career, decorations and recognition

Career development

Participation in operations abroad is an important advantage for the professional file of service members in France. Such experience is usually taken into account during appraisals for promotion and career advancement. Practical experience and technical skills acquired directly in the area of operations, the ability to act in crisis situations and leadership qualities are highly valued and may accelerate promotion to higher military ranks.

Participation in OPEX also contributes to developing competencies in demand in the civilian sector, particularly in crisis management, international coordination, and high-pressure work. This makes it easier for service members to find their first job in civilian life if they change professional field¹⁴.

¹³ Expert interview with Michel Yakovleff, retired Lieutenant General of the French Army and professor at the Institute of Political Studies, conducted on 7 January 2026.

¹⁴ Quels sont les avantages des militaires en OPEX ? Mutuelle Epargne Retraite.
mutuelleepargneretraite.fr/actualites/avantages-militaires-opex

Decorations and recognition

Service members who participated in OPEX may receive honorary decorations and medals, including the National Defence Medal and the Cross for Military Valour. **The award criteria are:**

- length of military service;
- demonstrated courage and bravery;
- the nature and duration of the mission and specific actions of the service member.

Return from OPEX is often accompanied by ceremonies. Such events are usually organised by units, take place with the participation of families and the military command, and are aimed at honouring the contributions of service members¹⁵.

Financial provision

Payments during service

■ Operational allowances (Sold OPEX/ISSE)

The main allowance for career service members in France during deployment is **ISSE (Indemnité de Sujétions pour Service à l'Étranger), a payment for special conditions of service abroad¹⁶**. It is a form of recognition of the difficulties and risks which service members face while serving abroad¹⁷. Since the 1990s, France has applied a single Sold OPEX rate, which is considered a fairer approach. Importantly, the principle for calculating the allowance is universal, but the final

¹⁵ Quels sont les avantages des militaires en OPEX ? Mutuelle Epargne Retraite.
mutuelleepargneretraite.fr/actualites/avantages-militaires-opex

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

amount correlates with rank through a multiplier applied to the basic salary¹⁸, meaning that the higher the rank, the larger the reward.

The allowance is accrued daily after departure for the mission¹⁹.

For enlisted personnel:

Average base pay (gross ²⁰) in 2023	Allowance
EUR 2,679	Calculated by multiplying the base amount by a factor of 1.5 (additional monthly payments of EUR 4,018)
Payments exempt from income tax ²¹	

■ Additional payments and bonuses differentiated by rank

In addition to the basic salary and operational allowances, service members in France are entitled to **additional bonuses, including family-related, qualification-related and service-condition bonuses**, which depend on rank and level of responsibility. **In 2023, the average amount of these monthly bonuses was:**

For enlisted personnel	For non-commissioned officers	For officers
EUR 864	EUR 1,230	EUR 2,559 ²²

¹⁸ Expert interview with Michel Yakovleff, retired Lieutenant General of the French Army and professor at the Institute of Political Studies, conducted on 7 January 2026.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Amount before taxes and contributions.

²¹ Prime de soldat: montant, conditions et versement (Service member's allowance: amount, conditions and payment). Journal du Net.

journal.dunet.com/management/salaire-cadres/1544321-cd1-prime-soldat

²² Quels sont les avantages des militaires en OPEX ? Mutuelle Epargne Retraite.
mutuelleepargneretraite.fr/actualites/avantages-militaires-opex

Deferred benefits

■ Preferential service credit

The French pension provision system for service members uses the mechanism of **campaign benefits (bénéfices de campagne)** as a form of deferred reward for service in conditions of increased risk.

Instead of direct payments, the service member is credited with **additional length of service**, which enables earlier retirement or an increase in pension payments.

Simple campaign (Campagne simple)	Double campaign (Campagne double)
One day of service in an area of operations counts as 1.5 days of service credit. For example, for 100 actual days spent in a combat zone, a service member accrues 150 days of pensionable service. This is the standard for most overseas operations	One day of service counts as two days. This coefficient is applied during intensive hostilities officially recognised as a war zone ²³

■ Mutual pension programme for persons with combat experience (Retraite Mutualiste du Combattant)

This is a deferred income instrument and savings programme that helps service members invest their additional payments independently after reaching age 65. All contributions to the fund are fully deductible from taxable income, allowing taxes to be reduced during active service and funds to be accumulated for the future.

In turn, the state adds an additional 12.5% to 60% to these contributions, depending on the age at which the status was obtained and the type of conflict in which the person participated. After age 65, the service

²³ Expert interview with Michel Yakovleff, retired Lieutenant General of the French Army and professor at the Institute of Political Studies, conducted on 7 January 2026.

member receives an additional lifelong payment that is fully exempt from tax²⁴.

Although deferred benefits are realised after service ends, they directly affect veteran well-being during service in two dimensions of the “Material Needs” component. First, they form part of the overall assessment of the fairness of the monetary allowance a service member receives when deciding whether to continue their career. Second, as General Yakovleff noted, it is the combination of current payments and deferred benefits that creates a balance in which “money is a supporting factor, rather than the main motivation for service”²⁵.

Health

Physical health

Health is one of the basic components of service members’ well-being in France, closely linked to the specific nature of service and the risks it entails. The French system combines medical provision, financial guarantees and rehabilitation tools, forming a holistic approach to supporting physical condition and recovery after wounds.

Thus, in the event of a wound, a service member continues to receive **full support** while in the hospital. If treatment and prosthetics are needed within the civilian healthcare system, the Department of Care and Follow-up of Injured and Pensioner (DSBP), within the National Military Social Security Fund (CNMSS), guarantees **100% coverage of medical costs** for service-related conditions.

²⁴ Quels sont les avantages des militaires en OPEX ? (n.d.). Mutuelle Epargne Retraite. mutuelleepargneretraite.fr/actualites/avantages-militaires-opex

²⁵ Expert interview with Michel Yakovleff, retired Lieutenant General of the French Army and professor at the Institute of Political Studies, conducted on 7 January 2026.

Additional payments from military insurance funds are provided for those wounded during OPEX, subject to confirmation of the link between the injury and service and the granting of PMI status²⁶. Service members with a disability of 25% or more, meaning a reduction in overall functional capacity compared with a healthy person of the same age, receive the relevant card from ONaCVG, which grants **priority rights and significant transport benefits**. Where care is needed, these benefits also extend to persons accompanying the person with a disability²⁷.

Health support concerns not only treatment but also **physical recovery through sports**. To this end, the state funds sports prostheses and creates specialised centres, including the “Village for the Wounded.” The professional reintegration of the wounded is supported **through job quotas in the Armed Forces and the active work of the Défense Mobilité agency**, which helps retain specialists in the defence system or supports their successful transition from a military career to civilian life²⁸.

The main instrument for compensation for the consequences of injuries or illnesses sustained during service in France is the **military disability pension (pension militaire d’invalidité, PMI)**, which is granted in case of long-term health consequences. A request for PMI can be submitted online through a dedicated portal. In the event of a severe injury resulting in a service member’s incapacity for work, the command or a military hospital may initiate the request.

Within the framework of the “Support Plan for the Wounded 2023–2027” strategy, the country also plans to reduce the administrative burden on service members, automatically extend pensions and create a digital safe for their documents.

The compensation system is not limited to a pension: the state also compensates for physical and psychological suffering, aesthetic

²⁶ PMI (pension militaire d’invalidité) — military disability pension.

²⁷ Expert interview with Michel Yakovlev, retired Lieutenant General of the French Army and professor at the Institute of Political Studies, conducted on 7 January 2026.

²⁸ Ministère des Armées. (n.d.). Dossier de presse: Plan Blessés 2023–2027. defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/ministere-armees/Dossier%20de%20presse%20Plan%20Bless%C3%A9s%202023-2027.pdf

damage, deprivation of the opportunity to practise sport or pursue hobbies, and the inability to start a family²⁹.

Psychological support after participation in operations

The French Ministry of Armed Forces offers psychological support mechanisms to overcome the stress and traumatic consequences of combat experience. The country has support services that facilitate transition after return, including **rehabilitation programmes** for treating symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Service members can also receive **counselling to support better adaptation** in family and professional environments. Assistance includes psychotherapy, support groups and individual counselling. Specialists provide psychological support services both during and after the mission.

After returning, service members usually receive **additional days of leave** for rest and time with loved ones. This is important for recovery after a long absence from home and service in conditions of stress and tension. Such leave helps strengthen family ties and facilitates adaptation after return. It usually lasts several weeks and provides an opportunity for full recovery³⁰.

In the context of well-being in service, these mechanisms are not part of adaptation to civilian life but rather elements of restoring combat capability and preparing for the next training cycle or rotation. Their effectiveness directly affects a service member's ability to continue their career without accumulating the negative consequences of combat experience.

²⁹ Ministère des Armées. (n.d.). Mes démarches: je suis militaire blessé ou malade en service. defense.gouv.fr/sga/au-service-agents/soutien-aux-blesses/guide-du-blesse/je-suis-militaire-blesse-malade-service/mes-demarches

³⁰ Quels sont les avantages des militaires en OPEX ? (n.d.). Mutuelle Epargne Retraite. mutuelleepargneretraite.fr/actualites/avantages-militaires-opex

Social protection and family support

Within the well-being framework, the “Relationships” component in the military environment has two dimensions: first, the ability to build stable family and social connections during service; second, confidence that loved ones will be cared for in the event of negative scenarios. The French experience primarily illustrates the second dimension – a system of guarantees that allows a service member to focus on performing combat missions, knowing that the state assumes responsibility for their family.

General Yakovleff emphasises the importance of officially registering relationships in France, whether through marriage or PACS, as a partner has no legal status within the army system without such registration. For those who did not manage to do this before leaving for a mission, there is an option to marry in absentia, without the service member’s physical presence. In this case, the unit colonel serves as a civil status officer and may register the marriage without the partner’s physical presence. At the same time, the prospective spouse must apply to the town hall in France and formalise the marriage.

While service members are abroad, **units organise leisure activities for their families**, e.g., tea gatherings for wives or trips for children. Spouses or partners of unit commanders usually undertake this form of family support. At the same time, the state does not finance these initiatives, and they are not commercial in nature.

In the event of death, the family receives substantial support. The deceased service member is usually promoted in rank on the day of death, which automatically increases the widow’s or widower’s pension. Spouses of fallen service members with the status of Veuve/Veuf de guerre are guaranteed **payment of the full monetary allowance** of their husband or wife until their youngest child reaches the age of 18.

Children of fallen or seriously wounded service members receive the status of “Wards of the Nation” (Pupilles de la Nation), which provides for **state guardianship, education benefits and assistance with admission to educational institutions.**

Prisoners of war formally retain the right to payments. Under the Geneva Conventions, the state holding prisoners must pay them **funds for minor needs**, which are then reimbursed by the person’s state of origin.

Yakovleff cited examples of Iraqi prisoners whom France paid, but did not mention cases involving French prisoners. In the event of missing in action (disparu), the status of service members is equated with death in order to ensure **payments to the surviving spouse without a long waiting period**, as occurs in other systems³¹.

Conclusions

The French model of support for participants in hostilities within the troop is based on a balance between immediate financial reward, long-term guarantees and recognition. Central to material support is an allowance, accrued daily as a 1.5 multiplier on basic income and fully exempt from income tax. At the same time, participation in combat operations is taken into account through the system of preferential service credit, which enables either early retirement or a significant increase in the pension amount. In addition, there is a state-supported private investment programme for separate payments after retirement.

Current payments and career advancement do not depend on holding a participant in hostilities ID card: it is voluntary and provides additional benefits in civilian life. The main internal document of the defence system is the **ESS (État Signalétique et des Services)**, which determines allowances, service credit and pension rights. Particular attention

³¹ Expert interview with Michel Yakovleff, retired Lieutenant General of the French Army and professor at the Institute of Political Studies, conducted on 7 January 2026.

is paid to psychological rehabilitation, additional rest after return from operations and social protection for families in the event of the death or missing in action of a service member. At the same time, the French system is designed to combine intrinsic motivation with external incentives, where financial payments play a supportive rather than decisive role.

In General Yakovleff's view, the French system compares favourably with the British and American systems, where, in his assessment, symbolic recognition prevails without adequate financial backing. At the same time, it should be noted that this assessment reflects the position of only one expert and requires comparison with a factual analysis of the relevant systems, presented below for other countries.

United States of America

The United States of America (USA) maintains the largest military presence in the world and positions it as a means of ensuring global stability and protecting national interests. The system of support for persons with combat experience is regulated by the legal definition of “periods of war,” set out in Title 38 of the **Code of Federal Regulations**. These official dates are critical because they determine a service member’s entitlement to specific veterans’ pensions, healthcare, and disability-related payments.

Over recent decades, the USA has carried out a number of military operations, including:

- Operation New Dawn in Iraq³²
- Operation Enduring Freedom³³ (28 December 2014)
- Operation Freedom’s Sentinel³⁴ (30 September 2021) in Afghanistan

As of January 2026, the US Armed Forces continue active operations within Operation Inherent Resolve³⁵ and Operation Enduring Sentinel³⁶, launched on 1 October 2021 to counter terrorist threats, including in Afghanistan³⁷.

³² Operation New Dawn was a US military operation in Iraq that officially began on 1 September 2010 and lasted until 31 December 2011. Its official objectives were to ensure stability in Iraq, train Iraqi military personnel and support the Iraqi government in combating terrorism.

³³ Operation Enduring Freedom was a military campaign by the USA and its allies that began on 7 October 2001 in response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. It was the longest war in US history and was aimed at destroying the terrorist organisation al-Qaeda and overthrowing the Taliban regime, which had provided it with refuge.

³⁴ Operation Freedom’s Sentinel was a US military mission in Afghanistan that began on 1 January 2015, lasted until mid-August 2021 and became the logical continuation of Operation Enduring Freedom (2001–2014) after the official end of NATO’s combat mission.

³⁵ Operation Inherent Resolve is an ongoing US-led military operation that began in 2014 and is aimed at combating the terrorist organisation Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria.

³⁶ Operation Enduring Sentinel is a US-led post-withdrawal mission in Afghanistan, launched on 1 October 2021, focused on counterterrorism against al-Qaeda and ISIS-K, protecting American interests and supporting humanitarian efforts.

³⁷ Congressional Research Service. (n.d.). Military Funeral Honors: Post-Service Benefit and Promotional Detail. congress.gov/crs-product/RS21405

As of March 2025	Total strength of the US Armed Forces	Approximately 2.86 million people of whom approximately 1.5 million are in active-duty military service. Congress also authorised an additional increase of 30,000 people to strengthen priority areas, including in the Indo-Pacific region
	Deployed in various countries around the world	Approximately 180,000 service members, where ten countries account for 95% of all US service members ³⁸
	Number of living veterans in the USA	16 million (approximately 6% of the adult population), of whom one in three is over the age of 75
As of 2024	Veterans with the status of a person with a disability	Approximately 5 million

The US system of support for service members is based on a distinction between the Department of Defense, which is responsible for service members during service, and the Department of Veterans Affairs, which provides follow-up after discharge.

Status

The US system distinguishes between a person with combat experience and a service member who has not directly participated in the hostilities based on combat decorations and records maintained in the personnel file during service. Under US law, **all service members who have performed military service have the status of veteran**. Accordingly, the Department of Veterans Affairs is responsible for all individuals with military service, regardless of direct participation in combat operations.

³⁸ How many people are in the US military? A demographic overview. (5 March 2026). usafacts.org/articles/how-many-people-are-in-the-us-military-a-demographic-overview

For active service members, **a status comparable to Ukraine's PCS is confirmed by awards**. In the Marine Corps and Navy, this is the Combat Action Ribbon (CAR), while in the Army, it is the Combat Action Badge (CAB). These decorations have clear criteria, are recorded in digital records and confirm direct participation in combat operations, rather than merely being present in a conflict zone.

Administratively, status of the participant in hostilities is also confirmed by financial records, namely, the receipt of Hazardous Duty Pay or Combat Zone Pay. For those who performed tasks in classified areas, the status is recorded through special coding, available only to authorised bodies for the subsequent verification of benefits.

All combat experience is stored in the unified data system of the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs, which enables the system to automatically identify a person with combat experience both during service and before discharge. The final confirmation of status for civilian life is the **DD214 form, which records combat distinctions and deployment areas** as legal facts³⁹.

Career, decorations and recognition

Career development

Combat experience is an important factor in career advancement during military service. Fitness Reports prepared during combat deployment have special markings and carry greater weight when considering promotion in rank or admission to military schools. To receive a good assessment from the command, a person should perform well, whether on a combat mission or in the rear. At the same time, experience performing a mission under real combat conditions may positively impact the final assessment result.

³⁹ Expert interview with John Boerstler, former Chief Veterans Experience Officer at the US Department of Veterans Affairs, conducted on 29 January 2026.

Promotion in the USA is a meritocratic system, in which advancement and influence are gained by people with the highest abilities; combat experience is regarded as an additional advantage, confirming a person's ability to act in extreme conditions⁴⁰. A separate instrument within the powers of, for example, the Commandant of the Marine Corps is **Meritorious Promotion, an extraordinary promotion in rank**.

It is granted not for the fact of bravery itself, for which medals are awarded, but for a demonstrated ability of a service member to perform the duties of a higher rank better than their peers. The service member must obtain the relevant professional military education and serve in the army for a defined period, but the minimum time requirement for the current military rank is waived in such cases. This enables the command to prioritise the promotion of leaders who have distinguished themselves while performing "non-standard tasks"⁴¹.

Financial incentives are used to retain personnel in the ranks:

- a system of monetary bonuses for re-enlistment, known as a re-enlistment bonus (USD 20,000 to USD 30,000);
- the opportunity to choose the desired location of the next duty station.

Officers may be offered fully **funded master's degree studies** in exchange for additional years of service⁴².

The US Awards System

- Medals for valour (Silver Star, Medal of Honor)
- Award for wounds (Purple Heart)

A mechanism of special devices that specify the nature of a service member's combat contribution:

- V (Valor): for acts of heroism in combat;

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ United States Marine Corps. (2006). Marine Corps Promotion Manual, Volume 2, Enlisted Promotions (MCO P1400.32D). marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/MCO%20P1400.32D%20W%20CH%201-2.pdf

⁴² Expert interview with Nicholas Armstrong, PhD, Vice President for Partnerships and Impact at Cabana and one of the key developers of the latest US National Veterans Strategy, conducted on 28 January 2026.

They are taken into account when assessing career paths and granting benefits^{43,44}.

- C (Combat): for performing missions under fire or in conditions of risk;
- R (Remote): for influencing operations remotely, e.g., UAV operators.

This gradation enables the state to differentiate combat experience for further career advancement and for the granting of benefits⁴⁵.

Return to service after wounds

Return to service after severe wounds, e.g., the loss of limbs, is possible through retraining, although service members **more often choose retirement** in such cases.

Special units (Wounded Warrior Battalions) have been created for the rehabilitation of the severely wounded, where they are kept on active duty until recovery is completed^{46, 47}. At the request of the service member or due to the needs of the defence department, the secretary of the relevant department may allow a warrior officially found unfit to continue service in permanent limited-duty status. This decision is based on the value of the service member's special skills and unique experience and enables them to continue a career in the active component or reserve in the same or a new military occupational speciality⁴⁸.

⁴³ Expert interview with Kyle Williams, Major in the US Marine Corps (active duty and reserve), veteran of combat operations in Afghanistan (2013), conducted on 14 January 2026.

⁴⁴ Expert interview with John Boerstler, former Chief Veterans Experience Officer at the US Department of Veterans Affairs, conducted on 29 January 2026.

⁴⁵ Air Reserve Personnel Center. (21 September 2017). Award devices: Valor "V", Combat "C" and Remote "R". arpc.afrc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1316685/award-devices-valor-v-combat-c-and-remote-r

⁴⁶ Expert interview with Kyle Williams, Major in the US Marine Corps (active duty and reserve), veteran of combat operations in Afghanistan (2013), conducted on 14 January 2026.

⁴⁷ Expert interview with John Boerstler, former Chief Veterans Experience Officer at the US Department of Veterans Affairs, conducted on 29 January 2026.

⁴⁸ Executive Services Directorate. (10 November 2022). DoD Instruction 1332.18: Disability Evaluation System (DES). esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/133218e.PDF

From the perspective of the well-being framework, mechanisms for retaining wounded personnel in service lie at the intersection of the “Health” (consideration of health status in personnel decisions on fitness) and “Vocation” components (preservation of the opportunity to continue a career after being wounded). For the Defence Forces’ personnel policy, this intersection is particularly relevant, as it demonstrates how the system can retain experienced personnel who would otherwise be lost.

Financial provision

Payments during service

■ Operational allowances

An officer’s Basic Pay depends on rank and length of service.

For example:

A second lieutenant (0-1) at the beginning of service	A captain (0-3, 4–6 years of service)	A colonel (0-6)
approximately USD 4,150 per month	USD 7,380–7,730	more than USD 10,700 ⁴⁹

When performing missions in a combat zone, basic pay is fully exempt from federal taxation, which increases net income by the amount that would otherwise have been paid in tax (typically 10% to 24%, depending on income level).

In addition, **monthly allowances are paid for hazardous duty or service in a combat zone (Hazardous Duty Pay / Combat Zone Pay)**, the amount of which is fixed at approximately USD 200–300 per month.

⁴⁹ Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS). Basic Pay — Commissioned Officers. dfas.mil/MilitaryMembers/payentitlements/Pay-Tables/Basic-Pay/CO

This payment does not depend on rank or position and is the same for everyone who is in a risk zone. Although the amounts of special combat allowances are small, the overall financial balance is equalised by the absence of taxes on all types of income of warriors in a combat zone.

■ **Additional payments and bonuses differentiated by rank**

Service members receive a **non-taxable Base Allowance for Housing, the amount of which depends** on military rank and the cost of living in the place where the family resides. The housing allowance is paid to a service member during participation in combat operations if they have dependants (a wife, husband or children). This allows the family to pay a mortgage or rent housing in the rear. The presence of dependants may also increase basic income: service members with families receive a slightly **higher salary rate**, which also becomes non-taxable during service in a combat zone.

Deferred benefits

Two pension mechanisms are combined in the USA:

Government pension after 20 years of service	Savings programmes
Usually amounts to approximately 50% of active-duty monetary allowance. In the event of discharge before reaching 20 years of service, the accrued length of service can be bought back so it is counted toward civilian federal service, and a federal government pension can be received	A service member makes contributions, while the state co-finances them through a 401(k) or the Thrift Savings Plan by providing matching contributions, effectively matching the service member's contributions up to 5% of salary. Contributions made while the person is in a combat zone are exempt from tax both when made and when later paid out

Veterans with wounds also receive **disability payments** after discharge, up to USD 2,500 per month, depending on the severity of the wound, and these payments not taxed. Previously, it was not possible to receive both a length-of-service pension and a disability payment simultaneously. Today, if the disability is 50% or more (a reduction

in overall functional capacity compared with a healthy person of the same age), they receive both amounts.

Another important financial benefit is the GI Bill programme, which provides **full funding for higher education**. It can be used by the service member personally or transferred to family members⁵⁰.

Health

Physical health

The Department of Defense has its own autonomous healthcare system, with healthcare facilities at each military base providing a full cycle of treatment during service. After returning from a mission, service members undergo a **mandatory health assessment** and physical examination within their division, primarily as a self-assessment⁵¹. Specialised centres have been created for the treatment of severe injuries, such as limb loss and burns, including Walter Reed Medical Center and Brooke Army Medical Center, where high-tech treatment and prosthetics services are provided.

Special units are created for wounded personnel with severe injuries. Service members remain in service until they have fully recovered, with **full monetary allowance** retained. Service members who are in service receive a **one-off injury payment**, for example, a T-SGLI (Traumatic Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance) payment in the event of limb loss or loss of vision, to provide financial support to the family during the period of adaptation to new physical conditions. There is also an **opportunity to remain in service** even after severe wounds, including limb loss or complete loss of vision, provided that the person meets

⁵⁰ Expert interview with Kyle Williams, Major in the US Marine Corps (active duty and reserve), veteran of combat operations in Afghanistan (2013), conducted on 14 January 2026.

⁵¹ Expert interview with Nicholas Armstrong, PhD, Vice President for Partnerships and Impact at Cabana and one of the key developers of the latest US National Veterans Strategy, conducted on 28 January 2026.

the relevant standards and is ready to retrain for less physically demanding positions, such as instructors or staff officers⁵².

Psychological support after participation in military operations

Psychological support after participation in military operations is based on a combination of formal follow-up from the system, professional assistance within units and confidential channels of informal support. In recent years, attitudes towards mental health among military personnel have changed: treatment is no longer an obstacle to a career and discrimination against service members for seeking help is prohibited by law.

Within this approach, **psychologists can now work directly in units**, helping service members undergo decompression⁵³ immediately after operations are completed. At the same time, **military chaplains remain an important source of support**, as stigma around seeing physicians still persists in the army environment, while communication with a chaplain guarantees complete confidentiality of conversations and is not included in the person's medical record⁵⁴.

In addition, technological solutions are being introduced in the country that allow service members to **communicate anonymously with peers who have similar experiences**, using pseudonyms and without receiving an official clinical diagnosis. Such initiatives are also implemented by individual organisations that work directly with units^{55, 56}.

⁵² Expert interview with John Boerstler, former Chief Veterans Experience Officer at the US Department of Veterans Affairs, conducted on 29 January 2026.

⁵³ Decompression is a specialised rehabilitation programme for service members after hostilities, aimed at a gradual return to peacetime life.

⁵⁴ Expert interview with John Boerstler, former Chief Veterans Experience Officer at the US Department of Veterans Affairs, conducted on 29 January 2026.

⁵⁵ For example, Cabana. (n.d.). Military, Veterans, Public Services Mental Health Solutions. yourcabana.com/military

⁵⁶ Expert interview with Nicholas Armstrong, PhD, Vice President for Partnerships and Impact at Cabana and one of the key developers of the latest US National Veterans Strategy, conducted on 28 January 2026.

A special focus is **support for service members during the first three months after returning home from hostilities**, as this is the period when adaptation difficulties may arise, including in emotional state, family relationships and the development of addictions. The standard cycle provides for 12–18 months at home between rotations, although in some units, for example, Special Forces, rotations take place much more frequently and intensively. Immediately after return, a unit usually receives **two to four weeks of collective leave** for rest with families before the start of a new training cycle⁵⁷.

Transition from a military career to civilian life

Although the subject of this study is veteran well-being during service, transition procedures warrant attention within two components of the framework. First, “Health”: the availability of continuous medical support (Integrated Disability Evaluation System, or IDES) between the military and veteran systems affects a service member’s decision on whether to continue or end their career. Second, “Vocation”: according to the interview with John Boerstler, units with combat experience often restrict warriors’ access to transition programmes, which effectively reduces their ability to plan their careers — a key indicator of well-being.

During the transition from military service to civilian life in the USA, special procedures are in place to prevent difficulties for persons with status of the participant in hostilities. One of the main actors in this support is IDES, which ensures **continuous support from the military hospital to the veterans’ administration**. Before discharge, service members also undergo a **final comprehensive assessment of their**

⁵⁷ Expert interview with Nicholas Armstrong, PhD, Vice President for Partnerships and Impact at Cabana and one of the key developers of the latest US National Veterans Strategy, conducted on 28 January 2026.

physical and mental health to determine the percentage level of disability and the scope of further assistance (Separation Health Assessment).

The Department of Veterans Affairs establishes the percentage of disability (0% to 100%). If it exceeds 50%, the veteran receives **lifelong free treatment** for any illnesses within the veteran system. Veterans with PTSD have priority access to health services. Even with 0% disability, the right to **free treatment is retained during the first years after service**.

An important recent innovation in the system has been the policy of providing psychological support even to those who were discharged with disciplinary sanctions if their behaviour resulted from undiagnosed PTSD or traumatic brain injury. This enables such people to receive the appropriate benefits.

The most difficult transition period for persons with combat experience is the first year after service, when the risk of suicide increases significantly. Therefore, the strategy is now focused on working with the person a year and a half before discharge. At the same time, this is more difficult for participants in hostilities due to the intensity of service and limited opportunity to participate fully in support programmes⁵⁸.

Social protection and family support

Family service offices operate within military bases to help families in need **with food, childcare and employment**. Units also have volunteer networks (FRG), usually led by commanders' partners. They serve as a form of horizontal support: **organising leisure activities, informing**

⁵⁸ Expert interview with John Boerstler, former Chief Veterans Experience Officer at the US Department of Veterans Affairs, conducted on 29 January 2026.

families and helping them adapt while the fighter is on a mission. The level of development of such networks depends on the unit⁵⁹.

In addition to local initiatives on bases, there is a nationwide programme, Military OneSource, funded by the Department of Defense. This is a centralised 24/7 resource that provides service members and their families with free **non-medical support**: psychological counselling, assistance with managing the family budget, employment support and help finding childcare. The programme enables families of persons with combat experience to receive professional support remotely, regardless of the unit's deployment location.

In the event of severe injuries, service members are entitled to a **one-off insurance payment under T-SGLI (Traumatic Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance)** ranging from USD 25,000 to USD 100,000, regardless of whether they continue or end their service. The key purpose of this payment is to give the family the financial capacity to adapt quickly to new circumstances. The funds are often used to adapt housing or a car to the wounded person's needs, as well as to compensate for the lost income of a partner who has to care for the wounded person.

Simultaneous service by both spouses remains a challenge, particularly in relation to childcare. Although the army tries to avoid simultaneous rotations, no special assistance is provided for such couples apart from standard combat allowances⁶⁰.

Support if a service member is missing in action, prisoner of war, dies or dies in action

Under **Title 37 of the US Code**⁶¹, the system ensures full administrative and financial continuity of the status of a **service member missing in action**, including being held as a prisoner of war or interned

⁵⁹ Expert interview with Nicholas Armstrong, PhD, Vice President for Partnerships and Impact at Cabana and one of the key developers of the latest US National Veterans Strategy, conducted on 28 January 2026.

⁶⁰ Expert interview with John Boerstler, former Chief Veterans Experience Officer at the US Department of Veterans Affairs, conducted on 29 January 2026.

⁶¹ United States Code. (n.d.). 37 U.S.C. §§ 551–559. [uscode.house.gov](https://www.uscode.house.gov)

in a neutral country. Service members who are missing in action are entitled to **all types of financial provision and allowances** that they were receiving at the time of disappearance or could have received later, even if their contracts expire.

While a person remains missing, payments are not automatically discontinued. Career advancement also continues as if the service member were still serving, ensuring they do not fall behind their colleagues after return.

The system also guarantees flexible management of payments for the benefit of the family. The secretary of the relevant department may continue existing deductions from combat payments to relatives' accounts and initiate new ones, including increasing child support in the interests of the family, even without the service member's consent.

For people **held as prisoners of war** as a result of hostile actions, a **special savings fund** is created in the US Treasury. Interest accrues on the undistributed portion of their monetary allowance at market rates. In addition, within one year of their return, the state pays those released from captivity **special one-off cash compensation for each day spent in captivity**. The law requires a mandatory review of the case after 12 months in missing status to decide whether to continue this status or declare the person dead. Tax obligations and the filing of tax returns are automatically deferred until the person returns under US control⁶².

The system of support for the **families of fallen service members** is implemented through **institutional support and instruments of long-term financial provision**. Administrative assistance is provided through programmes such as Casualty Assistance, which ensure the coordination of legal payments and psychological support by assigning a responsible officer to the family⁶³.

⁶² Cornell Law School. (n.d.). 37 U.S. Code § 559 — Benefits for members held as captives and their dependents. law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/37/559

⁶³ Military OneSource. (n.d.). Support for Survivors. militaryonesource.mil/resources/millife-guides/support-for-survivors

The financial basis is the Survivor Benefit Pay (SBP), which provides for voluntary participation, the payment of insurance contributions and guarantees lifelong support for beneficiaries as a percentage of the service member's pension. At the same time, this does not mean automatic inheritance of all unpaid funds and requires separate legal formalisation⁶⁴.

Conclusions

The American model of support for persons with combat experience is based on the legal definition of periods of war. The status of the participant in hostilities is determined not by the fact of being in a conflict zone, but through the awards system (CAR and CAB decorations and the combat devices V and C) and financial records confirming receipt of combat allowances. Combat experience is integrated into the meritocratic promotion system: it does not guarantee promotion, but it is a significant advantage in Fitness Reports and provides eligibility for Meritorious Promotion, provided that the person has demonstrated the ability to perform leadership duties.

Financial provision for veterans in the USA combines immediate incentives and deferred benefits. During deployment, basic pay is fully exempt from tax, with fixed monthly allowances for hazardous duty (Combat Zone Pay) added to it. Long-term instruments include the GI Bill programme for funding education and pension plans (Thrift Savings Plan) involving state co-financing.

In the event of severe wounds, one-off insurance payments (T-SGLI) are provided, and after discharge, tax-exempt disability payments are available. Where the disability rating is above 50%, these are paid

⁶⁴ Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS). (n.d.). Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Cost. dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/provide/sbp/cost

simultaneously with the length-of-service pension. In addition, mechanisms of limited duty and retraining are in place, enabling the USA to retain skilled personnel in service even after severe injuries.

The healthcare and psychological support system focuses on continuity of support and the destigmatisation of mental disorders. After returning from operations, units provide a mandatory period of decompression and special monitoring for three months to identify crisis conditions. At the same time, military chaplains continue to play an important role as a confidential source of support, alongside anonymous digital communication platforms that pose no risk to one's career. IDES ensures the transition of medical support from the military hospital to the veterans' administration without pauses in the provision of assistance.

Particular attention in the military system is paid to protection in cases of captivity and missing in action, as well as institutional support for families of fallen service members. Service members with missing or prisoner-of-war status are guaranteed full administrative and financial continuity: retention of payments, accrual of interest on monetary allowances, and unhindered career progression. In the event of death, the Casualty Assistance system provides the family with a dedicated officer to coordinate payments and psychological support, while the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) provides the opportunity to receive lifelong monthly payments.

Israel

In a state of constant high-intensity armed conflict, the Israeli military system differs from the models of peacetime armies in other countries, both in the definition of statuses and in approaches to supporting service members. Since October 2023, Operation “Swords of Iron” has been underway in the country, resulting in the largest mobilisation in the state’s history.

As of 2025

Israel’s regular forces (career and conscript service)	Approximately 170,000 people
Reserve	465,000 people ⁶⁵

Status

In Israel, people with status of the participant in hostilities are identified within the general personnel management system through **digital tools**, where **status can be accessed through the IDF Wallet app**. A person’s specialisation and rights within the system are recorded through 22 types of status cards, including the statuses of Lokhat (fighter) and Lokhat Khud (frontline fighter)⁶⁶.

Lokhat Khud is assigned to service members who can be deployed in the operational space to engage the enemy under life-threatening conditions, including infantry, special forces, engineer troops, armoured troops and other crews entering the combat zone⁶⁷. No separate

⁶⁵ Israel Defense Forces (n.d.). Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_Defense_Forces

⁶⁶ Israel Defence Forces. (n.d.). הארנק הדיגיטלי (The Digital Wallet). idf.il/שירות-שלי/סוגי-השירות-בצה-ל/סדיר/הארנק-הדיגיטלי/

⁶⁷ Israel Defence Forces. (n.d.). המדריך המלא ללוחמי החוד (The Full Guide for Combat Soldiers). idf.il/שירות-שלי/סוגי-השירות-בצה-ל/סדיר/לוחמה/המדריך-המלא-ללוחמי-החוד/

document is issued after a specific battle. **Participation is recorded daily through the electronic Report 1 system**⁶⁸.

After completing service, service members automatically receive **an identity card with the corresponding level of benefits**: for frontline fighters – after 18 months, including at least 14 months in a combat role; for others – after 21 months⁶⁹.

Career, decorations and recognition

Career development for commissioned officers in Israel is based on a comprehensive officer suitability indicator that includes data from first conscription, sociometric assessments, and the results of selection stages. Experience of service in combat units is a determining factor for career development⁷⁰.

Recognition of frontline fighter status is emphasised through **specific insignia**, including a unique badge (a silver sword on an olive background) and special rank insignia for non-commissioned officers⁷¹. **Medals** are also awarded for participation in wars and special operations, although they are mainly symbolic and not accompanied by direct financial payments⁷².

⁶⁸ Israel Defence Forces. (n.d.). שירות סדיר (Regular Service). idf.il/השירות-שלי/סוגי-השירות-בצה-ל/סדיר

⁶⁹ Israel Defence Forces. (n.d.). המדריך המלא ללוחמי החוד (The Full Guide for Combat Soldiers). idf.il/השירות-שלי/סוגי-השירות-בצה-ל/סדיר/לוחמה/המדריך-המלא-ללוחמי-החוד

⁷⁰ Israel Defence Forces. (n.d.). לוחמה (Combat Roles). idf.il/השירות-שלי/סוגי-השירות-בצה-ל/סדיר/לוחמה

⁷¹ Israel Defence Forces. (n.d.). המדריך המלא ללוחמי החוד (The Full Guide for Combat Soldiers). idf.il/השירות-שלי/סוגי-השירות-בצה-ל/סדיר/לוחמה/המדריך-המלא-ללוחמי-החוד

⁷² Expert interview with a service member of the Israel Defence Forces.

Financial provision

The payment system during service is differentiated by risk level, with frontline fighters receiving the **highest monthly monetary allowance (Dmei Kiyum)**.

Payments for a frontline fighter
as of February 2026

Basic allowance		Additional monthly allowance until demobilisation ⁷³
During the first two years of service	In the third year of service	After 24 months of impeccable service
Approximately ILS 2,647 (EUR 725)	Increases to ILS 3,276 (EUR 900), which significantly exceeds payments to rear units receiving around ILS 1,327 (EUR 363) ⁷⁴	

The financial gap between combat and support roles is approximately 25%. However, no additional direct payments are provided for exposure to fire along the line of contact. The payment is linked to the unit's overall status⁷⁵. **Deferred benefits** include the Mimmadim LeLimudim (Opportunities for Learning) programme, which covers two-thirds of the cost of higher education for fighters who completed their full term of service⁷⁶.

⁷³ Israel Defence Forces. (n.d.). המדריך המלא ללוחמי החוד (The Full Guide for Combat Soldiers). idf.il/השירות-שלי/סוגי-השירות-בצה-ל/סדיר/לוחמה/המדריך-המלא-ללוחמי-החוד

⁷⁴ Israel Defence Forces. (n.d.). לוחמה (Combat Roles). idf.il/השירות-שלי/סוגי-השירות-בצה-ל/סדיר/לוחמה

⁷⁵ Expert interview with a service member of the Israel Defence Forces.

⁷⁶ Israel Defence Forces. (n.d.). המדריך המלא ללוחמי החוד (The Full Guide for Combat Soldiers). idf.il/השירות-שלי/סוגי-השירות-בצה-ל/סדיר/לוחמה/המדריך-המלא-ללוחמי-החוד

Health

Medical support for service members is provided through the specialised RM2 sector⁷⁷, to which those who cannot continue regular service⁷⁸ on medical grounds are attached. In the event of a wound sustained while performing a combat mission, the Ministry of Defence handles rehabilitation and prosthetics and provides **somewhat higher standards of support than those available under the general civilian social insurance system**.

Over the past ten years, **psychological support** has also become a mandatory element of the system: after leaving combat operations, units undergo collective decompression with psychologists. Participation in such activities is usually voluntary, but commanders have the right to initiate mandatory consultations for their personnel where necessary⁷⁹.

Social protection and family support

The service member benefits package includes **a number of everyday benefits**: free travel on public transport in civilian clothing at weekends and discounts at commercial chains, such as clothing and grocery stores and leisure services, upon presentation of a digital identity card⁸⁰. Social recognition of combat experience is also implemented through **educational benefits**: universities provide support to students with combat experience in catching up with the curriculum, and, in cases of extended service during wartime, tuition fees may be fully reimbursed⁸¹.

⁷⁷ RM2 (Rofe Mirkaz 2) is a specialised unit within the medical provision system of the Israel Defence Forces that provides medical support to service members, especially in complex or long-term cases.

⁷⁸ Israel Defence Forces. (n.d.). שירות סדיר (Regular Service). idf.il/סוגי-השירות-בצה-ל/סדיר

⁷⁹ Expert interview with a service member of the Israel Defence Forces.

⁸⁰ Israel Defence Forces. (n.d.). הארנק הדיגיטלי (The Digital Wallet). idf.il/סוגי-השירות-בצה-ל/סדיר/הארנק-הדיגיטלי

⁸¹ Expert interview with a service member of the Israel Defence Forces.

In the context of the “Relationships” component, the Israeli experience illustrates both of its dimensions. First, tools for maintaining connection with family during service, including everyday benefits and special leave for family crises. Second, and this is the most developed aspect, a system of financial guarantees in the event of death, prisoner-of-war status, or missing in action, which gives a service member confidence that the state assumes full responsibility for the well-being of their loved ones.

In addition to the standard 18 days of annual leave, fighters may be eligible for **30 days of special leave to resolve financial or family problems**. Although the system does not provide automatic cash payments for children or gifts to fighters’ families, **mechanisms of targeted support** are available through social affairs officers where the family’s difficult economic situation, involving parents or a partner and children, is confirmed^{82, 83}.

Support if a service member is missing in action, prisoner of war, dies or dies in action

If a service member is missing in action, prisoner of war, dies or dies in action, the state seeks to relieve families as much as possible of financial burdens and everyday difficulties, so that they can focus on emotional recovery.

The status of the family of a fallen service member entitles them to a **wide range of monthly and annual payments**, differentiated according to the age of the widow/widower and the presence and age of children.

⁸² Expert interview with a service member of the Israel Defence Forces.

⁸³ Israel Defence Forces. (n.d.). שירות סדיר (Regular Service). idf.il/סוגי-השירות-בצה-ל/סדיר.

Support for fallen veterans' loved ones

Widow/widower under 60	Orphans	Parents	Fiancés/ fiancées
■ No children: basic monthly payment of ILS 10,525 (EUR 2,885) ■ One child: basic monthly payment of ILS 12,995 (EUR 3,562) ■ Automatic increase in payments after the widow/widower reaches the age of 60 and specific additional payments for each subsequent child⁸⁴	■ Monthly payments ■ Targeted education grants ■ The opportunity to join clubs free of charge ■ A one-off payment before reaching adulthood in the amount of ILS 10,978 (EUR 3,009) ■ A grant for driving lessons from the age of 17⁸⁵	■ Monthly payment of ILS 9,241 (EUR 2,533). ■ In the event of the loss of more than one child (double bereavement), the amount is doubled⁸⁶	■ Monthly payment of ILS 6,118 (EUR 1,677) ■ Social support for five years after the death of the partner⁸⁷

Service members released from captivity, as well as civilian hostages, are automatically recognised as persons with a high level of disability (usually 50%) due to post-traumatic stress disorder. This gives them **access to all rights of persons with disabilities** from the IDF. Released prisoners of war receive a **monthly payment** of approximately ILS 3,300

⁸⁴ Ministry of Defence (Israel). (n.d.). Widows (Rights and Benefits). mishpahot-hantzaha.mod.gov.il/benefits/widows

⁸⁵ Ministry of Defence (Israel). (n.d.). Orphans (Rights and Benefits). mishpahot-hantzaha.mod.gov.il/benefits/orphans

⁸⁶ Ministry of Defence (Israel). (n.d.). Bereaved Parents. mishpahot-hantzaha.mod.gov.il/benefits/parents

⁸⁷ Ministry of Defence (Israel). (n.d.). Fiancées. mishpahot-hantzaha.mod.gov.il/benefits/fiancees

(EUR 905) until age 67, which later transforms into an **annual grant**. For people released after the events of 7 October 2023, an additional adaptation grant of ILS 50,000 (EUR 13,705) has been introduced. In addition to financial support, the state covers **healthcare, the purchase of housing and vehicles** and provides **access to psychological assistance** for 36 months after return⁸⁸.

The status of **families of missing or abducted persons** is equated with the status of families of the fallen, guaranteeing them identical **monthly compensation and benefits**. In addition, the families of those abducted during Operation “Swords of Iron” receive **a special quarterly grant** of ILS 90,000 (EUR 24,670), intended to finance the search for or release of their loved one. **Labour and financial guarantees** are also provided: employers are prohibited from dismissing members of such families, while banks are required to grant deferrals on mortgage and consumer loans⁸⁹.

Families who have faced the captivity or death of relatives are protected by law from any enforcement actions against grants for 90 days after receiving them. Israel’s banking system has introduced **the cancellation of transaction fees and a zero-interest rate on overdrafts** (an interest-free credit limit) of up to ILS 10,000 (EUR 2,741) for these categories. Significant **discounts on municipal taxes** are also in place — up to 100% for property belonging to abducted persons⁹⁰.

⁸⁸ Kol Zchut. (n.d.). זכויות פדויי שבי וחטופים ששוחררו (Rights of released POWs and hostages). kolzchut.org.il/he/זכויות-פדויי-שבי-וחטופים-ששוחררו

⁸⁹ Kol Zchut. (n.d.). זכויות פדויי שבי וחטופים ששוחררו (Rights of released POWs and hostages). kolzchut.org.il/he/זכויות-פדויי-שבי-וחטופים-ששוחררו

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Conclusions

The Israeli model of support for people with status of the participant in hostilities is based on categorisation by type of unit, where belonging to a combat unit (the status of Lokhat Khud, meaning frontline fighter) is the main marker for receiving increased financial provision.

At the same time, the financial gap between combat and support roles is around 25%, while no direct additional payments are provided for individual exposure to fire.

Combat experience directly affects officers' career development and yields long-term benefits, particularly through full or partial funding for higher education.

The healthcare and psychological support system gives priority to those who have participated in combat operations.

In the event of death, captivity or disappearance, the state assumes full financial responsibility for families, providing them with lifelong payments, grants for children and comprehensive social protection.

Finland

Historically, support for service members with combat experience in Finland developed after the Second World War, particularly through large-scale reconstruction and the unique practice of providing veterans with land plots for construction under the [Land Acquisition Act of 1945](#)⁹¹. In the current stage of personnel policy development, the country is shifting from supporting veterans of past wars to supporting participants in international operations⁹².

Finland regards military crisis management as a statutory task of the Defence Forces, implemented through the voluntary participation of career service members and reservists in UN, NATO and EU missions⁹³. General social guarantees already provide sufficient protection for service members, so there are few separate benefits specifically for people with status of the participant in hostilities. At the same time, the country is discussing reforms to the system to prepare, for the first time since the end of the Second World War, for the involvement of a large number of military personnel in intensive combat operations due to the threat from Russia.

Status

Finland's participation in overseas operations is regulated by the [Act on Military Crisis Management](#). It defines the status of service members, as well as their rights and benefits⁹⁴. Formally, up to 2,000 warriors may participate in operations at the same time, although in practice no more than 300 are involved throughout a year.

⁹¹ Information provided by the expert.

⁹² Expert interview with Brigadier General Vesa Petteri Valtonen, Chief of Personnel (J1) of the Finnish Defence Forces, conducted on 16 February 2026.

⁹³ Finnish Defence Forces. (n.d.). International crisis management. puolustusvoimat.fi/en/international-activities/international-crisis-management

⁹⁴ Finlex. (n.d.). Act on the Compensation for Military Injuries and Diseases sustained in Crisis Management Duties. finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2006/en20060226.pdf

Under the law, the status of participant in an operation is granted to **Finnish citizens who have voluntarily undertaken a service obligation**. From the legal standpoint, the status applies upon arrival at the place of service and continues until official discharge back in Finland. **Mission ID cards and special frontline badges are used for identification** – they help verify experience in the digital personnel management system.

The law also **distinguishes between “crisis management personnel” (participants in combat operations) and people undergoing training**, guaranteeing the former the full scope of combat benefits. At the same time, private participation in combat operations outside state missions is not regulated by this Act. According to the expert, Brigadier General Vesa Petteri Valtonen, Chief of Personnel (J1) of the Finnish Defence Forces, this is a problem given the participation of Finns in the Russo-Ukrainian war since 2022⁹⁵.

Career, decorations and recognition

A military career in Finland is closely linked to participation in international operations. For career officers, this is effectively **a mandatory condition for promotion**, embedded in the personal career planning system. The awards system guarantees medals for participation in operations, awarded for being on a mission for at least three months⁹⁶.

⁹⁵ Expert interview with Brigadier General Vesa Petteri Valtonen, Chief of Personnel (J1) of the Finnish Defence Forces, conducted on 16 February 2026.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

In the context of the “Vocation” component, the Finnish case demonstrates the most formalised link between combat experience and career advancement among the countries analysed. Whereas participation in combat operations is a bonus within the appraisal system in France and the USA, it is effectively a requirement in Finland, making combat experience not an additional advantage, but a structural element of the career journey.

Financial provision

Payments during service

■ Operational allowances

The basic salary of veterans in the troop depends on the complexity of their duties and cannot be lower than the average salary for an equivalent position in the Defence Forces on the territory of Finland. In addition to the salary, they are paid a **daily monetary allowance** starting from EUR 25. The state also covers **travel costs to the area of operation** and guarantees at least **one paid trip home** every six months of service.

Deferred benefits

There are no additional long-term payments for service members with combat experience in Finland. The period of service in operations is fully counted towards the length of service. The military pension is calculated on a general basis. In addition, separate payments are provided for veterans with disabilities.

Payments for veterans with disabilities

Amount		Accrual mechanism
Monthly payment of approximately EUR 1,454 For veterans with a disability rating of at least 10%, meaning injuries that cause permanent discomfort but do not affect overall functionality, for example: ■ a mild form of PTSD with symptoms diagnosed within six months after service; ■ loss of one finger⁹⁷	One-off payment (Lisäkorvaus) of EUR 210,000⁹⁸ In the event of significant harm to health	Increased accrual coefficient: the minimum annual income used to calculate the military pension is three times higher than the civilian indicator

Health

Physical health

During a mission, medical provision for service members is provided exclusively by the Defence Forces, while after return, it is provided jointly with the civilian healthcare system. In the event of a wound or illness during service, compensation and treatment costs are covered by the State Treasury under the Military Accidents Act.

Vesa Valtonen, Chief of Personnel (J1) of the Finnish Defence Forces, emphasises that the army seeks to retain officers in service after

⁹⁷ Information provided by the expert.

⁹⁸ Finlex. (n.d.). Act on the Compensation for Military Injuries and Diseases sustained in Crisis Management Duties. finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2006/en20060226.pdf

wounds by offering them **adapted staff positions**. Participants in operations are also entitled to **specific reimbursement of dental treatment costs**⁹⁹.

Psychological support after participation in operations

Finland has introduced a multi-level support system that includes mandatory pre-mission training on recognising PTSD and a recovery period after returning home. Veterans of operations have the unique **right to contact the psychiatric clinic at Helsinki University Hospital without a referral**. A **24/7 psychological support line**, arranged by the Peacekeepers' Association¹⁰⁰, is also available.

If the link between a mental disorder and a military assignment is confirmed, the Treasury funds **up to three years of professional therapy**. Treatment data are not shared with the Defence Forces or the civilian employer¹⁰¹.

This mechanism is a systemic response to the conflict between the “Health” and “Vocation” components identified in other countries analysed: fear for one’s career prevents people from seeking psychological help. The Finnish model removes this barrier by guaranteeing a firewall between treatment and personnel decisions. In the context of well-being in service, this means that a service member can receive professional support while maintaining career prospects.

⁹⁹ Information provided by the expert.

¹⁰⁰ Expert interview with Brigadier General Vesa Petteri Valtonen, Chief of Personnel (J1) of the Finnish Defence Forces, conducted on 16 February 2026.

¹⁰¹ Finlex. (2016). Laki sotilastapaturman ja palvelussairauden korvaamisesta (1521/2016) (Act on Compensation for Military Accidents and Service-Related Illnesses 1521/2016). finlex.fi/fi/lainsaadanto/2016/1521#OT5

Social protection and family support

Unlike other countries analysed, the Finnish system covers needs corresponding to the “Housing and the Physical Environment” component of the framework through the **national social protection system** (Kela – the Social Insurance Institution of Finland), rather than through specific military mechanisms. It covers:

- housing costs, including rent, utilities or mortgage interest;
- interest payments on student loans.

This illustrates a model in which a service member’s well-being in the area of housing is ensured not through a separate personnel policy, but rather through basic social guarantees extended to the entire population.

Another economic preference is a **protected portion of civilian income** amounting to EUR 300 per month, which a service member may receive in parallel with service without reducing the amount of social payments¹⁰².

State support for families during service is relatively limited and focuses on **information support and peer-to-peer support measures**. In addition, since 2019, veterans with disabilities and their families have been entitled to **free municipal services**, including cleaning, cooking and care, funded through Kela¹⁰³.

¹⁰² Valtiokonttori (The State Treasury of Finland). (n.d.). Kriisinhallintatehtävissä sattuneiden sotilastapaturmien korvaaminen (Compensation for Military Accidents Occurring During Crisis Management Tasks).
valtiokonttori.fi/palvelut/kriisinhallintatehtavissa-sattuneiden-sotilastapaturmien-korvaaminen

¹⁰³ Information provided by the expert.

Support in the event of a service member's disappearance or death

In the event of a service member's death, the state pays the family **compensation equivalent to the group life insurance** coverage for civil servants. If the deceased was entitled to compensation from the international organisation under whose auspices the mission was conducted, the state pays only the difference if the national payment exceeds the international one. **A pension is also provided for widows, widowers and children**¹⁰⁴.

Conclusions

In Finland, the general social protection system for service members covers basic needs, while participation in crisis operations is considered part of service. Therefore, special benefits for persons with combat experience are limited and aimed primarily at compensating for risks and providing support in the event of a wound. At the same time, this system is designed for a small number of service members and relatively peaceful conditions.

This model is currently undergoing active transformation. Given the threats from the Russian Federation, Finland is gradually changing its approach and preparing to scale up the system, taking into account possible scenarios for a large-scale war and the involvement of a significantly larger number of service members.

¹⁰⁴ Finlex. (2006). Act on Military Crisis Management (211/2006).
finlex.fi/fi/lainsaadanto/saadokaannokset/2006/eng/211

The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom, while not directly participating in the war and effectively maintaining a peacetime army, has significant experience of participation in overseas operations. These include peacekeeping missions under the UN, NATO operations in Europe, as well as other humanitarian, counterterrorism and deterrence operations in different regions of the world¹⁰⁵.

According to the report of the Armed Forces' Pay Review Body (AFPRB) for 2024–2025

Royal Navy
Reserve

39% of personnel are in first-line combat roles of whom almost half (48%) are continuously on active deployment

Over the past year, the British Army has increased the number of military personnel overseas to 26,000, which is 5% higher than the previous period, while the Royal Air Force is involved in 21 operations across five continents¹⁰⁶.

Status

The British military system has **no separate administrative or legal status of the participant in hostilities** that would be recorded in a person's identity document or require separate documentary confirmation. Accordingly, there is no formal difference in identification documents between service members who participated in combat operations overseas and those who served only on the territory of the United Kingdom.

The only instrument of distinction is the **medal system**. Service members receive medals for being in an area of operations for a defined

¹⁰⁵ Kela. (n.d.). Sotilasavustus (Conscript's allowance). kela.fi/sotilasavustus

¹⁰⁶ British Army. (n.d.). Global Operations. army.mod.uk/learn-and-explore/global-operations

period (usually from 30 days), and this award is the same for everyone, regardless of role: whether an infantryman or infantrywoman on the frontline or a warehouse worker at a protected base¹⁰⁷. The only exception in recent years has been the awarding of medals to unmanned systems operators who control drones from the territory of the United Kingdom or the USA. This is linked to recognition of the high level of psychological strain, despite their physical absence from the risk zone¹⁰⁸.

The absence of a formalised status of the participant in hostilities is a structural feature of the British case and is of fundamental importance for analysis through the well-being framework. Unlike Ukraine, where a status of the participant in hostilities of the participant in hostilities is a legal basis for additional guarantees under each component of the framework, the United Kingdom addresses needs related to combat experience through general personnel policy mechanisms, without distinguishing persons with combat experience as a separate category. This means that this comparison should take into account not only specific instruments, but also the very principle by which support is organised.

Career, decorations and recognition

Career development

Combat experience is not a formal requirement for promotion or obtaining higher ranks, and even senior military leadership, including the Chief of the Defence Staff, may have no operational medals¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁷ Expert interview with a former service member.

¹⁰⁸ Expert interview with Richard Davies, retired air commodore and Commander of the Order of the British Empire, conducted on 9 February 2026.

¹⁰⁹ Expert interview with a former service member.

However, actual participation in combat operations indirectly affects a career through the annual appraisal system. **Leadership qualities demonstrated in combat conditions** are recorded in these reports and **may contribute to career growth**.

Access to military education and professional development courses is the same for all service members, regardless of combat experience¹¹⁰.

Decorations and recognition

In addition to standard operational medals, the United Kingdom also has gallantry awards, including the Military Cross and the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). Such decorations are awarded on behalf of the monarch and serve as evidence of a service member's exceptional qualities. They informally strengthen authority and may influence career prospects.

In civilian life, military awards usually do not translate into direct advantages in employment, as their significance is not always clear to civilian employers. National honours¹¹¹ are an exception.

Financial provision

Payments during service

■ Operational allowances

Service members performing tasks in a combat zone receive a **daily Operational Allowance**. It is fixed, tax-free and amounts to approximately £30–40 per day. The payment amount does not depend on rank, position or intensity of workload. This allowance effectively compensates for taxes on basic salary¹¹² for service members in lower ranks.

¹¹⁰ Expert interview with Richard Davies, retired air commodore and Commander of the Order of the British Empire, conducted on 9 February 2026.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

■ Additional payments and bonuses

A separate **allowance is provided for prolonged separation from family (Longer Separation Allowance)** with a progressive scale of 16 levels. It is paid for each day of absence from the permanent duty station beyond seven days. Rates range:

from GBP 9.25 per day	to GBP 42.25 per day
Level 1, up to 280 days of separation	Level 16, over 3,161 days of separation ¹¹³

According to the AFPRB report, warriors often compared their pay with the income of other public sector workers in their feedback (particularly those who, in their view, had received higher pay increases as a result of strikes) and felt that their own salary was lower. This applies especially to those who participated in missions and operations and worked overtime. Their level of pay is insufficient, especially compared with work in the civilian sector¹¹⁴.

Deferred benefits

Combat experience and allowances received during operations **do not affect the amount of the future military pension in any way**. Only the basic salary is relevant for pension accruals. Time served in a combat zone is counted towards the length of service under general terms, without additional coefficients or benefits¹¹⁵.

¹¹³ GOV.UK. (2025). Armed Forces' Pay Review Body Fifty-Fourth Report 2025. assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/AFPRB_Report_2025.pdf

¹¹⁴ GOV.UK. (2025). Armed Forces' Pay Review Body Fifty-Fourth Report 2025. assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/AFPRB_Report_2025.pdf

¹¹⁵ Expert interview with Richard Davies, retired air commodore and Commander of the Order of the British Empire, conducted on 9 February 2026.

Health

Physical health

The system of medical evacuation and treatment in the United Kingdom is based on the **principle of equal access**, where priority is determined solely by triage rather than by the circumstances in which a relevant injury was sustained. A person wounded in combat is evacuated according to the same algorithm and treated in the same specialised centres, e.g., in Birmingham, as a service member who was injured during training in Britain.

Service members with severe injuries, e.g., amputated limbs, are entitled to **free rehabilitation** until they reach a stable condition. The system seeks to retain such people in service by offering them **positions that correspond to their physical capabilities**, e.g., staff work, if they wish to remain in service. However, most service members with severe wounds choose discharge on medical grounds and receive **compensation**¹¹⁶.

Psychological support after participation in operations

Approaches to mental health have changed significantly over the past two decades. After completing operations, service members undergo a **mandatory decompression period** (48–72 hours) before returning home. They need this time for collective rest and initial psychological relief.

The Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) system operates at the unit level as a methodology for **assessing traumatic risks**, whereby specially trained officers conduct initial conversations following crisis situations. **Monitoring of vulnerable individuals** has also been introduced through special unit health registers, enabling commanders to track the condition of subordinates and respond in time, for example, by temporarily restricting access to weapons¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁶ Expert interview with Richard Davies, retired air commodore and Commander of the Order of the British Empire, conducted on 9 February 2026.

¹¹⁷ Expert interview with a former service member.

Social protection and family support

The system of social protection for families of service members in the United Kingdom is built on the principle of universality: it is not exclusive to persons with combat experience, but extends to all personnel, provided that specific criteria, such as family status, the presence of children and redeployment intervals, are met.

Although these mechanisms are not specific to persons with combat experience and formally fall outside the analytical focus of this study, they deserve attention for two reasons. First, in the context of the “Relationships” component, they directly affect the ability of a service member with combat experience to maintain stable family connections in conditions of frequent redeployments. Second, the British case demonstrates a model in which the well-being of participants in hostilities is ensured primarily through general personnel policy mechanisms, rather than through special status-based benefits.

One of the key instruments is the **Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA)**, which allows service members’ children to study at boarding schools from the age of eight to avoid constant changes of educational institutions due to their parents’ relocations. To receive this allowance, the family must demonstrate mobility, which, under current regulations, means a likelihood of moving more than 50 miles (80 km) within the next four years. As of August 2025, CEA rates are capped at GBP 8,918 per term for junior school and at GBP 11,130 for senior school. If tuition costs more, parents must cover the difference. A separate **Special Educational Needs Addition (SENA)** is provided **for children with special educational needs**¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁸ Army Families Federation. (n.d.). Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA). aff.org.uk/advice/money-and-allowances/continuity-of-education-allowance

To support working family members of service members, the UK Ministry of Defence also implements a comprehensive **Wraparound Childcare (WAC)** system, i.e., **reimbursement of childcare costs** for children aged 4 to 11, or up to 16 in the case of disability, outside school hours. The programme is adapted for overseas service and compensates up to 20 hours of childcare per week during the academic year, provided that both parents work at least 16 hours per week and each has an annual income of less than GBP 100,000. Since these payments are treated as taxable income, the department automatically adds extra funds to cover the income tax and national insurance contributions arising from receipt of this support. This ensures that the service member's net income does not decrease and that the benefit remains financially neutral for the family budget.

The entire process, from checking eligibility criteria to submitting invoices, is digitalised through the Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) system and integrated with state Tax-Free Childcare accounts, ensuring stable support for families even in remote overseas locations where standard services are unavailable¹¹⁹.

Support when a service member is missing in action, prisoner of war, dies or dies in action

If a service member dies in service, the family receives **financial payments** regardless of whether the death occurred in a combat zone or in other circumstances. The main payment is four times the service member's annual salary at the time of death.

In addition to the one-off amount, **a lifelong pension is provided for the partner**, usually amounting to approximately half of the pension that the service member would have received, as well as payments for children up to the age of 18, or 23 if they are in education.

¹¹⁹ Army Families Federation. (n.d.). MOD wraparound childcare scheme. aff.org.uk/advice/education-childcare/mod-wraparound-childcare-scheme

An important aspect is **the family's right to remain in service accommodation** for two years after the death of the service member, removing the need to relocate immediately after the loss of the breadwinner¹²⁰.

Conclusions

The British system of support for service members treats participation in combat operations as a standard professional duty that does not require a separate legal status. The main additional support mechanisms are post-operational decompression, operational allowances and separation payments, none of which affect the pension.

Career growth and healthcare for service members in the country remain unified: promotion depends on individual leadership qualities recorded in reports, while treatment priority is determined solely by the severity of the wound, regardless of whether it was sustained in combat or not.

Support for families, particularly in the areas of education and childcare, is fairly well developed. There are mechanisms that enable parents to work fully under different service conditions. If a service member dies in service, the family receives one-off payments and a lifelong pension.

¹²⁰ UNISON. (n.d.). Death in service. unison.org.uk/get-help/knowledge/pay/death-in-service

Conclusions

Analysis of international experience shows that different countries have their own approaches to building systems that support the well-being of service members with experience of participation in combat operations or international operations. Each of the states studied (France, the USA, Israel, Finland and the United Kingdom) builds its own model, taking into account historical experience, the intensity of participation in armed conflicts and the overall support system both within military service and in the social sphere.

Status of the participant in hostilities

Approaches to defining who is a participant in hostilities vary significantly.

- This is highly automated and digitalised in the **USA** and **Israel**: status is determined through record-keeping and data systems.
- In **Israel**, the system determines who is a “frontline fighter” and who is a “fighter” through the IDF Wallet app and daily reports, and status is granted automatically after a certain period of service.
- In the **USA**, status is confirmed not only through combat decorations, but also through financial coding and the data system accessed by the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- **France** has a different approach: a person usually obtains status of the participant in hostilities after service in order to receive civilian benefits, such as tax relief and special pensions, while the service record book remains the primary document during service.
- In **Finland**, the status of “crisis management personnel,” meaning participants in combat operations, is defined by law and applies only for the duration of the mission. An ID card system has been introduced there.

- The least formalised model is that of the **United Kingdom**: there is no separate status of the participant in hostilities, and the only confirmation of experience is medals, which are awarded to everyone who was in the area of operations, regardless of role.

Career, decorations and recognition

The impact of combat experience on professional growth differs significantly across the countries studied.

- In **France, Finland** and **Israel**, participation in combat operations or overseas missions is effectively a mandatory condition or key advantage for promotion to higher officer ranks. In **Finland**, this is embedded in the personal planning system, while combat experience in **France** is an element of appraisal which, although not formally mandatory, in practice means that those who have it will always have an advantage.
- The **USA** has a meritocratic model, where combat experience is considered a significant advantage in Fitness Reports and gives eligibility for extraordinary promotion, provided that leadership qualities have been demonstrated. In contrast, combat experience is not a formal career requirement in the **United Kingdom**, and even senior leadership may have no operational medals, although successful performance of tasks in combat has a positive impact on annual reports.
- The award systems of all countries except **Israel** use medals as the primary means of verifying combat experience. The system is the most detailed in the **USA** due to devices (for valour, for exposure to fire and for remote impact), which enables the state to determine whether a person was under fire or performed other tasks.

Financial provision

Financial support is generally divided into immediate operational payments and deferred benefits.

- In **France** and the **USA**, service members do not pay tax on salary while serving in a combat zone, which is a significant incentive. France has a universal allowance calculated as a 1.5 multiplier applied to salary, resulting in a substantial increase in income for enlisted personnel. In the USA, fixed payments for hazardous duty (USD 200–300) are added to tax-exempt basic pay.
- In the **United Kingdom** and **Finland**, operational allowances are fixed daily amounts (GBP 30–40 and at least EUR 25, respectively) that are also tax-free. In **Israel**, the payment is linked to the status of the unit (frontline fighters receive 25% more than rear-area personnel, regardless of whether they are participating in combat operations or not), but no direct additional payments for hazardous duty are provided.
- In terms of deferred benefits, **France** uses a system of pension coefficients, where 1 day of service counts as 1.5 or 2 days of service credit. The **USA** and **Israel** also offer educational grants. The USA has pension plans with state co-financing of contributions made in a combat zone.

Health

Military medicine in the countries studied focuses on continuity of treatment and rehabilitation. Some countries have specialised units for the wounded, where warriors are kept on active duty until recovery is completed.

- **France's** "Support Plan for the Wounded 2023–2027" automates the process of extending military pensions for persons with disabilities and ensures full coverage of the costs of high-tech sports prostheses.
- The **USA** has ensured a transition from the hospital to the veterans' administration without pauses.

There is a shift towards destigmatisation in the field of mental health.

- The **United Kingdom** has introduced mandatory decompression (48–72 hours after a mission) along with a risk assessment system, while commanders also maintain registers of vulnerable people to monitor their condition and restrict access to weapons where necessary.
- **Finland** gives veterans the right to access clinics without referrals and guarantees state-funded three-year therapy.
- In the **USA** and the **United Kingdom**, chaplains play an important role as advisers with whom people can speak confidentially.

Social protection and family support

The main goal of family protection systems is to make the family's life more stable while their loved one is in service.

- The **United Kingdom** has universal programmes to support education in boarding schools and reimburse childcare costs.
- In the **USA**, housing assistance is accrued based on the family's place of residence, while the Military OneSource programme provides 24/7 remote support, primarily informational support.
- Individual support is provided to families in financial difficulty in **Israel**.
- **France** allows marriage registration in absentia, without the physical presence of the service member, in order to give the partner legal status for receiving subsequent benefits and payments.

The most detailed protocols are those for support in cases of prisoner-of-war status, missing in action or death of a service member.

- In the **USA**, **France** and **Israel**, missing status is equated with the status of death in order to ensure immediate payments to families.
- Families of prisoners of war receive quarterly payments and protection against dismissal or debt enforcement in **Israel**.
- In the **USA**, an officer is assigned to the family of a fallen service member, while families of the severely wounded receive a one-off payment to improve living conditions.
- The **Israeli** system is also distinguished by lifelong support for fiancés/fiancées and substantial payments to the parents of the fallen, regardless of whether the deceased had their own family.
- In **Finland**, support for such families is integrated into the national Kela system, but participation in combat operations does not affect the form or amounts of assistance.

SECTION 2

**Legal and
regulatory
framework
for ensuring
well-being
in the military
environment**

Introduction

The well-being of service members in Ukraine is regulated by a number of legal acts and strategic documents that define basic guarantees and the state's approaches to human capital management in the defence sector. In particular, these documents define the conditions for service, professional development and provision, as well as family support.

The key reference points for public policy in this area are set out in the strategic documents of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine. In October 2023, Ukraine approved the Concept of Military Personnel Policy in the System of the Ministry of Defence until 2028 (Concept)¹²¹. Later, at the end of 2024, the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine approved the Strategy for Attracting, Developing and Retaining Human Capital in the Defence Forces of Ukraine until 2027 (Strategy)¹²².

The Concept aims to ensure high-quality staffing of the Defence Forces with motivated, trained and experienced personnel capable of effectively performing combat missions¹²³. The Strategy, by contrast, considers human capital more broadly, not only through the lens of staffing, but as a holistic system for attracting, preparing, training, effectively employing and retaining personnel in accordance with the needs of the Defence Forces of Ukraine under martial law, in the post-war period and in peacetime. It also aims to foster a sense of national defence awareness within society, encourage interest in military service and create conditions for professional and personal fulfilment in the defence sphere. The Strategy defines the key goals and objectives

¹²¹ Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (27 October 2023). Order No. 637 "On Approving the Concept of Military Personnel Policy within the System of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine Until 2028." zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v0637322-23#Text

¹²² Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (29 December 2024). Order No. 862/nm "On Approving the Strategy for Attracting, Developing and Retaining Human Capital in the Defence Forces of Ukraine Until 2027." mod.gov.ua/diyalnist/normativno-pravova-baza/nakaz-ministerstva-oboroni-ukrayini-vid-vid-29-12-2024-862-nm-pro-zatverdzhennya-strategiyi-zaluchennya-rozvitku-ta-utrimannya-lyudskogo-kapitalu-v-silah-oboroni-ukrayini-na-period-do-2027-roku

¹²³ Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (27 October 2023). Order No. 637 "On Approving the Concept of Military Personnel Policy within the System of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine Until 2028," para. 1.2. zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v0637322-23#Text

of public policy in the field of human capital, as well as indicators for evaluating results¹²⁴.

The state recognises **a number of systemic problems** in the Strategy that require regulation. These include:

- insufficient practical preparedness of graduates of military educational institutions and inadequate consideration of combat experience in military education;
- shortcomings in the system of psychological recovery and mental health support for service members;
- the need to improve the procedure for granting PCE status and to digitalise social services for service members and their families;
- the need to introduce a more transparent and fair system of monetary allowance, with improved payments for the performance of combat and special missions.

The Strategy pays particular attention to supporting veterans and their transition to civilian life, which indicates an expansion of the state's approaches to human capital management in the defence sector.

In this section, we examine the key components of this framework, including the grounds for obtaining status, the specific features of military career, monetary, medical and housing provision and social protection for the families of service members. Since ensuring veteran well-being in the military environment in Ukraine is shaped under conditions of prolonged war, it is important to continue examining their legal status, social guarantees and support mechanisms in a comprehensive manner.

¹²⁴ Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (29 December 2024). Order No. 862/nm "On Approving the Strategy for Attracting, Developing and Retaining Human Capital in the Defence Forces of Ukraine Until 2027." mod.gov.ua/diyalnist/normativno-pravova-baza/nakaz-ministerstva-oboroni-ukrayini-vid-vid-29-12-2024-862-nm-pro-zatverdzhennya-strategiyi-zaluchennya-rozvitku-ta-utrimannya-lyudskogo-kapitalu-v-silakh-oboroni-ukrayini-na-period-do-2027-roku

Status of the participant in hostilities

Grounds for obtaining status of the participant in hostilities

2014 – 2022

The status of the **participant in hostilities** and the status of the **person with a disability resulting from war (PWDW)** for service members who participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) were introduced **in 2014**. At that time, relevant amendments were made to the Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection”^{125, 126} and the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the Resolution “On Approving the Procedure for Granting Status of the Participant in Hostilities to Persons Who Defended the Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Ukraine and Participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation and Supported Its Conduct”¹²⁷. Subsequently, the grounds for obtaining this status were revised to take into account practical challenges, the development of combat operations on the territory of Ukraine, and to expand the circle of participants¹²⁸.

¹²⁵ Law of Ukraine No. 1233-VII (6 May 2014). “On Amending Article 6 of the Law of Ukraine ‘On the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection’.” zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1233-18#n5

¹²⁶ Law of Ukraine No. 1547-VII (1 July 2014). “On Amending Article 6 of the Law of Ukraine ‘On the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection’.” zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1547-18#n5

¹²⁷ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (20 August 2014). Resolution No. 413 “On Approving the Procedure for Granting Status of the Participant in Hostilities to Persons Who Defended the Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Ukraine and Participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation and Supported Its Conduct” (as of 20 August 2014). zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-n/ed20140820#Text

¹²⁸ Expert interview with a representative of a department of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine.

At the beginning of the ATO, the grounds for granting status of the participant in hostilities were **participation in the Anti-Terrorist Operation**¹²⁹ in the area of its conduct, as defined by the Anti-Terrorist Centre under the Security Service of Ukraine¹³⁰.

The first iteration of Article 6(1)(19) of the Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection” stated that only service members of **the following bodies were entitled to this status:**

- | | |
|--|---|
| ■ the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU); | ■ the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine (SBGSU); |
| ■ the National Guard of Ukraine (NGU); | ■ enlisted personnel, commanding officers and service members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine (MIA) and other military formations ¹³¹ . |
| ■ the Security Service of Ukraine (SSU); | |
| ■ the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine (FIS); | |

Later, the list was expanded to include reservists, persons liable for military service and employees of military formations, as well as institutions, enterprises and organisations. The Department of the State Protection of Ukraine and the State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection of Ukraine¹³² were also added to the list of bodies.

¹²⁹ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (20 August 2014). Resolution No. 413 “On Approving the Procedure for Granting Status of the Participant in Hostilities to Persons Who Defended the Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Ukraine and Participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation and Supported Its Conduct” (as of 20 August 2014), para. 4.
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-r/ed20140820#Text

¹³⁰ Ibid., para. 3.

¹³¹ Law of Ukraine No. 1233-VII (6 May 2014). “On Amending Article 6 of the Law of Ukraine ‘On the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection’.”
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1233-18#n5

¹³² Law of Ukraine No. 1547-VII (1 July 2014). “On Amending Article 6 of the Law of Ukraine ‘On the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection’.”
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1547-18#n5

In 2015, the list of entities entitled to status of the participant in hostilities was expanded again and included:

- the State Special Transport Service;
- service members of the military prosecution authorities, which operated in Ukraine at that time;
- the State Emergency Service (SES);
- the State Penitentiary Service of Ukraine (SPSU)¹³³.

The right to the status was also granted to people who participated in defending the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine as part of volunteer formations, provided that they were subsequently included in the AFU, NGU, other military formations and law enforcement bodies. At the same time, employees of enterprises, institutions and organisations were removed from the list^{134, 135}.

In 2016, the list of entities was additionally expanded, and status of the participant in hostilities could now be obtained by:

- enlisted personnel and commanding officers of operational support units in ATO areas of the central executive body implementing public tax policy and public policy in the field of state customs affairs¹³⁶;

¹³³ Law of Ukraine No. 291-VIII (7 April 2015). "On Amending the Law of Ukraine 'On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection' Regarding the Status of Persons Who Defended the Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Ukraine."
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/291-19#n7

¹³⁴ Law of Ukraine No. 1547-VII (1 July 2014). "On Amending Article 6 of the Law of Ukraine 'On the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection'."
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1547-18#n5

¹³⁵ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (25 June 2015). Resolution No. 413 "On Approving the Procedure for Granting Status of the Participant in Hostilities to Persons Who Defended the Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Ukraine and Participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation and Supported Its Conduct" (as of 25 June 2015), para. 2.
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-n/ed20150625#Text

¹³⁶ Law of Ukraine No. 965-VIII (2 February 2016). "On Amending Certain Laws of Ukraine on Guarantees of Social Protection for Certain Categories of Persons from among Participants in the Anti-Terrorist Operation."
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/965-19#n7

- police officers^{137, 138.};
- as well as enlisted personnel and commanding officers of operational support units in ATO areas of the SFS^{139.}

In the same year, the SPSU was also dissolved. So, it was replaced in the list by the State Criminal-Executive Service of Ukraine (SCESU)^{140.}

Additional changes also concerned volunteer formations. Although it had previously been provided that such formations could be incorporated into law enforcement bodies, the new version separately added the National Police of Ukraine to the list^{141.}

That same year, the grounds for granting status of the participant in hostilities were also changed: **what mattered was no longer only the fact of participation in the Anti-Terrorist Operation, as had previously been the case, but also the period of involvement.** The minimum period had to be at least 30 calendar days, which could be accumulated gradually. In other words, it was not necessary to remain continuously in the areas where it was conducted; the key requirement was that the total amount of time was 30 days. Exceptions were made for confirmed cases of direct engagement and fire contact with the enemy, or for wounds, concussions, or mutilation that enabled service members to continue performing their tasks, in which case the time limits did not apply^{142.}

¹³⁷ Law of Ukraine No. 901-VIII (23 December 2015). "On Amending Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine in Connection with the Adoption of the Law of Ukraine 'On the National Police'." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/901-19/ed20151223#Text

¹³⁸ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (5 May 2016). Resolution No. 413 "On Approving the Procedure for Granting Status of the Participant in Hostilities to Persons Who Defended the Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Ukraine and Participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation and Supported Its Conduct" (as of 5 May 2016), para. 2. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-r/ed20160505#Text

¹³⁹ Ibid., as of 27 August 2016, para. 2. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-%D0%BF/ed20160827#Text

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., as of 16 May 2017, para. 2. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-%D0%BF/ed20170516#Text

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Resolution as of 5 May 2016, para. 2. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-%D0%BF/ed20160505#Text

¹⁴² Ibid., Resolution as of 16 September 2016, paras. 2-1. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-%D0%BF/ed20160916#Text

Effective 30 April 2018, the ATO format was changed to the combined-arms Joint Forces Operation (JFO), and command was transferred from the SSU to the Joint Operational Headquarters of the AFU. These changes were reflected in the Resolution regulating the granting of status¹⁴³. In particular, its title changed in order to cover **all new legal grounds for granting or revoking status of the participant in hostilities**:

- provisions on status revocation were added, whereas previously the Resolution had referred only to granting it;
- the list of grounds was expanded to include participation in the measures necessary for the defence of Ukraine, the protection of public security and the interests of the state in connection with the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine¹⁴⁴.

At that time, there was a trend towards narrowing the list of entities eligible for status of the participant in hostilities. Employees (civilian personnel) of state bodies and military formations¹⁴⁵ were removed from the Resolution. However, another entity was added to the list, namely employees of the Court Security Service¹⁴⁶, already **in 2019**.

¹⁴³ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (18 May 2018). Resolution No. 413 "On Approving the Procedure for Granting and Revoking the Status of the Participant in Hostilities to Persons Who Defended the Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Ukraine and Participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation and Supported Its Conduct or in Measures to Ensure National Security and Defence, Repel and Deter the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and Support Their Implementation" (as of 18 May 2018), subparas. 1 and 2.
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-n/ed20180518#Text

¹⁴⁴ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (10 May 2018). Resolution No. 350 "On Amending Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 413 of 20 August 2014."
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/350-2018-n/ed20220225#n10

¹⁴⁵ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (6 November 2018). Resolution No. 413 "On Approving the Procedure for Granting and Revoking the Status of the Participant in Hostilities to Persons Who Defended the Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Ukraine and Participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation and Supported Its Conduct or in Measures to Ensure National Security and Defence, Repel and Deter the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and Support Their Implementation" (as of 6 November 2018), para. 2.
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-n/ed20181106#Text

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Resolution as of 23 July 2019, para. 2.
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-%D0%BF/ed20190723#Text

For the first time, the list of people entitled to the status of the participant in hostilities included:

- crew members of ships, boats, support vessels, aircraft and helicopters who performed combat or service missions in conditions of direct engagement¹⁴⁷;
- employees of intelligence agencies under cover and persons involved in confidential cooperation, with mandatory preservation of the secrecy of their tasks and areas of operation¹⁴⁸;
- as well as participants in the resistance movement in temporarily occupied territories and in the areas of the Anti-Terrorist Operation or hostilities¹⁴⁹.

Work on including volunteers entitled to status of the participant in hostilities began at the very start of the ATO. The issue became most acute in relation to the wounded, missing in action and the fallen. There were cases in which volunteers were posthumously nominated for the title of Hero of Ukraine, but their families could not obtain the status of a family member of a fallen or deceased Defender of Ukraine.

The main problem was that civilian involvement in hostilities could lead to criminal liability for military unit commanders. For this reason, it was extremely difficult to collect documents, testimonies and other evidence of direct participation. A separate challenge was establishing the link between an illness, wound (concussion, injury or mutilation) or disability and the defence of the Homeland, since there were no legal grounds for this¹⁵⁰.

¹⁴⁷ Law of Ukraine No. 430-IX (20 December 2019). "On Amending Article 6 of the Law of Ukraine 'On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection' Regarding Ensuring the Rights of Service Members of the Naval Forces and Air Force of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to Obtain the Status of the Participant in Hostilities." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/430-20#n4

¹⁴⁸ Law of Ukraine No. 912-IX (17 September 2020). "On Intelligence." Final and transitional provisions. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/912-20#n487

¹⁴⁹ Law of Ukraine No. 1702-IX (16 July 2021). "On the Fundamentals of National Resistance." Final and transitional provisions. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1702-20#Text

¹⁵⁰ An expert interview with a female veteran and lawyer specialising in the protection of the rights of service members and their families.

The procedure for granting status of the participant in hostilities to volunteers began operating only **in 2020**. The right to the status of the participant in hostilities was granted to participants in volunteer formations who, before the entry into force of the **Law of Ukraine “On the Specific Features of Public Policy to Ensure Ukraine’s State Sovereignty over the Temporarily Occupied Territories in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts,”** had directly participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation for at least 30 calendar days in the areas of its conduct, in cooperation with military formations and law enforcement bodies¹⁵¹.

2022 to date

With the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine **in February 2022**, it was determined that **service members are entitled to status of the participant in hostilities regardless of the duration of task performance if they:**

- participated in the defence of Ukraine, the protection of public security and the interests of the state in connection with the military aggression of the Russian Federation;
- performed combat or service missions or carried out intelligence activities personally or as part of a military unit, body, subdivision, institution or establishment;
- sustained a wound, concussion or mutilation¹⁵².

¹⁵¹ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (12 February 2020). Resolution No. 79 “On Amending Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 413 of 20 August 2014.” zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/76-2020-n/ed20200515#n13

¹⁵² Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (25 October 2022). Resolution No. 413 “On Approving the Procedure for Granting and Revoking Status of the Participant in Hostilities to Persons Who Defended the Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Ukraine and Participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation and Supported Its Conduct or in Measures to Ensure National Security and Defence, Repel and Deter the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and Support Their Implementation” (as of 25 October 2018), paras. 2–1, ident 3. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-n/ed20221025#Text

In 2023, volunteers of the Territorial Defence Forces and members of voluntary formations of territorial communities¹⁵³ were added to the list of persons entitled to status of the participant in hostilities. This concerns people who participated in the defence of Ukraine from 24 February to 25 March 2022 in accordance with the Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring the Participation of Civilians in the Defence of Ukraine," or acted as part of voluntary formations in cooperation with military formations and law enforcement bodies^{154, 155}. This decision was made in view of the widespread civilian participation in measures to defend statehood at the beginning of the full-scale invasion.

"I agree that every citizen had to defend the country in whatever way they could at the beginning of the full-scale invasion. We have many cases of brave people who did the almost impossible and defended Ukraine almost without weapons. And it is the duty of the state to recognise their contribution to the defence of independence and sovereignty. Therefore, the relevant amendments were made to the legislation. If I am not mistaken, it is paragraph 25 concerning persons who participated from the beginning of the full-scale invasion until 25 March 2022, provided this is confirmed. They are granted the PH status. That is correct", — an expert interview with a representative of a department of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine

At the same time, one of the experts interviewed for this study noted that the period from 24 February to 25 March, as defined by the Procedure, is insufficient, as volunteers were also killed during the de-occupation of the Kyiv region in early April 2022¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵³ Law of Ukraine No. 2121-IX (15 March 2022). "On Amending Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding Clarification of Provisions Regulating the Determination of Categories of Persons Recognised as War Veterans and Family Members of Fallen Defenders of Ukraine and the Provision of Social Guarantees to Them." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2121-20#n13

¹⁵⁴ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (11 July 2023). Resolution No. 701 "On Amending Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 413 of 20 August 2014." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/701-2023-n#ed20230713#n11

¹⁵⁵ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (13 July 2023). Resolution No. 413 "On Approving the Procedure for Granting and Revoking Status of the Participant in Hostilities to Persons Who Defended the Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Ukraine and Participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation and Supported Its Conduct or in Measures to Ensure National Security and Defence, Repel and Deter the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and Support Their Implementation" (as of 13 July 2018), para. 2. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2014-n#ed20230713#Text

¹⁵⁶ An expert interview with a female veteran and lawyer specialising in the protection of the rights of service members and their families.

In 2024, enlisted and commanding officers of the State Bureau of Investigation and commanding officers of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine¹⁵⁷ were also added to the list of those entitled to the status of the participant in hostilities.

Thus, the Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection” and Procedure No. 413 define groups of people who may claim the status of the participant in hostilities and the procedure for granting it.

Grounds for obtaining status of the participant in hostilities from 2014 to 2026
(changes in accordance with the Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection”)

Period	Main grounds	Who became entitled	Nature of changes
2014 (beginning of the ATO)	Participation in defending Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity; participation in the Anti-Terrorist Operation	Service members of the AFU, NGU, SSU, FIS, SBGSU and other military formations, as well as enlisted and commanding officers	Initial definition of the group of persons entitled to PH status
2015–2016	Direct participation in the ATO and support for its conduct; presence in ATO areas for at least 30 days in total. Except in cases of wounds, injuries, concussions or mutilation	Additionally: ■ reservists, persons liable for military service and employees of military formations; ■ persons from volunteer formations, provided they were subsequently incorporated into military formations;	Significant expansion of the categories of persons covered; introduction of a separate category of volunteers. A minimum period for performing tasks was introduced for obtaining the status

¹⁵⁷ Law of Ukraine No. 3549-IX (16 January 2024). “On Amending Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding Improvement of the Procedure for Processing and Using Data in State Registers for Military Registration and Obtaining War Veteran Status During Martial Law.”
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3549-20#n12

Period	Main grounds	Who became entitled	Nature of changes
		■ police officers; ■ persons from operational support units (tax/customs services)	
2018 (transition from the ATO to the JFO)	Participation in measures to ensure national security and defence, repel and deter the armed aggression of the Russian Federation, including the ATO	Exclusion of employees	Expansion of the grounds to cover the new operation format (JFO)
2019–2021	Direct participation in combat operations, the ATO/JFO and performance of special tasks	Separate categories were identified: ■ volunteers (separately); ■ crew members of ships, boats, support vessels, aircraft and helicopters; ■ employees of intelligence agencies; ■ confidential staff; ■ participants in the resistance movement.	Differentiation of legal regulation through the introduction of new categories of persons
2022 (beginning of the full-scale invasion) to 2024	Participation in measures necessary to ensure the defence of Ukraine, protect public security and the interests of the state in connection with the aggression of the Russian Federation	Additionally: ■ volunteers of the Territorial Defence Forces; ■ members of voluntary formations of territorial communities;	Expansion of the grounds in connection with the full-scale aggression; inclusion of new categories of volunteers and civilians

Period	Main grounds	Who became entitled	Nature of changes
	Removal of the requirement regarding the period of performance of such tasks.	■ civilians involved in defence (24 February – 25 March 2022); ■ intelligence agencies of Ukraine (generalised); ■ SBI and NABU officers	

How to obtain an ID card of the participant in hostilities

There are currently two main ways to obtain an ID card of the participant in hostilities.

1. Submit documents to the commission through the commander or independently

The commander submits documents to the commission **within 30 calendar days** upon the service member's participation in combat or service missions or following a wound, injury, concussion or mutilation.

In addition to the general documents, the document package for the commission includes:

Form 6 Certificate: on the person's direct participation in measures necessary to ensure the defence of Ukraine, protect public security and the interests of the state in connection with Russia's military

Commissions are established by:

- ministries;
- central executive authorities;
- other state bodies, depending on the subordination of the military unit, body or subdivision. For example, the Ministry of Defence has the Commission of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine on Identifying Persons with Status of the Participant in Hostilities

aggression against Ukraine, confirming the service member's performance of combat or special missions. Where necessary, the commander may also submit additional information confirming the service member's participation in combat operations	
The commission decides on granting status of the participant in hostilities within 30 calendar days of receipt of the documents	If the commander does not submit the documents to the commission for any reason, the service member may independently submit an application electronically or by post

If contentious issues arise during consideration and require interdepartmental regulation, the documents are also sent to the Interdepartmental Commission for the Review of Materials on Recognising Persons with Status of the Participant in Hostilities and the Payment of One-off Cash Benefit in the Event of the Death or Disability of a Volunteer¹⁵⁸.

The procedure for submitting results to the commission leads to different practices for determining direct participation in combat operations across units.

"In connection with this [the full-scale invasion and the fact that service members may perform tasks outside territories defined as combat areas], the approach has indeed become somewhat more complicated, let us put it that way, because previously everything was clear: a specific area where something was happening was required, and it was clear that the tasks were being performed there. Now, there is indeed an interesting issue here.

By the way, practice varies greatly across military units, for instance, regarding which periods should be counted as participation in combat operations. Some believe that this is, in fact, when you are on the 'hundred,' based on the BDA and so on. Others believe that, in principle, since the wording in the law is 'participation in measures necessary to ensure

¹⁵⁸ Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine (11 August 2025). Order No. 644 "On Approving the Regulation on the Interdepartmental Commission for the Review of Materials on Recognising Persons with the Status of the Participant in Hostilities and the Payment of One-off Cash Benefit in the Event of the Death or Disability of a Volunteer." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z1303-25#n19

defence,' any stages when you are involved as part of the forces and assets of defence qualify. In fact, I probably agree with the second view, because during the ATO, units that were deployed in the ATO area and above were, in practice, participating in combat operations all the time, regardless of the nature of those very actions [...].

As for the question of fairness, it is clear that, basically, de facto, participation in combat operations is what? It is participation in performing tasks under conditions of threat to your life. It is clear that sometimes the territory does not, basically, affect these tasks, but their nature is what matters first of all. I would say that this actually remains a highly debatable issue", – an expert interview with the Chief of Personnel of a corps of the Land Forces of the AFU

There are cases where commanders do not submit documents for obtaining status of the participant in hostilities for service members who perform combat or special missions outside combat areas, including air defence tasks. At the same time, according to a representative of one of the departments of the Ministry of Defence, the territory where combat missions are performed should not affect the status of the participant in hostilities. Fire contact with the enemy, which the commission should consider as direct participation, is decisive in this context.

'Therefore, there is no difference between air defence in Izium and Kyiv. Status of the participant in hostilities is granted for shooting down targets both in Izium and Kyiv. Because this is treated as fire engagement with the enemy. Namely, the destruction of enemy air targets.

[...] there are no criteria. No legal act, except Resolution No. 1041, which defines the specific procedure for automatically granting status of the participant in hostilities in combat areas, has any criteria. The procedure only defines the specific process for granting the status", – an expert interview with a representative of a department of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine

However, in its Ruling of 17 February 2026, the Supreme Court clarified that **"direct participation" to be granted status of the participant in hostilities does not mean any performance of duties during martial law**¹⁵⁹. It refers to real and personal involvement in the performance of combat or service missions related to repelling and deterring armed aggression, which involve an increased risk to life and health.

¹⁵⁹ Supreme Court (2025). Decision in Case No. 134/149529/22. Unified State Register of Court Decisions. reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/134149529

The territory where the tasks are performed is also important: such tasks are usually carried out in combat areas, although their execution outside these areas is also considered in certain cases.

The decision to grant the status is made with due regard to the totality of circumstances: the content of tasks, the place where they were performed and proper documentation. The performance of tasks for which an additional reward of UAH 100,000 is provided usually indicates an increased risk and may meet the criterion of direct participation. By contrast, the performance of tasks outside combat areas that entitles a person to an additional reward of UAH 30,000 is not, in itself, grounds for obtaining status of the participant in hostilities.

2. Automatic award of the status

In 2024, Ukraine introduced a procedure to automatically grant status of the participant in hostilities during martial law. It applies to people who perform combat, service or special missions in areas of military or combat operations or in temporarily occupied territories^{160, 161}. Such areas are determined according to the directory of areas of military or combat operations or the list of territories where hostilities are or were conducted or which are temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, approved by the Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine^{162, 163}. **In other words, the territory where tasks are performed is the determining criterion only in cases of automatic granting of status of the participant in hostilities.**

¹⁶⁰ Law of Ukraine No. 3551-XII (22 October 1993). "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection," Articles 6–1. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#n73

¹⁶¹ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (10 September 2024). Resolution No. 1041 "Certain Issues of Granting Status of the Participant in Hostilities Automatically during Martial Law," para. 1. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1041-2024-n#n13

¹⁶² Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (10 September 2024). Resolution No. 1041 "Certain Issues of Granting Status of the Participant in Hostilities Automatically during Martial Law," indent 1, para. 3. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1041-2024-n#n13

¹⁶³ Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine (28 February 2025). Order No. 376 "On Approving the List of Territories where Hostilities Are Being (Were) Conducted or which Are Temporarily Occupied by the Russian Federation," para. 16. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0380-25#n16

Within five days upon commencement of execution of a combat order or service mission, an authorised official of the military unit enters the data into the Unified State Register of War Veterans (Register). If this is impossible, the information is transferred within the same period to the authorised person of the commission, who enters the data into the Register within five days upon receipt¹⁶⁴. After the data are published in the Register, status of the participant in hostilities is deemed granted automatically.

Issues in granting status of the the participant in hostilities

Military tourism

As the number of people involved in defending Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity has increased and the nature of combat operations has changed, discussions have continued on improving the procedure for granting status of the participant in hostilities. One problematic aspect is so-called "military tourism": short-term assignments to units performing tasks on the line of contact (LC) for the purpose of formally acquiring grounds for obtaining status of the participant in hostilities.

According to service members, this status is required for appointment to certain positions in some cases, even where those positions are not directly related to managing units during combat operations. As a result, there are situations where service members are assigned to units on the LC for several days to obtain the status formally. After that, they return to their previous place of service and apply for new positions and the relevant social benefits¹⁶⁵.

¹⁶⁴ Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine (28 February 2025). Order No. 376 "On Approving the List of Territories where Hostilities Are Being (Were) Conducted or which Are Temporarily Occupied by the Russian Federation," para. 5. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0380-25#n16

¹⁶⁵ Expert interview with a representative of a department of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine.

"[...] but still, I believe this needs to be separated. What constitutes 'direct participation in combat operations,' what constitutes '[participation] in command and control,' and what constitutes '[participation] in support measures.' These are somewhat different things and should have been separated from the outset. Because, for example, I would now even introduce a separate category, a separate status and separate benefits. Specifically for those who are now in forward positions and who stay at these observation posts for months.

Or even, hypothetically speaking, with the title of Hero of Ukraine awarded immediately after completing a month in these positions, if the person served there and the positions were not lost, not to mention if the person was wounded. Because to say afterwards that this person is a participant in hostilities and that a person who came from the Ministry of Defence on a two-day assignment, or even for a month, is also a participant in hostilities means speaking about completely different kinds of participants in hostilities", — an expert interview with the Chief of Staff of a brigade of the Land Forces of the AFU

Granting status to civilians

A separate challenge is determining the right to status of the participant in hostilities for civilians and services that perform tasks in combat areas. The key issue here is the conditions and nature of their activities.

"The key question is simply this: under what conditions and where are they performing their tasks? That is, we know that in the same police force, there are combat units, such as 'Liut' with all the pros and cons. Again, there are SES personnel who were in the mission area. In the combat zone, I mean, this is not only humanitarian demining; it may also be demining directly in frontline territories [...]. If they are performing tasks in more or less equal conditions, then there is no problem with this. It is clear that when we speak about police units patrolling cities, say, 10 kilometres from the front, then, I think, doing this would be incorrect", — an expert interview with the Chief of Personnel of a corps of the Land Forces of the AFU

"Is it possible to distinguish that SES person from exactly the same person from an engineer-sapper company (service member) who was also involved in demining? There are no questions for those who conduct demining in the areas. But those who are now demining thousands of munitions outside combat areas, what do you think they are doing? Are they fighting or not fighting? In my opinion, they are. Because they are clearing approach routes and ammunition supply routes. That is, on their part, this is the performance of duties aimed at protecting independence, sovereignty and the population from the impact of these explosive substances. Well, explosive munitions. And stuff like that. It is difficult to separate them, let's put it that way", — an expert interview with a representative of a department of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine

Granting status to volunteers

The question also remains open as to whether status of the participant in hostilities should be granted to volunteers who perform combat missions alongside military formations during the full-scale invasion but lack the legal status of service members. The experts interviewed note that this practice should be discontinued.

"Why were the Armed Forces and other forces of Ukraine created? They were created precisely to protect the civilian population. Who are volunteers? The civilian population of Ukraine. [...] Further, they themselves should understand that once the state had stabilised, let's put it this way, got the engine moving and began to employ the Armed Forces in full. All mobilisation measures have been carried out. These people, on the contrary, need to be removed from the front. [...] Volunteers are those who, when summer comes, go on safari, shoot a bit, winter comes, it gets cold, 'Why do I need this?' and they leave... Well, these are no longer volunteers, let's put it that way", — an expert interview with a representative of a department of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine

"I believe that they [volunteers — authors' note] should either legalise the battalion, shouldn't they? Or work there with civilians in frontline areas. Because they are doing a really cool thing. That is it. But they could already acquire some kind of status for over 12 years", — an expert interview with a female veteran and lawyer specialising in the protection of the rights of service members and members of their families

Defining clear criteria for granting status of the participant in hostilities remains an extremely complex task under the conditions of a full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation. The Ministry of Defence of Ukraine is currently improving its approaches, namely, considering differentiation of the nature and duration of combat or special missions. Discussions on the criteria are ongoing: whether a service member should perform tasks during 30 days, as was the case before 2022, or whether, in some cases, a single day is sufficient to obtain war veteran status.

"Work is currently underway to streamline this, but no one can define clear criteria, and this is the main problem. But I think we will get there", —an expert interview with a representative of a department of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine

Military career

The Concept of Military Personnel Policy in the Ministry of Defence until 2028¹⁶⁶ emphasises the importance of combat experience as a basis for personnel management, career growth, professional training and social protection. According to the Ministry of Defence's vision, in future, veterans should form the basis of the peacetime staffing structures of the Defence Forces of Ukraine. This approach means that the state must already encourage persons with combat experience to remain in military service, support their promotion in rank and position and recognise their expertise. To this end, it is also important to assess the extent to which combat experience is decisive for certain positions and how individual experience should influence career growth.

Ranks

The legal and regulatory framework governing military service already includes provisions that enable service members with combat experience to advance their careers in the Defence Forces. During martial law, provisions are in force that simplify appointment to higher positions and the granting of higher ranks for this category of personnel.

In particular, according to the Regulation "On Military Service by Citizens of Ukraine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine" (Regulation), **during martial law:**

- enlisted service members without the required training may be appointed to non-commissioned officer and senior non-commissioned officer positions, with the simultaneous granting of the relevant initial rank and subsequent referral for training¹⁶⁷;

¹⁶⁶ Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (27 October 2023). Order No. 637 "On Approving the Concept of Military Personnel Policy within the System of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine Until 2028." zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v0637322-23#Text

¹⁶⁷ President of Ukraine (10 December 2008). Decree No. 1153/2008 "On the Regulation on Military Service by Citizens of Ukraine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine," para. 102. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1153/2008#Text

- non-commissioned and senior non-commissioned service members with combat experience, even without higher education, may be appointed to junior commissioned officer positions, provided that commissioned officers¹⁶⁸ are not subordinate to them;
- non-commissioned and senior non-commissioned service members who have directly participated in combat operations for at least three months and have successfully performed duties in officer positions for at least three months may sign a military service contract with the simultaneous granting of an initial commissioned officer rank¹⁶⁹.

It is also important to note that **on 10 February 2026, amendments were made to the Regulation establishing reduced periods of service in military rank for non-commissioned, senior non-commissioned and commissioned officers if they:**

- serve in combat military units, the list of which is determined by the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine;
- serve in military units that are not part of the combat force, but were assigned to combat force units and performed combat missions there for at least three months;
- served in combat military units or were assigned to them and sustained wounds, injuries, concussions, mutilation, or illnesses related to the defence of the Homeland, and were found by the MMC to be unfit for military service on health grounds or fit for service in support military units.

¹⁶⁸ President of Ukraine (10 December 2008). Decree No. 1153/2008 "On the Regulation on Military Service by Citizens of Ukraine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine," indent 2, para. 104. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1153/2008#Text

¹⁶⁹ President of Ukraine (10 December 2008). Decree No. 1153/2008 "On the Regulation on Military Service by Citizens of Ukraine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine," indent 3, para. 4. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1153/2008#Text

In these cases, the periods of service in military rank are:

One year	Two years
for junior and higher non-commissioned and senior non-commissioned personnel, and junior commissioned officers	for higher non-commissioned and senior non-commissioned personnel, and senior commissioned officers

Such changes support the career growth of service members who perform combat missions. At the same time, however, they effectively limit the possibility of accelerated promotion in rank for those who have significant combat experience but transfer to other military units or military command bodies for further development.

"On the one hand, it seems fine if accelerated ranks are granted only to those who are fighting. On the other hand, it does not seem very fair towards those who honestly fought in combat units and moved higher to scale up their experience, but now will not even be able to obtain a rank. This initiative once again kills the motivation to grow higher in the army. After all, why should competent people move from units to command bodies if their monetary allowance will be lower there and they will be even less likely to obtain a rank?"

Moreover, in the fourth year of martial law, accelerated timeframes are relevant primarily to those who, through their qualities, have proven they deserve to become officers of a new generation. And for such people, rank is an opportunity to be better perceived among other service members from higher headquarters.

And I can already see how these changes will simply trigger an endless series of assignments from rear units and command bodies to combat units to rack up their three months to obtain a rank under the simplified procedure. Thereby making everyone's work more difficult", — an expert interview with the Chief of Personnel of a corps of the Land Forces of the AFU

Education and training

Service members with combat experience may receive an initial rank as a non-commissioned officer or a commissioned officer, provided they complete additional training.

"So, what is interesting about these courses? Previously, these were two different courses. It was 45 days for infantry, if I am not mistaken. In 45 days, a group, where a service member, a sergeant with higher education, completed training and returned already as a second lieutenant. What was the advantage? You did not sign a contract, your type of service did not change, and no MMC was needed.

Now this still works, but these courses have been combined, so it no longer lasts 45 days [...], but half a year. The number of people willing to leave for half a year, or the number of commanders ready to release a capable person who truly deserves to become an officer, of course, does not really work in wartime", — an expert interview with the Chief of Personnel of a corps of the Land Forces of the AFU

Another stage in the development of military education during the full-scale war was Ukraine's transition to a model of professional military education based on NATO standards effective 1 September 2023. This system covers five stages — from L1 to L5, with training from lieutenant to general¹⁷⁰. Training is effectively available to all service members, regardless of combat experience, while also creating opportunities for those who already have combat experience to deepen their competencies or retrain¹⁷¹.

In addition to special courses, the Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Service Members" grants service members **the right to education**, including postgraduate education and professional development, in higher military educational institutions, military educational subdivisions of higher education institutions, professional pre-higher military education institutions and other higher education institutions. In addition, commissioned officers serving under contract have **the opportunity to study at civilian higher education institutions, although without interruption of service**. However, there is a condition: before doing so, they must serve for a period equal to the time spent studying to obtain their previous higher-education degree¹⁷².

¹⁷⁰ Ukrinform (22 January 2024). NATO Standards: Continuous Education from Lieutenants to Generals. ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3816702-standarti-nato-bezperervna-osvita-vid-lejtenantiv-do-generaliv.html

¹⁷¹ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (15 December 1997). Resolution No. 1410 "On Transformation of the Military Education System." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1410-97-n#Text

¹⁷² Law of Ukraine No. 2011-XII (20 December 1991). "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families," Article 13(1). zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2011-12#Text

The Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection” provides for **targeted state support for war veterans to obtain vocational, professional pre-higher and higher education** in state and municipal educational institutions¹⁷³.

Such support may be provided in the form of:

- full or partial payment of tuition from state and local budgets;
- preferential long-term loans for education¹⁷⁴;
- social scholarships¹⁷⁵;
- free textbooks;
- free access to the internet and database systems in educational institutions;
- free accommodation in a dormitory;
- other measures approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine¹⁷⁶.

In this context, it should be noted that although the state offers additional guarantees for service members with combat experience, admission to a specific higher education institution will depend on the conditions and rules for admission to vocational, professional pre-higher and higher education institutions for the relevant year, which may prioritise certain categories of applicants¹⁷⁷.

¹⁷³ Law of Ukraine No. 3551-XII (22 October 1993). “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection,” Article 12(7). zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3551-12#Text

¹⁷⁴ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (29 August 2018). Resolution No. 673 “On Approving the Procedure for Preferential Lending for Obtaining Vocational (Vocational and Technical), Professional Pre-Higher and Higher Education.” zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/673-2018-n#n12

¹⁷⁵ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (28 December 2016). Resolution No. 1045 “Certain Issues of Payment of Social Scholarships to Students (Cadets) of Professional Pre-Higher and Higher Education Institutions.” zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1045-2016-n#n16

¹⁷⁶ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (23 November 2016). Resolution No. 975 “On Provision of Targeted State Support to Certain Categories of Citizens for Obtaining Vocational, Professional Pre-Higher and Higher Education.” zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/975-2016-n#Text

¹⁷⁷ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (23 November 2016). Resolution No. 975 “On Provision of Targeted State Support to Certain Categories of Citizens for Obtaining Vocational, Professional Pre-Higher and Higher Education,” subpara. 1, para. 3. zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/975-2016-n#Text

In addition, legislation does not provide for additional conditions regarding education during martial law or the restrictions that service members may face while actually participating in combat operations. The provisions on combining service with education were created in peacetime and have barely changed since then. This creates a challenge for service members with significant combat experience who seek to continue developing their military careers and deepen their knowledge of military affairs.

Awards system

Recognition is an important element of well-being in the military environment. One way to support and honour those fighting for the independence of the state is through military awards and decorations.

Under Ukrainian legislation, service members may be recognised with:

- state awards¹⁷⁸;
- honorary badges of the Commander-in-Chief of the AFU;
- departmental decorations, including those of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine¹⁷⁹;
- other types of incentive decorations.

The commands of individual branches and services may introduce their own special decorations, such as the “Combat Commander’s Badge” or “For Assault” in the Air Assault Forces of the AFU¹⁸⁰. At the same time, there is currently no clear distinction between awards for service members and those for other groups who have made significant

¹⁷⁸ Law of Ukraine No. 1549-III (16 March 2000). “On the State Awards of Ukraine.” zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1549-14#Text

¹⁷⁹ Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (21 November 2022). Order No. 392 “On Establishing Departmental Incentive Decorations of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine.” zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z1469-22#Text

¹⁸⁰ Command of the Air Assault Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. (6 December 2024). Facebook post. facebook.com/uaairborne/posts/973195781521077

contributions to the development of the Defence Forces or supported their functioning. In addition, awards are not clearly divided into combat and non-combat awards. Legal acts only describe the actions or deeds for which a person may receive a particular decoration.

“Only based on descriptions. There is no clear gradation as such, but, as I said, there is a certain established practice. For example, among state awards, it is usually considered that the Order of Bohdan Khmelnytskyi is awarded for certain command achievements, more combat-related ones, while the Order for Courage is usually awarded more often to soldiers, those who fought directly. Well, that is how the practice developed. The Order of Danylo Halytskyi is usually nominated for some administrative achievements. That is how it is generally perceived. The same applies to all other decorations: you simply need to read the description. Some descriptions refer to exceptional bravery on the battlefield and so on.

That is, there are decorations that are generally considered combat decorations, that are generally considered ones a person may be eligible for, and so on. [...] In the Ministry of Defence [...] they prepared draft amendments to the departmental decorations. Accordingly, they wanted to describe in slightly more detail to whom and for what they may be awarded. Again, so that it would be clearer, directly with categories of persons who may be eligible for them”, – an expert interview with the Chief of Personnel of a corps of the Land Forces of the AFU

According to the Procedure for Submitting Nominations for and Presenting State Awards of Ukraine¹⁸¹, bodies authorised to submit nominations for state awards send a submission addressed to the President of Ukraine and an award nomination sheet in the established form approved by the Commission on State Awards and Heraldry under the President of Ukraine. Such an award nomination sheet must specify the specific merits of the person nominated for a state award.

Documents on nominations for state awards are first processed by the Department for Citizenship, Pardons and State Awards of the Office of the President of Ukraine. If Ukrainian legislation provides for preliminary consideration of nominations for state awards by expert groups under the Commission on State Awards and Heraldry under the President of Ukraine, the materials are submitted to this Commission together with the opinion of the relevant expert group. The President of Ukraine or a person authorised by the President presents the award.

¹⁸¹ Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 138/2003 of 19 February 2003 “On the Procedure for Submitting Nominations for and Presenting State Awards of Ukraine.”
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/138/2003#Text

At the same time, an instruction of the Minister of Defence of Ukraine introduced a **simplified procedure** for submitting nominations for and presenting state awards, except for the title of “Hero of Ukraine,” during martial law for service members participating in combat operations.

Features of the simplified procedure:

- shortened processing times at each level of military administration: from submission by the commander of a military unit to consolidation by the General Staff and transfer for consideration to the Office of the President of Ukraine;
- a centralised approach to preparing consolidated submissions;
- ensuring the prompt logistics of transferring awards to units or TRSSCs, including in cases of posthumous awards;
- minimising bureaucratic delays and accelerating decision-making to ensure timely recognition of service members for their contribution to the defence of the state¹⁸².

Procedure for awarding departmental decorations of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine:

- the commander of the service member nominated for the decoration submits a petition to the immediate commander in accordance with the military hierarchy;
- petitions for awarding decorations are submitted through the relevant higher-level bodies (according to subordination) to officials authorised to submit nominations for decorations to the Minister of Defence of Ukraine;
- the procedure is carried out through the Personnel Policy Department of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine.

A similar procedure applies to nominations of service members for **honorary badges of the Commander-in-Chief of the AFU**. During martial law, the immediate commander of the service member initiates the

¹⁸² Special Order of the Minister of Defence of Ukraine No. 4575/уґ of 15 August 2025.

petition, whereas in peacetime, candidates are considered at meetings of military unit attestation commissions. Submissions are sent to the Personnel Centre of the AFU and forwarded for consideration by the Commander-in-Chief of the AFU¹⁸³.

Although measures have been taken since the beginning of the full-scale invasion to simplify the awards system, **a number of challenges** remain in practice.

- A military unit may sometimes receive a “top-down” requirement to award a certain number of service members by a specific commemorative date. In such cases, the commander must choose which service members to nominate for a decoration, even though the number genuinely eligible may be higher or lower than the number required by the leadership.
- The issue arises concerning a fair distribution of decorations among subdivisions of the military unit.
- Although commanders of military units may themselves petition for decorations to be awarded to subordinate service members, there are cases where some direct commanders refuse to petition for the award of departmental decorations to subordinate service members¹⁸⁴.
- The absence of a transparent control mechanism for recognising service members undermines the significance of military awards and demotivates personnel.

¹⁸³ Order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine No. 187 of 5 July 2023 “On Honorary Badges of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.” dostup.org.ua/request/115533/response/383171/attach/3/05.07.2023%20187.pdf?cookie_passthrough=1

¹⁸⁴ Expert interview with the former Head of a Personnel Group of a brigade of the Land Forces of the AFU.

Awards system in Ukraine

Awards and decorations	Decision-making authority	Procedural features	Problems
State awards of Ukraine , e.g., the Order of Prince Yaroslav the Wise, the Order of Merit and the Order of Bohdan Khmelnytskyi	The President of Ukraine or a person authorised by the President; submissions are prepared by bodies authorised to make them; they are first processed by the Department for Citizenship, Pardons and State Awards of the Office of the President of Ukraine (OPU)	Standard procedure: submission → award nomination sheet → consideration by the Commission on State Awards and Heraldry → presentation by the President. Simplified procedure during martial law, except for the state award “Hero of Ukraine”: shortened timeframes, centralised preparation of submissions, prompt logistics and minimisation of bureaucracy	No clear distinction between awards for service members and civilian categories; no division into combat and non-combat awards; bureaucratic delays in peacetime
Honorary badges of the Commander-in-Chief of the AFU	The Commander-in-Chief of the AFU; submissions are prepared through the Personnel Centre of the AFU	Peacetime: consideration by attestation commissions of military units. Martial law: the immediate commander initiates the submission	Potential delays in consideration; uneven nomination of candidates

Awards and decorations	Decision-making authority	Procedural features	Problems
Incentive decorations of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine	The Minister of Defence of Ukraine; the submission is made by the commander through the relevant higher-level bodies, with the procedure carried out through the Department of Personnel Policy of the MoD	Submission of a petition through the military hierarchy; processing by the Department of Personnel Policy of the MoD	Lack of clear criteria for awarding; the procedure may be bureaucratically complex; dependence on the commander's decision; uneven nomination of candidates
Decorations of individual branches and services, e.g., the "Combat Commander's Badge" and "For Assault" in the Air Assault Forces	Command of the relevant branch/service	Established by internal acts; specific criteria and the procedure for awarding are determined by the command	Dependence on the commander's decision; potential lack of transparent criteria
Other incentive decorations	Depends on the military unit, body or subdivision establishing the decoration	Established locally under internal rules	Lack of a unified approach and clear classification of decorations

Transition from a military career to civilian life

Service members with war veteran status and population groups equated to them have the right to professional and social adaptation.

The Law of Ukraine “On Social Services” **defines the service of “social adaptation,” which includes:**

- assistance in analysing a life situation and resolving problems;
- psychological and psychiatric support;
- support in restoring family and social connections;
- development of social and communication skills;
- provision of information on social protection;
- group family psychological training¹⁸⁵.

Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 432, which regulates such social adaptation, applies to veterans of military formations for the entire period of martial law and for 12 months after its end¹⁸⁶. Although adaptation issues relate more to the transition from a military career to civilian life, this is an important part of the predictability of military service.

¹⁸⁵ Law of Ukraine No. 2671-VIII of 17 January 2019 “On Social Services.”
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2671-19#Text

¹⁸⁶ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 432 of 21 June 2017 “On Approving the Procedure and Conditions for Ensuring Social and Professional Adaptation of Persons Who Are Being Discharged or Have Been Discharged from Military Service, among War Veterans, Persons with Special Merits before the Motherland, Family Members of Such Persons, Family Members of Fallen (Deceased) War Veterans and Family Members of Fallen (Deceased) Defenders of Ukraine.”
zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/432-2017-%D0%BF#Text

Career after illness or wound

During martial law, service members whom the MMC has found fit for military service on health grounds in support of military units are appointed in accordance with the list of positions, subject to their written consent and upon the petition of the commander or head of the relevant military unit¹⁸⁷. In addition, in February 2026, amendments were made to the legislation allowing such service members to be appointed to positions in combat-force military units¹⁸⁸ upon the commander's petition.

Moreover, during mobilisation and martial law, the Lists of Positions That May Be Filled by Service Members Found to Be Unfit for Military Service on Health Grounds by Military Medical Commissions do not apply¹⁸⁹. Such service members may also be appointed to positions upon the petition of the commander or head in accordance with the list of positions for appointing service members.

In practice, commanders sometimes use this list to refuse to appoint a service member to a combat position. At the same time, some wounded service members with extensive combat experience do not wish to continue service in rear positions. Disability may become an additional reason for refusal, as it confers the right to be discharged from service. That is the reason why some veterans do not formalise disability at all after being wounded or do not exercise the right to have a higher disability group established.

In addition, if a service member has reached the age limit for remaining in service, they may, if they wish, extend their service for another five years if they have combat experience¹⁹⁰.

¹⁸⁷ Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 1153/2008 of 10 December 2008 "On the Regulation on Military Service by Citizens of Ukraine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine," para. 257-1.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 594 of 2 September 2024 "On Approving the List of Positions That May Be Filled by Service Members and Reservists Found to Be Unfit for Military Service by Military Medical Commissions." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z1345-24#Text

¹⁹⁰ Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 1153/2008 of 10 December 2008 "On the Regulation on Military Service by Citizens of Ukraine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine," para. 219.

Monetary allowance and pensions

Service members' monetary allowance includes:

- monthly basic payments;
- monthly additional payments, including increases in position-based salary, allowances, additional payments, bonuses and rewards, in particular for cybersecurity and the specific features of service during martial law;
- one-off additional payments, including rewards, additional and one-off rewards for the period of martial law, as well as assistance payments.

The amount of a service member's monetary allowance depends on position, rank, length of service, specific features of service, the presence or absence of academic degrees, academic titles and other factors.

Additional rewards for performing combat (special) missions

When performing combat (special) missions, service members may receive additional rewards. For the period of martial law, several types of such rewards have been established depending on the specific nature of the missions performed. The grounds and procedure for payments in the system of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine are regulated by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On Certain Payments to Service Members, Rank-and-File Personnel and Senior Officers, Police Officers and Their Families during Martial Law"¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 168 of 28 February 2022 "On Certain Payments 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-%D0%BF#Text

and the MoD Order “On Approving the Procedure for Payment of Monetary Allowance to Service Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Certain Other Persons”¹⁹². In practice, the latter narrows the grounds for receiving additional rewards.

UAH 100,000 per month (proportional to the number of days of direct participation)

CMU Resolution
No. 168,
para. 1-1

Service members who are directly present in areas of hostilities, on the territory of Ukraine temporarily occupied by Russia, or in the territory between positions of the Defence Forces and positions of the aggressor state’s troops

MoD Order
No. 260,
para. 2,
Section
XXXIV

Clarification:

- during combat (special) operations on the line of contact with the enemy, to the depth at which combat (special) missions are performed by a military unit (subdivision, namely a combined one) of the first echelon of defence or attack (counteroffensive or counterattack) up to and including battalion level;
- in areas of military or combat operations involving the detection of enemy air targets;
- during flights in the airspace of the oblasts of Ukraine where military or combat operations are taking place;
- during fire engagement of the enemy as part of a missile forces and artillery subdivision or asset, or an air defence subdivision or asset;
- on enemy territory, including the territory between the positions of enemy troops and own troops, and territories temporarily occupied or seized by the enemy;
- during fire engagement of enemy air or maritime targets;
- during the withdrawal of aircraft from enemy attack by carrying out a take-off;
- by ships, boats and vessels in maritime or river waters (outside the internal waters of ports, basing points and temporary basing locations);
- in areas of military or combat operations, for medical personnel of medical units and subdivisions (medical reinforcement subdivisions);

¹⁹² Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 260 of 7 June 2018 “On Approving the Procedure for Payment of Monetary Allowance to Service Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Certain Other Persons.” zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0745-18#Text

	■ during the repelling of an armed attack (fire engagement of the enemy) on guarded facilities, or the liberation of such facilities in the event of their seizure or violent capture of weapons, combat or other equipment; ■ in areas of military or combat operations, during demining (detection, neutralisation and destruction) of explosive objects, in places where assigned tasks are performed in accordance with combat orders.
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UAH 50,000 per month (proportional to the number of days of task performance)

CMU Resolution No. 168, para. 1-1	Service members who perform combat or special missions as part of a military command body, headquarters of a grouping of troops or forces, or headquarters of a tactical group up to and including the command post of an operational-strategic grouping of troops, as well as part of the command and headquarters of a military unit, combined subdivision, including outside areas of military or combat operations, which exercises operational or combat command and control of military units and subdivisions conducting military or combat operations on the line of contact at the distance where combat or special missions are performed by a military unit (subdivision, including a combined one) of the first echelon of defence or attack (counteroffensive or counterattack)
MoD Order No. 260, para. 2, Section XXXIV	Clarification: the list of these military command bodies (directorates or headquarters of groupings of troops or forces) is approved by the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine or the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine

UAH 30,000 per month (proportional to the number of days of task performance)

CMU Resolution No. 168, para. 1-1	Service members who perform combat or special missions during measures necessary to ensure the defence of Ukraine, protect public security and the interests of the state in connection with the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine
MoD Order No. 260, para. 2, Section XXXIV	Clarification, tasks: ■ intensive training for conducting military or combat operations as part of military units or subdivisions included in the reserve of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the defence forces of the state; command and control of groupings of troops or forces as part of deployed command posts of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine;

- command and control of subordinate forces and assets in accordance with the tasks assigned to the Administration of the State Special Transport Service, as part of deployed command posts of the State Special Transport Service; as part of a working group or individually, as determined by the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine or the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, within oblasts of Ukraine where military or combat operations are taking place;
- demining (detection, neutralisation and destruction) of explosive objects, outside combat areas;
- as part of active groupings of troops or forces of the state defence forces, according to the list of tasks approved by the Minister of Defence of Ukraine;
- comprehensive support for active groupings of troops or forces of the state defence forces directly in areas of military or combat operations;
- air defence cover and ground defence of critical infrastructure facilities, including transport infrastructure facilities, by military units and subdivisions of the State Special Transport Service

The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine also provides for a one-off cash benefit of **UAH 70,000 for every 30 days** (calculated cumulatively) for service members who participate in combat operations on the line of contact. This concerns the performance of combat or special missions by a first-echelon defence or attack (counteroffensive, counterattack) subdivision up to and including company strongpoint level, as well as on the territory of Ukraine temporarily occupied by Russia, in the territory between positions of the Defence Forces and positions of the aggressor state's troops in areas of hostilities and on the territory of the aggressor state¹⁹³.

¹⁹³ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 168 of 28 February 2022 "On Certain Payments to Service Members, Rank-and-File Personnel and Senior Officers, Police Officers and Their Families during Martial Law," indent 2, para. 1-1.

In practice, the Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine sets out a significantly narrower list of grounds for receiving monthly additional rewards of UAH 100,000, UAH 50,000 and UAH 30,000:

"[...] they calculate payments of 100,000 exclusively for the so-called battalion defence area, which is up to 3.5 kilometres according to the combat manual. But apart from those in forward positions, no one else enters those 3.5 kilometres, because there is no point in being there; it is, a priori, equivalent to death if you are not in dugouts. [...] The battalion defence area is where the battalion COP should be located. And the battalion COP consists of units that enter, leave, some report, others deliver things; they are constantly coming in. If you organise it at a distance of 3.5 kilometres, they will definitely detect you; they will definitely destroy your COP. And in practice, you place it 7–10 kilometres away in order to command the battle. But then they come and tell you that you are not entitled to receive UAH 100,000. Because that is what is written. First, there is a Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers that regulates this payment of 100,000. And on the basis of this Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers, the Minister of Defence also issued an Order. So the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers states that 100,000 is paid to everyone who performs combat missions as part of a unit located on the line of contact or in areas of hostilities. Areas of hostilities are 20–30 kilometres from the line of contact. Then the Minister issued a procedure that refers to that notorious BDA. And says, no, it should not be paid as the Cabinet of Ministers says. It should be paid as we decided for ourselves. [...] And as a result, out of nowhere, it is precisely those who are actually performing combat missions and taking risks who are paid less. [...] And this also affects, so to speak, both the morale and psychological state and the motivation of people, when you are constantly taking risks, and they tell you, 'No, return it, you were paid this money, a commission came and said that you received it unlawfully, now return it.' What I am getting at is that everyone knows this: commanders and others give interviews saying the war and this kill zone have changed. So change the combat manual, change the approaches, the requirements, change the grounds for payment. No one is doing this", — an expert interview with the Chief of Staff of a brigade of the Land Forces of the AFU

Additional challenges arise from service members' lack of understanding of the criteria on which the matrix of monthly additional rewards is based:

'It happens that operators [of UAVs] receive one hundred thousand for the whole month if they carry out flights every day. [...] This work is safer [than the work of an infantryman], and there is some lack of clarity here. Many service members file complaints asking why one person goes out to positions, fires an assault rifle and receives 100,000, while someone else who carries out a UAV flight also receives 100,000, but that is how it is written', — an expert interview with the head of the financial service of a military unit of the Defence Forces

Additional rewards in connection with wounds, disappearance or captivity

In addition to monthly and one-off additional rewards for performing tasks defined by legal acts, service members are also entitled to an **additional reward of UAH 100,000**:

- in connection with a wound (concussion, injury or mutilation) related to the defence of the Homeland, during inpatient treatment or rehabilitation, including during transfer between healthcare facilities and leave for treatment based on the conclusion of the MMC, but for no more than 12 consecutive months^{194, 195};
- monthly in the event of going missing in action or capture^{196, 197}.

If, after a wound related to the defence of the Homeland, the MMC finds a service member to be partially fit or temporarily unfit, with re-examination after 6–12 months, and they are placed at the commander's disposal, then the service member receives the full monetary allowance for the last position held during the first two months, excluding the additional reward. After two months, **the salary based on military rank, the length-of-service allowance and an additional reward of UAH 20,100 per month** are paid in proportion to the time spent at the commander's disposal¹⁹⁸.

¹⁹⁴ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 168 of 28 February 2022 "On Certain Payments to Service Members, Rank-and-File Personnel and Senior Officers, Police Officers and Their Families during Martial Law," indent 4, para. 1-2.

¹⁹⁵ Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 260 of 7 June 2018 "On Approving the Procedure for Payment of Monetary Allowance to Service Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Certain Other Persons," indent 25, para. 2, Section XXXIV.

¹⁹⁶ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 168 of 28 February 2022 "On Certain Payments to Service Members, Rank-and-File Personnel and Senior Officers, Police Officers and Their Families during Martial Law," indent 4, para. 1-2.

¹⁹⁷ Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 260 of 7 June 2018 "On Approving the Procedure for Payment of Monetary Allowance to Service Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Certain Other Persons," indent 4, para. 11, Section XXXIV.

¹⁹⁸ Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 260 of 7 June 2018 "On Approving the Procedure for Payment of Monetary Allowance to Service Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Certain Other Persons," indent 25, para. 2, Section XXXIV.

However, after the status of “partially fit” was changed to “fit on health grounds for military service in support units [...]” this payment is effectively not made due to inconsistencies in the wording of legal acts.

Other types of cash assistance

When going on annual basic leave (in full or in part), a service member is paid **cash assistance for health improvement**. It may also be paid without leave, on the basis of a report.

The amount depends on:

- the position-based salary;
- the salary based on military rank;
- the length-of-service allowance;
- monthly additional types of monetary allowance, except rewards, for the position held, to which the service member is entitled on the date the order on payment of the health improvement assistance¹⁹⁹ is signed.

Service members may also receive **financial assistance** once a year **to resolve social and domestic issues**, in the amount of one month’s monetary allowance. The grounds for providing such assistance change annually and include, for example, the birth of a child, serious illness or the death of a member of the service member’s family, etc²⁰⁰.

¹⁹⁹ Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 260 of 7 June 2018 “On Approving the Procedure for Payment of Monetary Allowance to Service Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Certain Other Persons,” Section XXIII.

²⁰⁰ Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 260 of 7 June 2018 “On Approving the Procedure for Payment of Monetary Allowance to Service Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Certain Other Persons,” Section XXIV.

Pension

Legislation provides for military pensions for length of service and disability pensions for service members, regardless of combat experience.

In the context of pension provision for service members, two concepts should be considered: **entitlement to a military pension** and **the calculation of the pension**.

Entitlement to a military pension

The decisive condition for entitlement to a length-of-service pension is the **duration of service**. Length of service is the calendar period of service that gives the right to retire²⁰¹.

Conditions for receiving a military pension

25 calendar years of service	Less than 25 calendar years of service, but no less than 12 years and six months
The pension will amount to 65% of the monetary allowance	Service members who were mobilised and/or served under contract for a short period may claim a military pension, subject to additional conditions: having civilian length of service; reaching the age of 45 at the time of discharge from military service ²⁰²
Under these conditions, participation in combat operations does not affect entitlement to a length-of-service pension	

If a service-related disability is established, a service member may receive a military disability pension regardless of length of service.

²⁰¹ Supreme Court resolution of 14 April 2021 in Case No. 480/4241/18 (administrative proceedings No. K/9901/15011/19). reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/96250219

²⁰² Law of Ukraine No. 2262-XII of 9 April 1992 "On Pension Provision for Persons Discharged from Military Service and Some Other Persons." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2262-12#n41, Article 12(b)(1).

At the same time, the right to a military pension may be exercised only after discharge from service.

Calculation of military pension

If a service member is entitled to a military pension, combat experience affects its calculation differently depending on the type of pension: length-of-service pension or disability pension.

Length-of-service pension

Basic pension	Preferential service credit for PCE
If there are 25 calendar years of service, the pension amounts to 65% of the monetary allowance ²⁰³	Participation in combat operations is counted as “one month for three,” which increases the length of service and, accordingly, the pension amount ²⁰⁴
Example: if, out of 25 years of service, one year is combat service, the pension will increase by approximately 5% and amount to 70% of the determined monetary allowance	

Disability pension

Combat experience does not significantly affect the amount of a **disability pension**. Such a pension depends on the group and cause of disability. Even if the disability resulted from the defence of the Homeland, meaning that the wound, mutilation or illness was sustained in connection with participation in combat operations, the amount of the pension under the law remains fixed: 60%, 80% or 100% of the determined monetary allowance²⁰⁵. Such a pension will be the same for a service member who performed combat missions for one month and

²⁰³ Law of Ukraine No. 2262-XII of 9 April 1992 “On Pension Provision for Persons Discharged from Military Service and Some Other Persons,” Article 13.

²⁰⁴ Expert interview with a female lawyer specialising in pension provision.

²⁰⁵ Law of Ukraine No. 2262-XII of 9 April 1992 “On Pension Provision for Persons Discharged from Military Service and Some Other Persons,” Article 21.

for a person with one year or more of combat experience. Preferential service credit is taken into account when calculating the length-of-service allowance. The total amount of preferential service credit affects the pension amount.

Allowances and additional payments

Regardless of the type of pension, additional payments are accrued for participation in combat operations: from 25% to 50% of the subsistence minimum for persons who have lost working capacity (UAH 648.75 to UAH 1,297.50 in 2026).

Key factor

The amount of a military pension is most affected by the **monetary allowance for the last position held at the time of discharge from service**, taking into account the service member's rank and salary. Additional rewards for participation in combat operations are not taken into account when calculating the pension.

"Military pensions are granted on the basis of monetary allowance, from basic and additional types. So, we have basic types that are taken into account: salary, rank and length of service, and they are taken in the amounts and for the position held at the time of discharge. That is, if the person was discharged from the position of driver on 1 January 2025, then the salary, rank and length of service will be taken from the driver's position. At the same time, as I said, the length of service will take into account this percentage with preferential service credit. Because we had cases where a person was a battalion commander in 2024, then was wounded, was transferred to a driver position for some reason and discharged. And it turns out that his salary, rank and length of service will be as of the time of discharge, meaning as a driver, not as a platoon or company commander", – an expert interview with a female lawyer specialising in pension provision

Furthermore, all additional types of monetary allowance are taken into account only for the last 24 months of military service, or for the actual months of service if the service lasted less. Payments for participation in combat operations are not taken into account at all in the calculation.

'[...] but there are also additional types of monetary allowance. These are bonuses, allowances, the secrecy allowance, for sports titles, maybe he had an honoured title or something, an allowance for being honoured, if he was a donor, there will be a donor allowance. All of these are additional types; they are taken into account for the last 24 months of service before discharge, for full calendar months. That is, all this is added together and divided by 24. And the resulting amount is added to these basic ones, and then this percentage, 50%, 60%, 70%, is taken from it. But the problem arises precisely with these additional types', – an expert interview with a female lawyer specialising in pension provision

It is the **monthly additional types of monetary allowance**, such as bonuses, salary increases, allowances for special service conditions and so on, that the service member received before discharge from service that **have the greatest effect on the pension amount**²⁰⁶.

Therefore, being at the commander's disposal for more than two months before discharge, when a service member does not receive a monetary allowance or receives it in a significantly reduced amount, negatively affects the pension amount²⁰⁷.

Entitlement to a civilian pension

If a veteran has no grounds for receiving a military pension, due to insufficient length of service or because they continue to serve despite a service-related disability, they may use the general pension provision system²⁰⁸. At the same time, it should be taken into account that **the granting of a civilian pension, whether an old-age pension or disability pension, currently depends on the length of insurance record, both military and civilian.**

²⁰⁶ Law of Ukraine No. 2262-XII of 9 April 1992 "On Pension Provision for Persons Discharged from Military Service and Some Other Persons," Article 43.

²⁰⁷ Expert interview with a female lawyer specialising in pension provision.

²⁰⁸ Law of Ukraine No. 1058-IV of 9 July 2003 "On Mandatory State Pension Insurance." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1058-15#Text

Combat experience is taken into account for an old-age pension	Combat experience is not taken into account for a general disability pension
It gives the right to earlier retirement (at 50 for women and 55 for men) and with a shorter insurance record ²⁰⁹	The requirement for an insurance record remains mandatory and is the same for everyone. This may create problems, especially for young service members who were wounded at the beginning of service and do not have a sufficient insurance record. As a result, while having the status of a person with a disability, they may not be entitled to any type of pension while they remain in service

The mechanism for calculating a civilian pension differs significantly from that for a military pension: preferential service credit is not taken into account, but additional rewards for participation in combat operations are included in the calculation.

Type of pension provision	Grounds for entitlement	Pension calculation
General pension provision ²¹⁰	Age: 55 for men, with an insurance record of at least 25 years, and 50 for women, with an insurance record of at least 20 years. The insurance record includes civilian employment and military service	General calculations of all taxable income, excluding preferential service credit (one month counting as three during periods of participation in combat operations)
	Presence of disability. The insurance record affects the granting of the pension	General calculations of all taxable income, excluding preferential service credit (one month counting as three during periods of participation in combat operations)

²⁰⁹ Law of Ukraine No. 1058-IV of 9 July 2003 "On Mandatory State Pension Insurance," Article 115.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

Type of pension provision	Grounds for entitlement	Pension calculation
Military pension provision	25 years of service regardless of status of the participant in hostilities and age. Discharge from service ²¹¹	Calculation taking preferential service credit into account (one month counting as three during the period of participation in combat operations), but excluding one-off cash rewards for participation in combat operations. Other allowances and bonuses are taken into account only for the last two years of military service ²¹²
	Presence of a service-related disability. Length of service or civilian employment does not affect the granting of the pension. Discharge from service	Calculation given the group and cause of disability, but excluding one-off cash rewards for participation in combat operations. Other allowances and bonuses are taken into account only for the last two years of military service
Mixed pension provision ²¹³	25 years of insurance record, of which at least 12 years and six months are military service. Subject to retirement after the age of 45. Discharge from service	General calculations of all taxable income, excluding preferential service credit (one month counting as three during periods of participation in combat operations). Other allowances and bonuses are taken into account only for the last two years of military service

²¹¹ Law of Ukraine No. 2262-XII of 9 April 1992 "On Pension Provision for Persons Discharged from Military Service and Some Other Persons," Article 12.

²¹² Ibid., Articles 17-1, 13, 43.

²¹³ Law of Ukraine No. 2262-XII of 9 April 1992 "On Pension Provision for Persons Discharged from Military Service and Some Other Persons," Article 12(b)(1).

In any case, **even if a person is entitled to several types of pension provision, they may choose only one.** At the same time, a military pension is significantly higher than a civilian pension. According to reporting on the number of pensioners and amounts of assigned monthly pensions as of January 2025²¹⁴, the average military-law disability pension was UAH 15,600, while the average civilian disability pension was UAH 3,600.

²¹⁴ Pension Fund of Ukraine, Report on the Number of Pensioners and Amounts of Assigned Monthly Pensions, as of 1 January 2025 (6-ПФ) (16/04/2025). pfu.gov.ua/2171438-zvit-pro-chyselnist-pensioneriv-ta-sumy-pryznachenyh-misyachnyh-pensij-standom-na-01-01-2025-6-pf

Medical provision

Under the Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families,” service members have the right to free healthcare²¹⁵. Separate guarantees are provided by the Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection,” including free dental prosthetics, provision of medicines and other benefits for persons with combat experience²¹⁶.

Treatment of service members is provided on an inpatient basis, either in military or civilian healthcare facilities. Treatment is also possible in private healthcare facilities, provided that an agreement is in place on free healthcare for service members under the NHSU Medical Guarantees Programme, or if the facility independently covers the cost of treatment or provides a discount. The head of the health service issues a referral for treatment, meaning that the service member’s ability to receive proper healthcare depends on them. However, the challenge here is the lack of clear criteria for such referrals, especially in the field of mental health²¹⁷.

Physical health

In the event of illness or a wound (concussion, injury or mutilation), a service member is granted **leave for treatment** on the basis of the MMC conclusion, **with monetary and material provision retained**. The duration of such leave is determined by the nature of the illness or wound²¹⁸.

²¹⁵ Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families,” Article 11.

²¹⁶ Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection,” Article 12.

²¹⁷ Expert interview with a Medical Service Officer of a military unit of the Defence Forces.

²¹⁸ Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families,” Article 10-1(11)(1).

Service members may also be referred for treatment or rehabilitation abroad²¹⁹ in accordance with the MMC conclusion.

With the full-scale invasion unleashed by the Russian Federation, service members participating in combat operations were granted the right to **free medical provision of reproductive services**: collection, cryopreservation and storage of their reproductive cells in case of loss of reproductive function while performing duties to defend the state²²⁰.

Mental health

Psychological assistance measures are being introduced in the Armed Forces of Ukraine to support the mental health of service members participating in combat operations. In particular, mobile groups operate in mission areas, helping service members adapt to combat conditions, reduce stress levels, providing psychocorrectional support following trauma and support during decompression after return from combat zones^{221, 222}.

The state also provides free psychological assistance to persons with combat experience through psychological service subdivisions of military units or, where necessary, in partner institutions²²³. Service members who were held as prisoners of war must undergo recovery and adaptation measures upon release in accordance with the rules established by the Ministry of Defence²²⁴.

²¹⁹ Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families," Article 11(1)(9).

²²⁰ Ibid, Article 11(1)(10).

²²¹ Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 768 of 11 November 2025 "On Approving the Procedure for Organising Psychological Assistance in the System of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z1930-25#Text

²²² Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 637 of 27 October 2023 "On Approving the Concept of Military Personnel Policy in the System of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine until 2028."

²²³ Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families," Article 11(1)(6).

²²⁴ Ibid., Article 11(1)(7).

Housing provision

The legal and regulatory framework for providing housing to service members was developed in peacetime. Under the Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families,” the state must provide service members with housing or pay compensation for it²²⁵. Under current provisions, service members called up during mobilisation must live in barracks, while service members with families must live in service accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence or, if such accommodation is unavailable, in special dormitories.

However, the above provisions are entirely inconsistent with the conditions of modern war, in which service members must live dispersed to avoid detection of their concentrations and enemy strikes against them. They also effectively secure housing in the civilian sector and rent housing in frontline areas at their own expense²²⁶.

In other words, the housing needs of service members as part of their well-being in the military environment currently remain insufficiently regulated at the state level.

At the same time, the Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection” provides for a number of **social guarantees and benefits for veterans, including:**

- a 75% discount on housing and utility payments;
- a discount on fuel for homes without central heating;
- priority provision of housing and land plots;
- assistance with housing repairs and fuel provision²²⁷.

²²⁵ Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families,” Article 12.

²²⁶ Expert interview with the former Head of a Personnel Group of a brigade of the Land Forces of the AFU.

²²⁷ “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection,” Article 14.

In addition, the Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families” envisages:

- extraordinary provision of housing for persons with combat experience under defined conditions;
- a one-off opportunity to obtain a loan for the construction or purchase of housing for up to 20 years (at budget expense) for those who did not receive housing during service;
- compensation of 50% of the initial mortgage payment²²⁸. The Law also guarantees an additional UAH 100,000 after the first year of military service and UAH 100,000 after the second year for service members who have signed their first contract, regardless of combat experience. However, despite this guarantee being enshrined in law, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has still not determined the procedure for its implementation, which makes it impossible to actually exercise this right;
- housing or monetary compensation for service members who served in temporarily occupied territories, were provided with service or other housing, obtained internally displaced person status and continue to serve, regardless of their combat experience²²⁹.

In other words, the above provisions primarily concern housing in the civilian environment or in peacetime, provided that the service member serves at their place of residence. **During martial law, especially when participating in combat operations, the exercise of these rights is significantly complicated.**

²²⁸ In accordance with the Conditions for the Provision of Affordable Mortgage Lending to Citizens of Ukraine by Ukrainian Financial Housing Company Private Joint-Stock Company.

²²⁹ Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families,” Article 12.

Mobility is also an important element of a favourable physical environment for well-being in the military context. Service members who have status of the participant in hostilities or are persons with disabilities resulting from war receive **additional travel benefits** on urban, suburban and intercity transport, including road, rail, sea, river and air transport. At the same time, these benefits are not linked to actual military service and are available to all veterans.

Relationships with family and social protection of family members

Social connections are one of the important elements of veteran well-being in the military environment. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation has significantly affected service members' ability to spend time with their family and friends. This may also potentially affect their morale and psychological state, as respondents repeatedly noted during expert interviews^{230, 231}.

Therefore, it is important to maintain family connections through cohabitation or relocation with relatives, use leave as a tool for recovery and spending time together, and provide comprehensive support for families through support services. Each of these aspects is considered in more detail below.

Service near the place of residence and joint relocation of spouses

In this context, it is important to note the right of service members to relocation in connection with the health condition of family members²³². In particular, when a service member serving under contract is transferred to another place of service, the other spouse must also be transferred if he or she is a service member serving under contract.

²³⁰ Expert interview with a Medical Service Officer of a military unit of the Defence Forces.

²³¹ Expert interview with the former Head of a Personnel Group of a brigade of the Land Forces of the AFU.

²³² Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 1153/2008 of 10 December 2008 "On the Regulation on Military Service by Citizens of Ukraine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine," para. 113.

However, this rule does not apply in cases of:

- transfer based on the results of attestation;
- imposition of a disciplinary sanction;
- risk of violating anti-corruption legislation;
- impossibility of simultaneous appointment to military positions within one settlement (garrison), and in the event that one spouse refuses discharge from military service²³³.

In practice, such a transfer may be significantly complicated during martial law due to the high intensity of hostilities and the shortage of personnel in the Defence Forces.

Leave

Under the Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families,” service members are guaranteed **various types of leave** that allow them to spend time with their families:

- annual basic leave of up to 30 days;
- additional leave defined by the Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection” (14 days);
- leave for family circumstances;
- leave on health grounds;
- maternity leave;
- childcare leave until the child reaches the age of three or six;
- leave for destroyed equipment of up to 15 days.

²³³ Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 1153/2008 of 10 December 2008 “On the Regulation on Military Service by Citizens of Ukraine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine,” para. 114.

In addition, service members aged 18 to 25 who do not hold a university degree and are obtaining higher or professional pre-higher education, except for study at higher military educational institutions and military educational subdivisions of higher education institutions, are granted study leave.

Leave during military service is granted, excluding the time needed to travel to the place where the leave is spent and to return²³⁴.

The right to leave for family circumstances is granted in case of certain events in a service member's life. The duration of leave varies depending on the nature of the event and the degree of kinship with the person the service member needs to travel to. However, the total duration of such leave may not exceed 15 calendar days per year²³⁵.

Leave for family circumstances is granted in the event of:

- marriage of the service member – up to ten calendar days;
- serious health condition or death of relatives by blood or marriage:
 - the service member's spouse, parent, stepparent, child, stepchild, sibling, the spouse's parent, or the person who raised the service member – up to seven calendar days;
 - other relatives – up to three calendar days;
- fire or another natural disaster affecting the family of the service member or their relatives – up to 15 calendar days;
- other exceptional cases, once a year, where the presence of the service member in the family is necessary, by decision of the commander of the military unit – up to three calendar days²³⁶.

²³⁴ Law of Ukraine Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families," Article 10-1(9).

²³⁵ Law of Ukraine Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families," Article 10-1(10).

²³⁶ Law of Ukraine Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families," Article 10-1(9).

During the special period of martial law, the duration of leave for family circumstances may not exceed ten days²³⁷.

Activities of support services

Even where rights and opportunities related to leave, relocation or social guarantees are provided by law, their implementation in practice often requires additional support and coordination. This is especially relevant in cases of wounds, long-term treatment, disappearance, captivity or death of a service member, when different institutions are involved in the process, and the burden on the family increases significantly.

Support services play a key role here. They are intended to provide comprehensive support to service members and their families, as well as to help them navigate the system of social, health and legal services. The deployment of support services in all military units of the AFU and other Defence Forces is an important step towards strengthening the protection of the rights of service members and their families, as well as increasing motivation and trust in command.

Thus, in 2024–2025, Ukraine developed the necessary legal and regulatory framework for the operation of such services. In particular, in 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted a Resolution for all Defence Forces²³⁸, along with departmental orders of the Ministry of Defence (the AFU and the State Special Transport Service)²³⁹,

²³⁷ Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families,” Article 10-1(18).

²³⁸ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 948 of 20 August 2024 “Certain Issues of Implementing the Activities of Support Services for Service Members, Enlisted and Commanding Officers of the Civil Protection Service, Police Officers and Members of Their Families.” zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/948-2024-%D0%BF#n10

²³⁹ Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 59 of 29 January 2025 “On Approving the Regulation on the Support Service for Servicepersons and Members of Their Families in the System of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine.” zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0213-25#Text

the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine²⁴⁰ and the Ministry of Internal Affairs²⁴¹; in 2025, the Chief of the General Staff approved a separate order on the specific features of deploying support services in the AFU²⁴². These documents define the functions of services, their target audience and responsibility for their deployment and effective operation.

A support service in military units provides comprehensive support aimed at meeting the social, medical and information needs of service members, in particular, those who have sustained a wound, concussion, injury or mutilation, fallen ill while performing official duties, died, gone missing or been held prisoner of war, as well as their families.

The main functions of the services are to:

- support service members during health care, MMC and MSEC procedures;
- assess the functional capabilities of service members;
- provide advice on monetary allowance, benefits, leave and social protection;
- support the provision of essential items and assist with document processing;
- maintain regular contact with healthcare facilities, family members, governmental authorities, local governments, civil society organisations, volunteers and charitable foundations;
- provide psychosocial support and restore social and family connections for service members after release from captivity or forced isolation;

²⁴⁰ Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 67 of 10 April 2025 "On Approving the Regulation on the Support Service for Servicepersons of the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine and Members of Their Families." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0582-25#Text

²⁴¹ Order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine No. 750 of 11 November 2024 "On Approving the Regulation on Support Services for Servicepersons of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine, the National Guard of Ukraine, Enlisted and Commanding Officers of the Civil Protection Service, Police Officers and Members of Their Families." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z1899-24#Text

²⁴² Order of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine No. 149 of 8 September 2025 "On Certain Issues of Support Services in the AFU."

- facilitate the restoration of documents and the provision of legal assistance;
- monitor compliance with the rights and social guarantees of service members.

Thus, support services perform coordination and support functions, ensuring a comprehensive approach to protecting the rights of service members and their families²⁴³.

Payments in the event of going missing in action, captivity or death of a service member

A separate dimension of the well-being support system is the presence of clear support mechanisms in critical situations related to service risks. This concerns cases of going missing in action, captivity or death, which have a direct impact not only on service members themselves, but also on their families.

An important tool for implementing such support is **the possibility of drawing up personal instructions in the event of going missing in action or being taken captive, or separate instructions in the event of death**²⁴⁴.

This guarantees a service member the right to independently determine to whom their monetary allowance will be paid during captivity or being missing in action (monetary allowance plus UAH 100,000 in AMR, as well as OCB of UAH 15 million in the event of death. If the service member does not draw up instructions in the event of going missing in action or captivity, 50% of the amount will remain in their account, and the rest will be distributed among relatives in the manner prescribed by law.

²⁴³ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 948 of 20 August 2024 "Certain Issues of Implementing the Activities of Support Services for Service Members, Enlisted and Commanding Officers of the Civil Protection Service, Police Officers and Members of Their Families," para. 3.

²⁴⁴ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 550 of 14 May 2024 "On Approving the Procedure and Timeframes for a Service Member to Transfer the Original Personal Instructions to the Commander of a Military Unit or the Commander/Head of a Subdivision of a Body (Service or Military Formation) for Storage in the Personal File." zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/550-2024-%D0%BF#n8

At the same time, legislation designates certain groups of people who must receive a share of the OCB upon a service member's death, regardless of the personal instructions. These include:

- underage children and minors;
- adult children who are unable to work;
- a widow or widower who is unable to work;
- parents of the fallen or deceased service member who are unable to work.

However, they may receive only 50% of the share each would have been entitled to if the one-off cash benefit had been assigned and paid under the general procedure²⁴⁵.

²⁴⁵ Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicepersons and Members of Their Families," Article 16-1(2)(2).

Conclusions

The Concept of Military Personnel Policy and the Human Capital Development Strategy are aimed at personnel management, including training, motivation, social provision and support for veterans, which should ultimately contribute to strengthening the state's defence capability. At the same time, the Strategy recognises systemic problems in training, psychological support, social payments, and the digitalisation of services that require further regulation.

The procedure for granting status of the participant in hostilities has evolved from the ATO period to the present day, reflecting changes in the nature of hostilities. Whereas initially only service members of military formations were entitled to status of the participant in hostilities, other categories were later added to this list, including the SES, SCESU, SBI and NABU.

The granting of status of the participant in hostilities to volunteers remains a separate problem. In 2020, a procedure was established to grant status to groups of people who performed combat missions with military units while maintaining civilian status. With the start of the full-scale invasion, additional provisions were adopted to grant status of the participant in hostilities to volunteers who took up arms without joining the ranks of the Defence Forces from the first days of the invasion. Although volunteers can still obtain status of the participant in hostilities, experts interviewed are sceptical about this. In their view, there are now sufficient opportunities to officially join the Defence Forces and perform combat missions as a service member.

Legislation establishes two ways to obtain status of the participant in hostilities: through consideration of documents by a commission or automatically through the entry of data into the Register. At the same

time, the absence of clear criteria regarding the nature of tasks performed, the duration of participation and the territorial factor leads to inconsistent practice and complicates the determination of entitlement to this status.

Experience of participation in combat operations directly affects the granting of ranks and appointment to positions during martial law. Thus, war veterans may be granted non-commissioned or commissioned officer ranks without the relevant training or higher education. Shortened periods of service are also provided for commissioned officers if they serve in combat force military units, are temporarily attached to them or have sustained an illness or wound as a result of which they became unfit for military service or fit for service in support military units.

The training and education of service members includes special courses and a five-stage professional training system based on the NATO model, which creates opportunities to develop competencies, retrain, and combine service with study at vocational and higher education institutions. The state provides financial support for education, preferential loans, scholarships and other guarantees for war veterans that support professional development and career growth.

An important element of well-being in the military environment is the system of awards and decorations, which enables the recognition of service members' achievements. However, the practical implementation of this mechanism requires improvement to ensure transparency and fairness.

Veterans are entitled to professional and social adaptation during the transition to civilian life, as well as the opportunity to continue service after a wound or illness.

Within the monetary allowance system, service members may receive monthly basic payments, monthly additional payments and one-off additional payments. The monetary allowance amount depends on position, rank, length of service, specific features of service, and professional qualifications. Service members who perform combat or special missions receive additional monthly rewards, the amount of which is determined depending on the conditions of participation in combat operations, including the distance to the line of contact and their roles in performing the tasks.

In practice, the Ministry of Defence procedure limits the circle of people eligible for the highest rewards, which poses risks to personnel motivation and morale. In particular, the monthly additional reward of UAH 100,000 is paid only to service members in the so-called battalion defence area (BDA), which is formally limited to within 3.5 km of the frontline. In reality, however, most forward units are not located in this area due to risks to command posts and the need to command the battle from a safer distance. This leads to situations in which service members who are actually performing combat missions and risking their lives are not formally entitled to the highest reward. Due to the emergence of the kill zone on the frontline and changes in the nature of the war, this approach is becoming outdated and no longer reflects the realities of combat operations.

Separate additional rewards and the retention of monetary allowance during treatment and rehabilitation are provided for service members who have been wounded, taken prisoner of war or gone missing in action. This ensures social protection during the period of health recovery. Additional types of assistance include health improvement payments during leave and financial assistance for resolving social and domestic issues.

The pension provision system for service members has several structural features that do not fully account for combat experience when determining future pensions. Participation in combat operations

is mainly taken into account only through preferential service credit when calculating a length-of-service pension, which noticeably increases its amount, but has almost no effect on the amount of a disability pension.

Additional rewards for combat missions are not included in the calculation of a military pension at all. At the same time, the pension amount largely depends on the position held at the time of discharge and on additional payments received during the last 24 months of service, which may lead to a significant reduction in pension payments, particularly in cases where a service member remains at the commander's disposal for an extended period before discharge.

The amount of a civilian pension depends on the length of the insurance record, including both military and civilian employment, and the average earnings over the entire record. Unlike military pension provision, a civilian pension allows additional rewards for participation in combat operations to be taken into account, since social contributions are withheld from them, but preferential service credit does not apply. Current legislation on civilian disability pensions also does not take a service member's combat experience into account.

Medical provision for service members in Ukraine covers physical and mental health and provides for free assistance in military, civilian and private institutions by agreement. Physical health is supported through treatment and rehabilitation based on the MMC conclusion. Mental health is supported by mobile psychological groups, psychological service units and programmes for people released from captivity.

Housing provision for service members is regulated by legislation largely developed for peacetime and civilian environments. During combat operations, service members have to be dispersed, rent housing at their own expense and, in practice, organise their physical environment independently. State guarantees provided by laws on the social and legal protection of service members and war veterans primarily concern

housing provision, compensation, loans, and benefits in the civilian sector, but do not account for the specific nature of modern war and the need for mobility at the front.

Social connections and family are key elements of service members' well-being. During Russia's full-scale invasion, the limited ability to be close to family affects the morale and psychological state of service members. Legislation provides for the right to joint relocation of spouses and various types of leave, including annual leave, additional leave, leave for family circumstances, leave on health grounds, childcare leave, and study leave. However, in practice, their use during the special period of martial law is complicated by the intensity of hostilities and the shortage of personnel.

Support services in military units provide comprehensive support, including medical, social and information assistance, ensure recovery after wounds, captivity or death and coordinate interaction with families, authorities and civil society organisations. State mechanisms guarantee service members the right to draw up personal directives in the event of going missing in action, captivity, or death, and determine the procedure for payment of monetary allowance, additional rewards, and a one-off cash benefit, taking into account the service member's personal wishes regarding who should receive these funds.

SECTION 3

Mapping the needs of veterans in military service

Introduction

In this section, we describe the findings from our study of the needs of veterans who continue military service. We prepared this part following three focus group discussions with service members and deepened the findings through triangulation, verifying and clarifying them through additional information collection. For this purpose, we used 48 questionnaires collected from service members, which repeated or supplemented the questions from the focus group discussions.

In accordance with the research design and our initial hypotheses, we focused mainly on studying the needs of veterans in the military environment. **We divided the needs of veterans who remain in military service into the following blocks:**

- granting status of the participant in hostilities;
- military career;
- material provision and social guarantees;
- treatment and rehabilitation;
- relationships with family and close circles.

The findings of this study are considered according to this structure.

Granting status of the participant in hostilities

The issue of fairness in granting status of the participant in hostilities remains contested among informants. Although the intensity and nature of combat operations in Ukraine changed after the beginning of the full-scale invasion, and legislation on the groups of people, conditions, and criteria for obtaining this status also changed, the substance of the status itself has not been modified. As a result, people who obtained status of the participant in hostilities at different stages of the Russo-Ukrainian war and under different conditions of service and involvement in combat operations have the same guarantees and benefits. Our informants consider this approach not entirely fair.

When discussing the granting of status of the participant in hostilities, most informants mentioned systemic shortcomings. These can be divided into four groups:

1. Different approaches to granting status of the participant in hostilities during the ATO/JFO and after the beginning of the full-scale invasion

Study participants point out that during the ATO/JFO period, the criteria for granting status of the participant in hostilities were often linked to formal presence in a combat zone, rather than to the intensity or nature of participation. In their view, this led to situations where the status was granted to service members with varying levels of involvement.

“For example, we were at the airfield in Kramatorsk in 2020. Where was the combat zone? Somewhere 40 kilometres away? But Donetsk Oblast was included in the combat zone. Did everyone receive status of the participant in hostilities? Everyone did. Did the battalion fight? No”, – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"Let's recall the ATO period, when guys simply crossed the line back and forth in one jump", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

When comparing combat experience during the ATO/JFO and the full-scale war, informants consider it appropriate to distinguish between the statuses of "ATO/JFO participant" and "participant in hostilities."

2. Defining the groups of people who receive the status

The issue of defining which groups of people should receive status of the participant in hostilities was among the most contested by focus group participants, as perceptions of service members' roles and tasks vary depending on their specialisation and the specifics of their work. In this context, informants had different views on the fairness, mostly concerning whether it is appropriate to grant status of the participant in hostilities to those who organise support for combat units.

"He did not personally participate in combat operations. But when the guys entered a settlement, they did not stay in a cowshed or a pigsty. Vasylovych arranged proper houses for them, support. Well, how can you not give him an ID card of the participant in hostilities? Did he not fight? But he organised support. Without support, no matter how much of a Jackie Chan you are, you will not last long. Support should also play its role", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 2, conducted on 13 February 2026

"Staff work exists so that everything works directly in the combat zone. Therefore, I think that if a person performs their work conscientiously and diligently, then, literally, they also participate in combat operations, because they also influence the course of the war", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 2, conducted on 13 February 2026

*"If it is some rear position, then that is somewhat different and, accordingly, during my service, rear personnel were not granted PH status. I had a driver who drove us to the drop-off point five kilometres from the fu**rs [Russians — ed.], and he could not get PH status for a year and a half because he was not in the CO, and that is fair", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026*

"But, for example, what about people who were in the infantry. I know a person who has already served four months in the frontline, and even now, two years later, they still cannot grant him status of the participant in hostilities. And an artilleryman who was hit by a GAB once has a PH status; all of them there have a PH status. Is that fair? No", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

As a result, most informants emphasised that the best and fairest approach, in their view, is an individual approach to granting status and taking into account the specific circumstances of each person's service.

"So in this regard, I would differentiate even within PH status itself. I mean that I would make Form 6 for a person with combat experience, but specify exactly what the person received status of the participant in hostilities for. If the person was on the frontline, it should say that they were in the infantry, fought in the trenches, and received PH status. If this is an artilleryman, then it should say that they were an artilleryman and received PH status during artillery shelling", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"I do not consider myself a participant in hostilities. Although I did hold a position, and the only thing is that I was chief of staff for six months, so maybe to some extent I am, but still, I believe that this needs to be separated. What constitutes direct participation in hostilities, what constitutes command and control and what constitutes support measures. These are somewhat different things and should have been separated from the outset. Because, for example, I would now even introduce a separate category, a separate status and separate benefits. Specifically for those who are now in forward positions and who stay at these observation posts for months", – an expert interview with the Chief of Staff of a brigade of the Land Forces of the AFU

3. Military tourism

Separately, some focus group participants in this study highlighted the phenomenon of so-called military tourism, meaning cases in which people who perform other tasks in the troop and do not directly participate in the hostilities adjust themselves to the formal criteria to obtain status of the participant in hostilities.

This issue caused the greatest concern among participants regarding granting status of the participant in hostilities. In their view, such cases devalue the status and blur the distinctions between different types of experience. In this regard, some informants distinguished between participating in combat operations and status of the participant

in hostilities, noting that the status is increasingly a formality and is perceived mainly as a tool for obtaining benefits rather than as confirmation of actual experience.

"I still know that people obtain the status of the participant in hostilities in one day. Now, the order does not say 30 days; it says that you arrived and departed, and you can obtain the PH status in one day. So nothing can be done about this lawlessness here; this is a lack of control", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"A classmate of mine was called up. There is a settlement near us, on the border of Sumy Oblast. It falls within the 50-kilometre combat operations zone. They tell him, well, now you will go there and get the PH status. Why devalue the status of the participant in hostilities like that?", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 2, conducted on 13 February 2026

"And what is truly unfair is when support staff, that is the rear, are sent, as my brother-in-arms said, sent for a month to get the PH status... They were sent 36, somewhere up to 40 kilometres from the line of contact, spent a month there and were rotated one by one", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 2, conducted on 13 February 2026

"There are enough factors, but the main one is when officers from the General Staff arrive and obtain the status in a week, without knowing which direction the line of contact is in. Meanwhile, an ordinary soldier may wait for the status for months", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"A person comes from the corps at most to the battalion COP to get the PH status, and very often everyone calls around saying, 'Say that he came to you.' That is one person, and then there is a soldier who constantly risks getting killed. Those who obtain the status of the participant in hostilities should simply look into the eyes of a person who, after two months on the zero line, has to return there in three days because there is no one to replace them. These are completely different levels, but, as I say, this is purely a moral aspect", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

4. Difficulty obtaining the status

Another challenge mentioned by informants, though less common, was the complexity of the procedure for obtaining status of the participant in hostilities. Some participants noted that compared with previous years, the process had become significantly faster and better organised. At the same time, some participants encountered difficulties, including the need to resubmit documents, delays in consideration and excessive formal requirements.

"In my case, I had to submit documents four times, and this was after being wounded... Meanwhile, only staff members were receiving the status", – a written questionnaire, veteran, enlisted personnel

"A drawn-out bureaucratic process. I received it at the end of 2023 based on a CO from the end of 2022. For a year, we refilled different forms, took photos about six times: first it had to be in the Navy dress uniform, then on matte paper, then even more matte and so on", – a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

At the same time, some study participants noted that unjustified granting of the status of the participant in hostilities is uncommon.

"I know one such story in two years, where the guy did not participate in hostilities and was granted status of the participant in hostilities. One such story, and he probably paid someone off for it somewhere. As for everything else, I know that the process works very strictly in our case and, in my opinion, quite fairly", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

Another group of respondents noted that they had not observed unfairness in granting status of the participant in hostilities and had not encountered difficulties in obtaining it.

Military career

Key points

- A military career is often not the initial professional choice — many service members entered service because of the need to defend the country.
- Quality management and commanders' leadership influence are key factors in motivating service members to extend their contracts.
- Soviet-style approaches, bureaucracy, and practices remain widespread problems.
- Instructor work is seen as an important path for career development, especially for wounded service members.
- The system for granting ranks and moving between personnel categories enlisted personnel — non-commissioned officers — commissioned officers) remains complex.
- In matters of promotion in rank and appointment to positions, the commander's figure and their approach to working with personnel play a major role.
- Training for professional development gives rise to discussions because of the quality of courses and their organisation.

Promotion in ranks and positions

The issue of a military career may not be relevant for a person at the beginning of their journey in the troop. Some of our informants mentioned that they had not planned to connect their lives with the

troop, but had to stand in defence of the country because it was necessary. At the same time, even during service, such attributes as promotion in rank or position, skill improvement, and awards became important parts of their lives.

In its 2020 study, Come Back Alive Foundation examined the importance of various factors that may influence service members' motivation to extend their contracts. One of the significant and problematic factors affecting motivation was the quality of management and leadership, namely, outdated management approaches and low-quality training in HMEIs²⁴⁶.

Within our study, informants also emphasised the prevalence of Soviet-style approaches and bureaucratic red tape among management. We did not study the relationships between commanders and subordinates in detail, but this aspect runs through almost all components of well-being set out in this report. The experiences of informants show that access to treatment, training, rest, and opportunities to receive ranks and awards depends largely on the commander's decisions and their interest in supporting personnel.

At the same time, despite the commander's significant role in promotion, sometimes even when there is support and assistance from their side, submissions may not be approved at higher levels of command.

"Now, because of my limited fitness, I transferred to a rear unit. But over three years, my battalion commander submitted me four times; I mean, I did not plan it. The command submitted me for an officer rank, and I held the position. I went from an ordinary soldier to squad commander, then platoon commander, and, basically, ended my combat journey as head of a combat command group. But the point is that at the level of higher command, the response was that it was not advisable because of limited fitness. And when this submission was turned down for the fourth time, and there was only an offer to transfer to a rear unit, I agreed to the first offer that came along and left. And now, in principle, I have not been in an officer position for the past 5 months. Well, I understood that this is exactly our greatest pain and sorrow. I mean our command. When it does not see promising service members, people who strive, can and know how to do things. They, as they say, do not notice them or do not let them grow further..." — a focus group discussion with veterans as part of a parallel study on 13 January 2026

²⁴⁶ Come Back Alive Foundation (2020) Why are service members leaving the Armed Forces? irf.ua/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/zvit-ua-digital.pdf

In addition to the importance of the role of command, we found that **informants view promotion in service** primarily not as a tool for building their own military career, but **as a way to perform tasks more effectively**²⁴⁷.

"And promotion in service is, let's say, where you can do more for the state, better protect your guys and motivate them. This is important. Promotion in service, in general, involves many factors if you dig into it. Even when you talk about awards for the guys. It is easier for you to award them when you are a company commander, when you are a battalion commander. And to continue protecting them...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"As a soldier, you cannot do anything. Because you are a soldier, that is it. When you become part of the non-commissioned officer corps, you have personnel, of course, and responsibility appears. And certain opportunities. You can already encourage, or release, or be responsible for something...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

One path of development in a military career for informants is also **becoming an instructor**. Although a person may remain in a non-commissioned officer rank while serving as an instructor, they perceive the transfer of experience and training of personnel as a vocation.

This is also an attractive alternative for service members who, after being wounded, cannot return to performing their previous duties.

"Even before discharge, after being wounded, I returned to service and began looking for a position for myself. And I realised that my training at that point was not sufficient for me to find a rear position that would suit me and would not be purely administrative. So, after discharge from military service, I began trying to develop in this direction. And I discovered instructor work in various disciplines. And, in fact, I cannot say directly that a military career is my goal in life, but overall I do consider it for myself...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

Informants also emphasised that **the granting of ranks, and especially promotion from enlisted personnel to non-commissioned officers and**

²⁴⁷ Note: we have not specifically targeted an audience that is pursuing or planning to pursue a military career.

then to commissioned officers, remains difficult in the troop. Thus, the veterans interviewed, who began their journeys in the troop back in 2014, when describing their experience of promotion in service, emphasised that as of 2026, despite certain changes in procedures, the promotion system remains unchanged: the figure of the commander and their approaches to working with personnel play a major role in promotion in ranks and positions.

Informants also described different experiences of promotion in service. Sometimes, promotion requires the fulfilment of all formal requirements, including completion of officer courses, which are often deemed ineffective. In other cases, service members may be appointed to positions without proper training. A common feature across the experiences of different informants was insufficient attention to their individual wishes: this concerns both promotions in rank and appointments to lower positions without taking the person's own position into account.

"As they say, I came from the first days of the war, from 2014. And I faced enormous problems in this regard. I hold two university degrees, but as they say, I am still not an officer. They simply do not grant it to me. I submitted reports before, when I had only just received my bachelor's degree, and I was already writing reports asking to be sent on courses. There were positions, especially... And now, when quotas come to the new unit, and this unit is not bad. I have been serving here for only six months as an instructor, but quotas keep coming in saying there are no officers... And everyone knows that I hold two degrees; they know who I am and what I am. Not a single person even asked me if I wanted to become an officer. Everyone is silent. Well, I do not say anything...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

*"I came in as an ordinary machine gunner and, after the last wound, I went through these so-called officer courses... Pointless courses, where you just wasted a whole month for nothing, and on the very day when they were supposed to officially grant me the rank and present it, that was when I was wounded. I lost an eye then and never received the rank. And they won't give it to me still, f***. And when I contacted the unit so that they would process me, so that I could return to continue serving, I said to them, 'Bro, give me my lieutenant rank, the one I earned, the one for which I completed the courses.' They said, 'Well, come back, serve for half a year and then we will give it to you'...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026*

"Well, I also hold a university degree. I obtained my second degree after being wounded. But after being wounded, I returned and already had two degrees. Yet I remained a soldier. I did not even receive a non-commissioned rank. Because there is this thing where you have to go around bowing to get something...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"I was appointed as a supply sergeant. Without any service experience or a non-commissioned rank, I was appointed to a non-commissioned officer position because it was also needed. And I probably spent about four months trying to get removed from that position, to transfer to the position of rifleman or someone else. Because I did not want that responsibility, first of all. Second, I wanted, basically, to transfer to another brigade..." — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

Another obstacle for informants was **administrative complexity**, including limitations in the staffing structure of the military unit, the absence of positions or their mismatch with rank.

"Well, this is basically not only a story about rank, but also about positions, because they were assigned on an entirely random basis and, despite the fact that there was time to somehow organise the staffing structure, nobody dealt with it, because it means transfers, it means paperwork and, at least in our battalion, everything was very, very sluggish...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

Overall, informants demonstrate scepticism about promotion in service because, in their view, personal relationships with the commander have a significant influence on career.

"If you are a good guy and have an approach to the leadership, then you will get it... If not, nobody will send you anywhere or deal with, so to speak, promotion and awards, decorations and so on...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"As for promotions, this game annoys me a bit: when they try to manipulate it. You sign this; you serve there; we will give you a position, a rank, and a company. It should not go on like this. I would like it to happen much more simply...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"They did this, they did three-month, six-month, one-year courses, they once did those courses. But the point is that the quality of this did not change at all. If a person holds even ten university degrees, even if they are a professional, but they are inconvenient, they will not appoint such a person..." — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

The issue of promotion in service, particularly the transition between enlisted personnel, non-commissioned officers, and commissioned officers, is closely linked to training and the acquisition of skills needed to perform duties in higher positions.

This issue is debatable, primarily because of the quality of training and approaches to its organisation. At the same time, participants with no experience completing the relevant courses often have high expectations for them. Overall, informants agree that promotion in ranks and positions should not depend on completing courses. Instead, these processes should take place in parallel, provided that training quality improves. In this context, combat experience is seen as a more effective factor in developing the necessary skills for growth in the troop than formal training. Therefore, in the participants' view, **faster promotion for service members with combat experience is fairer compared with those who do not have such experience.**

"I would rather appoint as company commander a guy who has at least six months of combat experience than some dude who came from [name of the city where the courses are held], immediately as a lieutenant, and was made company commander..." — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"If you have combat experience, you should advance faster. There are also other side factors that should facilitate this. They should also be sent for further training. And the guys should be promoted. Because they will be the best leaders, who will be able to retain personnel..." — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"Although, for this soldier to sergeant position, I would not oblige my fighters to attend these courses, I would give it to them based on length of service..." — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

Views among study participants differ on how and whether the status of the participant in hostilities should generally affect a military career. On the one hand, they see combat experience as a necessary filter for granting commissioned officer ranks and appointment to higher command positions. Some informants also noted that holding the status may provide priority access to certain opportunities, including extraordinary granting of ranks, obtaining higher military education, appointment to positions and broader freedom to choose a place of service or position.

At the same time, the most widespread position is that the status of the participant in hostilities should not affect a military career in any way.

Although arguments for this position differ, they include the following:

- there are cases where the status is granted to those who did not directly participate in hostilities;
- the status itself does not indicate the nature of hostilities in which the person participated;
- when there is already a high concentration of people with the status of the participant in hostilities, this makes it difficult to provide preferences on this basis;
- the status of the participant in hostilities is primarily associated with benefits, whereas a career should be influenced first and foremost by skills, not status or previous merits²⁴⁸.

Acquiring and developing skills

Training is an important part not only of service but also of a military career, as it is during training that a service member is expected to acquire the skills and competencies required for higher positions and higher ranks.

²⁴⁸ Summarised from the written responses of informants.

20 out of 48 informants in our study identified the improvement of professional skills as the most important factor in terms of its impact on military service. By comparison, 10 informants named promotion in rank as a priority factor, while 9 named promotion in positions.

At the same time, we assume that service members distinguish between improvements in professional skills and formal training within the service, a distinction that does not always align with real needs or experience.

*"The officer course is the same thing. They did not really teach anything. You arrive there, and they are like, look at this radio, we press this to speak to one another, we press the push-to-talk button, and then this f***ing nonsense begins. We had 20 people there on the officer courses after combat... I probably attended those classes about five times. Because what they teach is simply absurd..."*, – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

*"I spent two weeks on these reconnaissance courses. They explained to us what a map is, how to use a compass, how to follow bearings, and how to look for balises... But, f***, in reality nobody f***ing walks with a compass. A compass is only needed to know, for example, how to show the bearing from which an incoming strike came and give the coordinates to your artillery, but nothing more. And I, for example, explained this to some of my guys simply on my fingers, using a pen and notebook, how to give these correct bearings, and that was basically it..."*, – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

In addition to the content of training, participants in the focus group discussion also mentioned its ineffective organisation, in particular, the mismatch between the conditions and their previous combat experience.

*"We arrived there, 19 of us. And everyone who arrived had combat experience, some after wounds, some with disabilities, but still serving. We arrive there, and they show us trenches at the training ground. And they say, you will live there for four weeks in these trenches. And we ask, where do the instructors live? The instructors live in the city. I say, why are you putting us in trenches? Well, so that we adapt. We said, everyone told them about their combat experience and said that we were ready to turn around right now and go back, that we were not going to do these f***ing courses. Either we live in the city,*

*or we turn around, and each go back to our units... Because this is some f***ing surrealism: you come from positions, and they tell you that you have to live in a trench for a month because you are undergoing training...”, — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026*

“Going on courses for two weeks, it would be better to send the guys on leave for two weeks than have them freeze there, because you still arrive at those courses, you sleep somewhere in a basement, you eat terribly somewhere. They were also useless to me. So for now I am not a fan of these courses...”, — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

At the same time, participants emphasise that **training and skills improvement are in fact important components of service, but that completing courses is not always necessary for acquiring them.** An effective alternative may be the ordinary exchange of experience between practitioners.

“We contacted, for example, artillerymen, mortar crews. For example, our battalion chief of staff arranged it with the commander of a mortar crew. And that commander held courses for us, immediately a combat commander who fires from our positions, and gave us a course on what a mortar is, how to fire it properly, how, for example, to understand shots, what calibre it is, where it came from, and what smoke should remain. That was clear. And in reality, I would not have gone through this in any training unit, and no one would have. Then we organised the same thing with sappers, with our engineers. Our chief of staff called the sappers. We did not go anywhere for any courses; we moved 20 kilometres away from our positions in the other direction and went there. There, a combat engineer who goes on assaults with assault groups showed us what mines are, what tripwires are, how to move, how to see it...”, — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

In some cases, for example, when mastering special equipment, NATO standards or working with documents, participants described training as appropriate and useful.

“Many attended these NATO courses. And actually, considering what the war is like now, well, going abroad to undergo training courses if you are an assault soldier or rifleman makes no sense at all. If you are going to learn to operate a tank, yes. Going to learn to fly an aircraft or a helicopter, yes. But there is no point in going there for soldiers at all. Because there, they will teach how to move through a trench, how to fight in a city...”, — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"If instructors are being trained... according to NATO standards, if something new is being introduced, some useful information, then yes, I agree, perhaps they should be completed...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

Overall, study participants were positive about the idea of standardised training, primarily in the context of training recruits without service experience. At the same time, they criticised the quality of this training.

"They came up with a good thing about BCAT. You come in as someone who has not served, or served 30 years ago. You go to BCAT. Yes, perfect, great. The system is excellent. But again, we come back to who teaches it. Again, some blockheads end up teaching it. And when a guy comes to you from BCAT and you ask him how to lie down properly with a PKM, and he has no clue..." – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

This block can be summarised by saying that veterans generally view the improvement of professional skills as an important and integral part of service. At the same time, the format and quality of training are assessed differently, primarily due to doubts about instructors' qualifications.

Informants generally view training as a mandatory prerequisite for granting new ranks or promotion to a position negatively. In their opinion, these processes should take place in parallel, while the prerequisite for promotion should be experience, in particular participation in combat operations.

A separate challenge is that the training system largely remains static: even when changes occur, they are slow and do not always align with current needs. These observations are consistent with the findings of the 2020 study by the Come Back Alive Foundation: informants in this study also mentioned the problems identified then regarding the quality of training and the level of instructor preparedness.

In addition, the problem of training for specialities other than those for which a person intended to enter the troop remains relevant, as before²⁴⁹.

Awards system

Awards are an important part of recognising military merit and one of the tools for motivating service members. At the same time, we observed a certain level of distrust in the awards system among informants and a decline in the perceived value of awards among service members, and, accordingly, in their motivational and symbolic roles as evidence of recognition.

"I asked not to be nominated for medals because they are just empty badges...", — a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"I received another one for participation in the ATO from the President, which was handed out to everyone. But since it was handed out to everyone, I do not consider it anything special...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"I received the third one from the JFO commander for participation in the JFO. And I received it because there were good people and bad people. They gave them to all the good ones and did not want to give them to the bad ones. And then there is Serhii. They say, let us give it to Serhii. We need to give it to someone so it does not go to waste...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

Regarding awards, informants also noted the decisive role of commanders, making the system sensitive to relations between commanders and subordinates. Therefore, the grounds for awarding decorations, as well as the difficulty of obtaining them, may differ significantly across military units.

²⁴⁹ Come Back Alive Foundation (2020) Why are service members leaving the Armed Forces? irf.ua/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/zvit-ua-digital.pdf

Among those surveyed, **every fifth service member** had been nominated for awards without result, while every seventh had not been nominated for any.

"They nominated me, but the battalion commander threw out the nomination...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

Although half of the informants had received awards, **most noted difficulties in the process**, including its long duration, as well as cases where awards ultimately did not reach the recipients or differed from those for which they had been nominated.

"Signed by Presidential Decree, but it was not communicated or received from the command...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, enlisted personnel

"I received a couple and never got a couple of others. I was also nominated twice for early promotion in rank, but no result...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"They nominated me many times, both me and my people; some people received them, but not all and not the awards they had been nominated for. In most cases, instead of state awards, they received a pile of 'trinkets' and certificates/letters of appreciation and 'thank you notes'...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"...And the chief sergeant calls me and says, like, 'How are you, are you all right?' It is not the unit calling, not the commander, but the chief sergeant. And he says, 'I am nominating you for an award here, you were wounded.' He says, 'Everything will be fine, all clear.' That was in May. And the unit tells me in July, 'We want to nominate you for an award here.' I think, 'So you finally woke up'...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

Overall, service members surveyed assess the award distribution system rather sceptically, which is linked not only to their personal experiences, but also to general approaches.

"And what is the system for awards? They, as they say, have, let's say, 30 medals. And they give them to a brigade. And they give, say, ten medals to the brigade headquarters. They give ten medals to the battalion command. And distribute them among company commanders. ... But it should be the other way round. They should give 40 medals, 30 medals at the bottom, starting with soldiers. And then gradually raise it upwards...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

A separate aspect is the perception and meaning of different types of awards. Service members note that they are proud of some of their awards, while others have no particular significance for them. At the same time, attitudes towards awards are individual: in addition to the conditional level of prestige, they are largely shaped by the context and circumstances in which they were received.

"The only medal I have is the one I received for being wounded. And it is the only medal I found unpleasant to receive... Because giving a medal for, I don't know, an event. For the fact that you were shot, which in most cases happened through no fault of your own. You were simply walking, standing or lying there, and something hit you. And to give a medal for that, like, well done. Or are they giving a medal because the medics saved you, or because your brothers-in-arms carried you out? What was my part in this? Or for shed blood. Then it should have been called a medal for shed blood...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

Predictability of service and balance with personal life

An integral element of building a military career is the predictability of one's own future. Informants view the potential introduction of a fixed-term contract, with the possibility of deferral from mobilisation, as a positive instrument. In particular, even in the absence of other advantages of such a contract, **the opportunity to rest temporarily and be able to plan one's life is perceived as a necessary change** which, in the participants' view, should have been introduced much earlier.

"This, again, is a major motivation for people. If he knows that he will now go and serve, say, for a year and have six months of deferment, or serve two years and have one year of deferment, that is great. This should have been introduced long ago. The war has already been going on for four years...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

*"I realise that I will be discharged either with a disability or if I am 200, that's it. And that is a f***ed up feeling. If I knew that I would be discharged in two years, then I'd grit my teeth and, okay, work my ass off for two years...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026*

"It motivates you because you know the timeframe when you can return, and if you want to, you stay. But you have a timeframe, a part of your life that you are ready to give. Because the guys need to be rotated out. They absolutely need to be rotated out...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 2, conducted on 13 February 2026

A separate aspect of building a military career is the **possibility of combining service with having and raising children**. This issue is particularly important for female service members who are considering continuing their service in the future.

"But if we are given such an opportunity, the opportunity to prove ourselves and be a person in a position, then this is already about something slightly different. It is about an additional opportunity opening up for us. And if we are talking about a woman, then we probably need to take into account that we may become mothers. Here, on the one hand, there should be decent conditions for returning to service after maternity leave. This is one side of the coin. And the other side of the coin ... is a serious challenge for the country and a serious task in balancing...", — an in-depth interview with a female commissioned officer

Material provision and social guarantees

Issues	Key observations	Challenges
Importance of monetary allowance	Material provision is one of the key factors shaping the experience of service; its importance has increased due to the duration of the war	The level of basic provision does not correspond to the workload and risks
Comparison with the civilian sector	Service members compare their pay with civilian professions	A sense of unfairness due to lower income despite higher risks
Service members' own expenses	Part of the payments is spent on service needs	Independent purchase of equipment, repairs, fuel and housing
Timeliness of payments	Delays in additional rewards	Payments may be delayed for several months
Transparency of bonuses	The system of additional payments is complex and unclear	Non-transparent accrual criteria
Presence in the combat area	Payments are often linked to the LC	Risk outside the LC, but within the strike zone, is not taken into account
Roles of service members	Different specialities involve different risks	Undervaluing support roles, operators and drivers
Commander's influence	The commander influences access to additional payments	Possible abuse or subjectivity
Payments to the wounded	Require separate regulation	Problems with payments during treatment
Payments during rotations	Reduction in income after withdrawal from the combat area	Demotivation of service members

Monthly basic monetary allowance

The issue of material provision remains one of the most important factors affecting the experience of service.

Having analysed the written responses of informants, we found that the average importance score for monetary allowance was 3.1 on a scale from 1 to 10, the highest priority score among the proposed options. Informants identified benefits and guarantees for the family as the second most important factor, with a score of 3.3.

At the same time, both aspects reflect material needs to varying degrees. Although financial motivation was rarely the reason for joining military service among participants in our focus groups, the duration of the war, changes in approaches to provision and changes in the specific nature of military operations make monetary allowance one of the key elements of service members' well-being.

An important context and, at the same time, a challenge is the assessment of salary levels and their comparison with those in the civilian sector. Informants described the significant pay disparity as unfair, especially given the level of risk and the conditions of service.

"Since 2022, the salary has been set at 20,000... Prices have changed due to inflation. My son-in-law works as a security guard at ATB... he gets 32,000 hryvnias a month. He is with his wife every evening, while a service member... is very far from the family, serves around the clock, and the salary is 20,000. This is unfair...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

Overall, in the context of monthly rewards, participants in the focus group discussions raised two issues: **the low level of basic monetary allowance and the shortcomings of the bonus system.**

In addition to mentioning general economic factors, such as inflation and the rising exchange rate, they also described specific challenges directly related to participation in combat operations that affect their

financial provision. This primarily concerns the needs of units, which service members are often forced to cover at their own expense: from arranging housing in the mission area to purchasing drones, EW systems and other special equipment to improve the effectiveness of operations.

"Spending 30 days a month on the front line as a UAV operator is a serious workload. You do not just sit it out there; you constantly work, look at monitors. And with ordinary schedules, which are common, like five days on and five days off, 15 on and 15 off, or ten on and ten off, when applying for AMA, in practice this will be only around UAH 40,000, half of which will go to company and platoon funds, food, fuel and other things, and no one wants to sit under GABs for that kind of money...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"There are often delays in combat payments of three to six months. And then all of it goes towards buying what is needed for service: fuel, tools and so on. So it is as if you earned the money, but it all went straight back into the army...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, enlisted personnel

"Direct participants, for example, infantry, should receive an additional reward of UAH 70,000 for every 30 days. In general, the salaries of service members who do not serve in the rear should be several times higher: vehicle repairs, refuelling, purchasing EW systems, drones and other expenses, such as renting housing, take up the lion's share of the additional reward, while a salary of UAH 20,000 is simply ridiculous...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"And no matter how hard the commander tries, when a person has been at war since 2022, diesel, petrol, part of the food and most of the equipment and gear are bought from that salary and additional reward, while the family also lives on it, sometimes even more than one family, all of this is demotivating...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"The money should remain for the family, but currently most of it is spent on service...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

Additional monetary rewards

Importantly, in matters of monetary allowance, participants' attention is focused mainly on the amount of payments and the need to increase them. At the same time, in the area of bonuses, particularly regarding the amount and method of accrual of additional payments, **the system remains neither fully transparent nor understandable for some service members.**

"The guys sitting in the metro in Kharkiv receive 30 grand, a 10-grand allowance and their salaries... They get a total of 60,000–70,000. The guys sitting on the line of contact near Saltivka... every other one gets thirty grand. So, the situation with how this bonus is calculated is completely unclear..."; – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"Compensation for resolving social and domestic issues is currently paid only to the wounded. Civil servants and persons equated with them receive social assistance annually without issue, while maintaining their own housing and comfortable living conditions. Service members are constantly relocating, renting housing on their own, carrying out repairs and paying utilities..."; – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

In addition to the timeliness and amount of monetary allowances and bonuses, which in practice often turn out to be much lower than declared due to provision expenses, the issue of pay disparity remains relevant. Opinions on a fair bonus system differ, particularly regarding the criteria according to which a service member may receive additional payments. Informants most often emphasise the level of risk to the service member while performing tasks. Participants tend to link increased reward to direct presence on the LC to a lesser extent, primarily because of the changed nature of combat operations and the corresponding increase in risks for those who are outside the LC but within the enemy's strike zone.

'In my opinion, there are currently two problems. First: the area where combat missions are performed, for which payment is accrued, does not always correspond to genuinely important criteria: the impact of your service work on the course of the war, and the scale of responsibility and professionalism. Second: current payments for many roles do not correspond in amount to the level of risk and intensity of people's involvement. A fair system should provide for a fair calculation in relation to the level of risk and intensity of involvement, which is significantly higher than the current one, as well as a bonus component for acquiring specialities or experience, training and increasing the responsibility of your participation for the course of the war...', — a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

"We need to proceed from the state's capacities. But dividing it by MOS, you are a driver, you provide support, and you get 30 grand, while he is a gunner and gets 100, is utter nonsense. Because without these drivers, cooks and others, the gunner will have neither the means nor the ability to do their work. Only together, as a unit, can they function. At the very least, everyone who is in the kill zone should receive 100 grand. Because even if they are not on the zero line, they are risking their lives to the maximum...", — a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"The AMR (100 grand) is paid, specifically in my brigade, only to those who are directly in positions. If you are carrying munitions seven, ten or fifteen kilometres away, then there is no 100 grand anymore, although everything possible is flying around...", — a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

*"Situation: a driver carries out rotations, which is f***ing risky, repairs vehicles... and they count it according to the days of trips to the LC. And where is that mythical 100 grand?"*, — a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

Some informants single out infantry personnel as a category that should receive a higher salary than other service members. At the same time, the point is that the risks of performing tasks for other specialists are currently underestimated. Constant presence within the enemy's strike zone, even during breaks between tasks, is risky and therefore also requires decent compensation.

"A differentiated approach to calculating payments, an increase in minimum payments and double-rate payments for infantry and assault troops...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

"Infantry units should receive a higher bonus compared with other units in order to increase their motivation, but not at the cost of reducing bonuses for others, as is often practised...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"If at least one unit in this zone receives an allowance, then all other units should also receive an allowance. Regardless of whether it is SOF, the Alpha unit, DIU or just some guy from the infantry. But we do not have that...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 2, conducted on 13 February 2026

"The problem is that there is no clear definition of what 'participation in hostilities' means. When it comes to an infantryman on the LC, everything is clear. But what about UAV operators, especially those operating fixed-wing UAVs? What about SIGINT/EW posts? What about AD? And many other highly specialised tasks. In such cases, positions have to be 'drawn' in the BDA so that at least some payments can go through. When service members live their daily lives within FPV reach and within the reach of other types of weapons, this is not considered participation in combat operations. Even though you can be killed just going to the toilet...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

As a result, units are sometimes forced to find ways to independently preserve additional payments for fighters. Another related risk is the commander's influence over bonuses. As informants note, this can work in both ways: either in favour of personnel or to their detriment due to potential abuse.

On the one hand, a commander may work to secure possible additional payments for their unit.

"Everything depends on the commander. If the commander is reasonable, he'll do everything so that they receive the allowance. Sometimes everyone hesitates and does not want to do anything... and as for subordinates, well, that is just how it is...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 2, conducted on 13 February 2026

On the other hand, commanders may use personal relationships and subjective attitudes to cut bonuses or, conversely, assign them to those who had no grounds for receiving them.

"There is no clear control, and the immediate commander can cut several days from combat payments...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"Everywhere there are informal 'orders' and 'instructions' for financial officers and commanders to save as much as possible on payments...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

In addition to provision for service members who continue performing tasks, informants separately emphasise **problems with payments to wounded fighters**, especially those undergoing long-term treatment.

Another problem identified by survey participants is the level of provision for service members during rotations.

"The level of basic provision is far too low. After withdrawal from the combat zone, it has a significant impact on the decision to go AWOL...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

The amount of decent monetary allowance is traditionally a debatable issue. Informants' views range from "pay what is provided for on time and fairly" to USD 5,000–10,000 per month. Nevertheless, **three main trends** can be identified as necessary in their view:

1. Increasing basic monetary allowance (MA).
2. Revising approaches to bonuses and increasing bonus amounts, in particular considering presence not only on the LC, but also in the so-called kill zone (the zone affected by enemy weapons).
3. Optimising provision for units and related needs of service members in the mission area in order to reduce their personal expenses for these needs.

To summarise, the system of financial provision for service members with combat experience is perceived as outdated, both in its approaches and in the amounts of MA and bonuses. Cases of delayed combat payments or underpayment are not uncommon. A separate challenge remains the provision of related needs of service members and units, on which a significant share of their own funds is spent. Expenses for arranging housing, purchasing special equipment, repairing and refuelling vehicles are mentioned particularly often.

Despite the lack of recent research on the provision of material support for service members, particularly in modelling potential pay review systems, the need to increase service members' income is widely recognised. Civil society is currently a central communicator of this need, with specialised think tanks and media outlets reaching almost identical conclusions in their work. Thus, at the end of 2025, Radio Svoboda published an analytical article that examined in detail the amount and structure of payments to service members. According to the article, the minimum monetary allowance for service members is 34% lower than the average salary in Ukraine. As of October 2025, the average salary was UAH 26,913, while the minimum salary of a service member was UAH 20,000²⁵⁰.

²⁵⁰ Rusetska, Y. (22 December 2025). War at One's Own Expense: What Is Wrong with Service Members' Salaries? Radio Svoboda. radiosvoboda.org/a/zarplaty-viyskovykh-shcho-ne-tak/33626428.html

Treatment and rehabilitation

Key points

- The head of the medical service plays an important role in matters of supporting service members' health.
- The qualifications of a unit's medical personnel are important and may be a key factor in diagnosis and treatment referral, including for cancer diseases among service members.
- Relationships with commanders and personal relationships within the unit as a whole affect how often service members can turn to medical personnel and how simple this procedure is.
- The health situation of personnel is deteriorating due to units being replenished with older people.
- Hospitals, especially in frontline territories, are often inaccessible to service members.
- After being wounded, a person faces a number of barriers in accessing quality rehabilitation.
- There are difficulties in service members' interaction with the psychological assistance system.

The issue of preserving and supporting service members' health is multifaceted. **Three main areas** can be identified in informants' responses through which they describe their experience of receiving health care:

- health support directly within the military unit;
- undergoing the examination of the military medical commission (MMC);
- interaction with healthcare facilities.

At the same time, in their responses, informants mostly emphasised issues of access to health services and barriers on this path, while much less frequently raising the issue of their quality. This may indicate that the accessibility problem is currently perceived as more urgent.

According to informants, in the context of health support within a military unit, the head of the medical service plays a key role. Often, it is his or her qualification and the appropriateness of decisions that determine how quickly and smoothly a person receives the necessary health care.

"In addition to this, it is now very difficult for a service member in a unit to get to the medical company and receive quality treatment. In other words, very often a person sits for months and cannot turn to anyone with their complaints. Because there is no one to replace anyone and stuff like that...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

"Sometimes this takes a very long time. That is, for a service member to get sent to the MMC is very difficult, because without the signature of the head of the medical service, this is impossible today...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

"In our brigade, the head of the medical service, well, the man, arranged things so that we have an X-ray, we have a blood test machine, we have an ultrasound, a CT, well, in short, we are equipped like this, although, of course, we are a poor Territorial Defence brigade. We are equipped, well, superbly. We have our own rehabilitation doctors who give us massages. You can get an appointment; they can adjust your lower back. I am currently in the queue and so on, so, well, it depends very much on the brigade, very strongly...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

"He says he is a radiologist. I say, 'Fine, and how long did you work?' He worked as a radiologist for eight or ten years. I asked what he did. He says he pressed the button. This is the head of the battalion medical service. He pressed the button for five to ten years, and now he has been given 650 people to serve... Accordingly, if doctors are being mobilised, then specialist doctors are needed. Such battalions should already be provided at the level of the medical company with an orthopaedic surgeon, a traumatologist and a cardiologist. If we are already recruiting people aged 55+, a cardiologist is mandatory. And with a resuscitation kit. There must be an X-ray...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

"In my unit, both here where I am now and in previous units, if something hurts, whether it is a tooth or something else, I can easily see a doctor. We do not have this thing where you are not allowed to go, or forbidden from doing something, or anything else. They care a lot about this, especially in this unit; they care a lot about people's health...", – an in-depth interview with a female commissioned officer

The decisive role of this subjective factor is also confirmed by findings from previous studies, particularly those concerning cancer diseases among service members²⁵¹. Previous research also showed that **access to healthcare often depends on personal relationships within the unit**: in some units, service members may receive informal permission to visit a physician, while in others, they cannot obtain an official referral for treatment. In addition, informants in previous studies emphasised the importance of the qualifications of a unit's medical personnel, as the speed of diagnosis and referral for treatment depends on their level of expertise. They mentioned cases where medical personnel in military units were not always able to recognise symptoms of diseases, especially cancer diseases and, accordingly, refer a person to a hospital for diagnosis.

In this study, in addition to the quality of the medical service as a whole, as well as staffing and material and technical provision, informants also emphasised a related component: the objective deterioration in the health situation among personnel due to units being replenished with older personnel.

"It is just that the people they bring, they are now 55+, after passing the MMC, their heart stops, they have a stroke or something else...", – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

"Recruiting such people creates an enormous burden on the medical system. Simply catastrophic. Because there is a whole caste of people who bring him in for the third time, and he still wants to get in so he can be treated at the state's expense. He carries this

²⁵¹ Pryncyp. (2025). Exploring the Journey of Service Members and Veterans with Cancer. pryncyp.org/analytics/doslidzhennya-shlyahu-viiskovosluzhbovcziv-z-onkologichnymy-zahvoryuvannyamy

huge three-volume personal file with him. It starts with the info that when he was born, something was already wrong. Something with his health had already started. And as of today, he already has more than ten chronic diseases, and they send someone like that to your unit...”, – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

No less important is taking a person's health condition into account when performing combat missions. Informants note that, for a number of reasons, primarily because there is no replacement, service members are unable to obtain a referral for treatment or to undergo the MMC. As a result, units may disregard medical restrictions without assessing the consequences for health. In such situations, focus group participants emphasise the commander's role.

“He comes back, his medical company rejects him, you are not going to the MMC, you are not going there, you cannot go there, and so on, and in the end, his commander sends him to the frontline. That is, the guy has to go; the guy weighs 110 kilograms, he also has to get to the positions with armour and all kinds of stuff, and if his lower back gives out, he becomes a seriously wounded casualty. A normal commander would not do that. I do not know what kind of conflict there was, but he was forced to go AWOL and is now transferring to another normal brigade...”, – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

*“It means that in our brigade, I can now say that I am leaving to undergo the MMC's examination, but if I somehow do not suit them, the commander of the medical company can say, you are not f***ing going anywhere...”, – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026*

“I have a lot of people sitting there who cannot even get an X-ray because they are not given a referral. The only thing that works more or less now is that if someone is partially fit, you can still manage to ensure that this person is not sent to the frontline. This more or less works now, previously it did not work...”, – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

“They have also stopped sending partially fit people to the frontline in our case, because there have already been precedents where people sued, where commanders were removed, because this is not legally allowed. But they made a clever move, so that you supposedly go to the second line. And the second line now is as much a second line

as I am a ballerina. I mean, everyone knows how the enemy is now infiltrating somewhere into the rear...” – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

An additional factor in taking a person’s health condition into account when performing combat missions is that, according to informants, physicians, both civilian and military, tend to consciously “improve” service members’ health and record a better condition in documents than it actually is. This leads to another problematic situation: in practice, the person cannot perform the necessary tasks in service.

“That is, they grab sick people and bring them to us. For infantry, this is very dangerous, because it is not only his life, but also the life of the brother-in-arms with whom he goes out to the position that depends on it...” – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

“That is, physicians are directly instructed that service members, people of conscription age, are all healthy. And I have encountered this more than once...” – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

Pryncyp analysts recorded similar issues last year in a study of psychological support for service members with primary psychiatric diagnoses²⁵². In particular, it concerned the fact that physicians may soften diagnoses or fail to record severe conditions that affect service. As a result, a person does not receive the timely assistance they actually need.

This practice fits within the broader context of barriers to accessing health services. In particular, informants mention a number of problems they faced when using health services in military and civilian healthcare facilities: long queues, indifferent attitudes among staff and disorganised admission of service members.

²⁵² National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Pryncyp (2024). The Path to Effective Psychological Support for Service Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine: An Integrated Perspective on Challenges and the Search for Viable Solutions. pryncyp.org/analytics/shlyah-do-efektyvnoyi-psyhologichnoyi-pidtrymky-vijskovosluzhbovcziv-zsu-integrovanyi-poglyad-na-vyklyky-ta-poshuk-diyevyh-rishen

"And when you are fighting, like me... I came to the traumatologist at the MMC, and he said, 'When did you start fighting?' I say, 'From the first days of the war, since 2014.' He says, 'Right, man, can I help you with something?' I say, 'Yes, I have problems with my back, knees and shoulder.' He says, 'I understand, I will sort everything out for you.' But with some others, you come in, and they look at you like, 'Why have you come to us?' Well, I am after being wounded. So what? Everyone here is like that...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 1, conducted on 13 February 2026

"...for a week now, he has not been able to see the doctor because the doctor sees patients from 11:00, and in front of my eyes, she came at 11:30. She saw patients until 12, for half an hour. She has lunch from 12:00 to 13:00. And at 16:30, she closed the door right in front of a female service member. Because that was it, her working day was over. I go to the head of the hospital and say, 'What is this nonsense?' He says to me, 'You understand, there are no specialists. This is a civilian doctor. We invite her to come. And she leaves whenever she wants'...", — a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

In this same context, the issue of physical access to health services is particularly acute, especially in frontline territories:

"As for other health issues, you know, our situation is so ridiculous that in the whole of Donetsk Oblast, there was one urologist. It seems that one for the entire oblast, in a private clinic, who could see people, including service members, and whose appointments were booked two or three months ahead. And accordingly, in the case of urology, neither male nor female service members had any real access. The Law of Ukraine "On Social Guarantees for Servicepersons and Members of Their Families" declares that, on equal terms with everyone else, some things are free of charge. But in practice, the service member has to travel to a city with a hospital that will accept them under this law, and it may be the only healthcare facility, with a queue of everyone imaginable. And the practical implementation of this is rather vague, unfortunately. So whether you are a participant in hostilities or not, you still run into the real accessibility of this healthcare...", — an expert interview with a medical service officer of a military unit of the Defence Forces

In addition to personal attitudes, **there are also procedural and systemic difficulties**. In particular, in the study on cancer diseases²⁵³, Pryncyp analysts described barriers to access to treatment linked to the low level of coordination between the military and civilian healthcare systems.

²⁵³ Pryncyp. (2025). Exploring the Journey of Service Members and Veterans with Cancer. pryncyp.org/analytics/doslidzhennya-shlyahu-vijskovosluzhbovcziv-z-onkologichnymy-zahvoryuvannyamy

While a person with a chronic disease may need support from both systems, it can be difficult for service members to get a referral from a military facility to a civilian one. In the previous study, informants said that in military hospitals, doctors are mainly occupied with wounds, so patients with somatic diseases receive less attention. At the same time, civilian hospitals often refused service members either on the basis of the territorial principle or because fighters were expected to turn first to a military facility.

We also examined the practice of obtaining rehabilitation services in previous studies. During this study, informants noted that they **consider the organisation of rehabilitation after wounds to be somewhat better compared with the treatment of diseases.**

“So, the conclusion is this: rehabilitation for a service member who is already after a wound... is possible. Here, many volunteer organisations, state organisations and others monitor. But a service member within the unit does not fully possess the right to receive health services, which, under the Constitution of Ukraine, they should receive...”, – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

“I think that, in fact, regarding rehabilitation and everything else, the state does still ensure this level for a person who, after being wounded, ends up somewhere in rehabilitation... In addition, even when it comes to prostheses, my brother-in-arms has now written that Ukrainian prosthetics are better than Western ones...”, – a focus group discussion with veterans No. 3, conducted on 14 February 2026

Pryncyp’s 2024 study showed that after being wounded, people face a number of barriers in accessing quality rehabilitation. For example, 58% of respondents reported that, in the acute period after trauma or a wound, they did not receive rehabilitation services in the facilities where they were treated. Every second respondent noted that military units did not support their treatment and rehabilitation process, while 43% reported the problem of interruption of treatment/rehabilitation due to the need to resolve bureaucratic issues with the MMC²⁵⁴.

²⁵⁴ Pryncyp (2024). Rehabilitation of Ukrainian Military and Veterans: Navigating Systemic Gaps. pryncyp.org/analytics/rehabilitation

We cannot state that the rehabilitation situation has objectively improved, as this study lacks a comparable quantitative component. However, we recorded that the issue of support for service members by their units during treatment remains open and affects the morale and psychological state of a person undergoing treatment after being wounded. In addition, informants reported problems with payments during long-term treatment, difficulties in undergoing the examination by the MMC, especially during treatment abroad, and a lack of coordination between structures in matters of treatment and rehabilitation abroad.

According to informants, the pre-rehabilitation stage can be quite problematic, which later affects not only a person's treatment and rehabilitation, but also their material support.

"There should be a very long list here, but it needs to start with work with the company, battalion, brigade command and so on. Because one still has to reach state services, since following wound, damage or trauma, they are withdrawn from the position/evacuated and... not everyone is taken to a stabilisation point or healthcare facility, or they are taken there but no injuries are recorded, Form 100 is not issued, and either they are quietly put on a drip, or they do pass through the stabilisation point and then go for treatment, but still without Form 100 and, accordingly, without proper recording and/or reflection of the real situation. And the consequences are terrible...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

Informants believe that the state should:

- ensure regular monitoring of service members' health;
- simplify access to specialist doctors and diagnostics;
- provide sanatorium vouchers;
- implement all declared services in this area.

In our view, this list should also include establishing interaction between the civilian and military healthcare systems and creating clear navigation for service members with somatic diseases.

“Treatment and rehabilitation should be systematic. Currently, referrals for rehabilitation are handled by the unit. The unit needs service members in place to perform their tasks. And those who go to rehabilitation are either those who actually deal with rehabilitation or those who do nothing...”, – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

In the field of mental health, informants primarily note:

- the need for effective and high-quality psychological rehabilitation programmes;
- the importance of a system of psychological support during service.

Our previous study on psychological support in the troop showed that access to quality assistance largely depends on the qualifications of professionals in units and commanders' attitudes towards psychological support. One of the key systemic problems identified by the authors of the report was the lack of professional competencies and education among deputy commanders for personnel psychological support (PPS): these positions are held by people who are not psychologists. Informants reported the same problem during this study.

“Certified professional specialists who have the relevant education and practice, especially regarding states of acute combat stress, should provide personnel psychological support. Physical health means regular, comprehensive and full examinations...”, – a written questionnaire, veteran, enlisted personnel

Another problem lies in service members' interaction with the civilian system of psychological assistance:

“I tried a state support programme after the person I loved was killed back at the beginning of 2023. Honestly, it was not great. The psychologist who worked with me was experienced and professional, but he did not understand the specifics at all. He had not gone through even a fraction of our journey, so all his advice and recommendations only emphasised the gap between service members and civilians, rather than helping with socialisation and rehabilitation. That is the reason why there is distrust towards all state programmes. Especially since you have to beg for all of them – you feel as if you are begging, like a pauper, for some help. It is humiliating, it is easier to pay...”, – a written questionnaire, female veteran, commissioned officer

In addition to psychological support directly within the unit, which service members often receive through communication with comrades-in-arms, healthcare professionals or chaplains, **the system also provides for other mental health support tools:**

- psychological recovery in specialised centres;
- psychiatric care in healthcare facilities;
- psychological rehabilitation.

At the same time, our previous study shows that this system does not work coherently enough: there are difficulties in obtaining referrals, related not only to administrative aspects, but also to the fact that specialists at brigade level cannot always correctly determine what kind of assistance a person needs, whether outpatient or inpatient care.

Access to psychological recovery remains limited because of the small number of specialised centres providing such services. The unit's psychologist officer plays an important role here, as they can engage with these centres and identify recovery opportunities for service members.

The demand for recovery and psychological support outside the military unit is high. In the context of identifying mental health needs, informants often mentioned sanatorium vouchers. They also emphasised the need for therapy that should be available on an ongoing basis.

"Payment for a psychologist/psychotherapist at the rate of one session once a week or, at most, once every two weeks...", — a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

A separate issue that informants almost hardly discussed is access to psychiatric treatment. We recorded demand for simplified access to a psychiatrist without going through a general practitioner, but previous studies show that there are many more barriers to obtaining treatment in practice. In particular, there is no clear procedure for referring people for outpatient psychiatric treatment

in civilian healthcare facilities, no criteria for inpatient hospitalisation and a shortage of qualified professionals to assess indications locally.

Among other needs, informants also often mentioned **the organisation of sports activities for service members and the possibility of health insurance under special programmes.**

"Health insurance for persons with combat experience and members of their families for a defined amount, which would allow them either to address acquired problems or maintain their health. It is also very important to speak about families...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

"Cash certificates for obtaining professional psychological assistance, with accredited psychologists, psychotherapists and psychiatrists taking part in the programme...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

Informants also view leave and rest as part of health support. This primarily concerns increasing the duration of leave, days off between deployments to positions, and separating rest leave from treatment leave.

"Long leave. Much longer than now...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

"Provide the opportunity to receive treatment not at the expense of annual leave, but by using additional paid leave of at least 15 days...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

"...separate leave for maintaining health (15–30 days) at least once a year. Independent of annual and family leave...", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

In practice, there are provisions that guarantee treatment and rehabilitation for wounds sustained after release from captivity, as well as additional measures to support mental health and parenthood.

At the same time, they do not address the systemic problem of the general deterioration of the physical and mental health of service members who participate in combat operations, live under conditions of constant stress and lack proper rest and recovery.

"In fighting brigades, the performance of combat missions comes first, and everything else is a side effect. Until they squeeze the maximum out of you, whatever you can produce, well, the reality is that they will squeeze everything out of your health that they can. This concerns both physical... and mental condition. Accordingly, service members could be helped by bringing health services, support, and rehabilitation as close as possible to where they are constantly located. Because if people are stationed in villages in Zaporizhzhia Oblast and are told they can receive rehabilitation in Zaporizhzhia, that makes no sense. But on the other hand, placing rehabilitation in villages where service members are located also makes no sense.

We are in something of a deadlock due to a shortage of personnel. We are somehow trying to stretch the health of the people we have. And then, someday, when the war ends or something happens to them somewhere, we will have hundreds of thousands of people with musculoskeletal problems, impaired mental condition and mental health, deteriorated eyesight, ruined teeth, ears after ABT with hearing loss and all the other wonderful stories. There are currently no solutions or proposals from the state for precisely such people. What to do with one hundred thousand men who will be in a half-broken condition after the age of forty? I have no idea. And no one is taking on this story to solve it yet, because this is martial law... I am not even talking about all kinds of dependence on psychoactive substances...", — an expert interview with a medical service officer of a military unit of the Defence Forces

Thus, the health needs of service members with experience of participation in combat operations can be divided into two main blocks:

1. Health support during service in cases of somatic diseases

This primarily concerns the service member's interaction with their unit. We identified several barriers to accessing treatment here. The most prominent needs are simplifying the process of obtaining referrals for treatment and the MMC, taking health conditions into account when commanders plan tasks, and ensuring the objectivity of MMC conclusions.

2. Services and rehabilitation following injury or trauma

Regarding rehabilitation after wounds, informants believe the situation is somewhat better, primarily due to greater public attention. At the same time, a number of difficulties remain, related to payments and long-term treatment. Among the main needs for improving physical and mental health, informants mentioned the need for systematic health monitoring, effective psychological support programmes, and scaling up the veteran sport programme.

Family and close circle

Social connections are an important component of well-being. During service, a person builds new contacts that may remain strong even after discharge, while connections with friends from civilian circles may gradually fade. Family is important in this context, as it is often the main source of support for a service member both during and after service.

Maintaining a balance between service and personal life has always been difficult, and the problem became even more acute with the beginning of hostilities in 2014. Some people joined the troop not as a professional choice, so their families were entirely civilian. In 2020, in its study on the reasons for leaving the army, Come Back Alive Foundation identified nine factors affecting service. Among them, the balance between personal and working time was a key one: respondents often described it as a "choice between family or service." Irregular working hours while serving at the permanent deployment point, long assignments to mission areas, staying in garrisons and the inability to move family together with the service member could lead to deterioration in relationships and often become a reason for divorce. Even then, the issue of possible compensatory mechanisms, such as housing provision or subsidised programmes, arose to allow the family to move with the service member to the garrison²⁵⁵.

With the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the situation became more complicated again. In matters of balance between work and personal time, the main concern is the possibility of spending leave with family once or twice a year. The mission area of most service members makes relocation together with family impossible, while the unknown duration of service creates tension in relationships.

Relationships with family and the ability to support loved ones during service can have a major impact on a service member's motivation. During focus group discussions, most informants noted that they

²⁵⁵Come Back Alive Foundation (2020) Why are service members leaving the Armed Forces? irf.ua/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/zvit-ua-digital.pdf

had consulted their family about joining military service, although they also stressed that they made the decision primarily on the basis of their own convictions. At the same time, participation in the life of one's own family is an important issue in the context of a military career. When considering factors such as material provision, benefits, housing, and the right to leave, some informants primarily mention the needs of the family, which are more difficult for them to support from a distance.

For example, among the factors that have the greatest impact on service, social guarantees and benefits for the family were most often assessed as the most important. This indicator ranks second after monetary allowance.

Also, when discussing monetary allowances, many informants primarily emphasise the need to support families.

"The state must ensure decent conditions for service members and their families. Because of the inability to be at home, rent for the apartment reaches 80% of the monetary allowance", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"The biggest problem in the army now is distrust of commanders, low psychological state because of the inability to see loved ones and constant thoughts about where to get money to support the family", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"Being with the children, watching them grow. Being near the family. This cannot be compensated. The only compensation for me here and now would be the possibility of taking out a mortgage. Under the current conditions of eOselia, the sharp increase in apartment prices (two to three or even four times) and the small number of apartments that qualify for it, this is impossible.", – a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

Although the issue of relationships with family was rarely discussed separately during focus groups, family support remains an important part of service members' well-being. Benefits and monetary allowance are sometimes seen as compensation for the time that they cannot

spend with family. A number of informants noted that the state can partially compensate for these losses, but prolonged separation from family still often negatively affects relationships.

"Time spent with family. At the very least, where possible, husband and wife should serve near each other, if not in the same unit. Time with children. Restore childcare leave for men or women. They are growing up, and we do not see them for years", — a written questionnaire, veteran, commissioned officer

"First, health, second, family. The state cannot compensate health a priori. Only defined service terms can preserve the family.", — a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

"A project-based role for a defined period, in which I can truly be effective and useful, as well as service conditions that allow me to combine it with my professional civilian roles, be present in the life of my family and loved ones and have a certain degree of freedom", — a written questionnaire, veteran, non-commissioned officer

Informants consider short-term solutions, such as longer or additional leave beyond what is currently available, at least for rest and settling matters in civilian life. Defined terms of service could become a long-term solution, enabling people to plan both their everyday life and service. In the long run, maintaining relationships with family and participating in family life may become a decisive factor for some service members in deciding whether to remain in the troop.

Conclusions

The service experience of active service members is shaped at the intersection of **professional fulfilment, fair recognition, financial stability** and **predictability of the future**. The balance between these components may determine the level of motivation and willingness to remain in service.

In the context of a **military career**, there is a clear demand for a fair, transparent and predictable promotion system. For most informants, a career is not an end in itself or a formal increase in status. It is viewed as a tool for performing tasks more effectively, an opportunity to influence decisions, protect subordinates and pass on experience.

In practice, the processes of **granting ranks and appointing people to positions** are perceived as dependent on subjective factors, such as the commander's position and attitude, informal relationships and decisions of higher command. Education, combat experience, or completion of courses does not guarantee promotion, and in some cases, appointments are made without proper training. This creates scepticism and a sense of injustice, especially among those who have been performing combat missions for a long time, meet the formal criteria, such as position and education, and want to advance.

Training and the acquisition of relevant skills are recognised as an important component of service, but there is a significant gap between expectations and the actual content of courses. Informants distinguish between formal completion of training and real professional growth. They place the greatest value on combat experience and the exchange of practical knowledge between units, while some courses are perceived as detached from the current needs of the war.

Therefore, training is viewed as a necessary, but not decisive, factor in career growth. Real experience of performing combat missions remains the key marker of professional capability.

Narrowly specialised or standardised training programmes, especially for recruits, are assessed more positively. However, in all cases, the quality of instructors is an issue.

The awards system, which potentially should perform the function of recognition and motivation, is also perceived ambiguously. Some service members have experience with unsuccessful nominations or long delays in receiving awards and decorations. The commander plays a decisive role in the process, while the distribution of awards is sometimes perceived as formal or disproportionate to contribution. This may lead to the devaluation of certain decorations and the development of a sceptical attitude towards the awards system as a whole.

At the same time, individual perception of awards largely depends on the context in which they were received and on personal experience.

Predictability of the future is an important component of **professional motivation**. The idea of a fixed-term contract with a guaranteed period of rest or deferment from mobilisation is viewed as an instrument for restoring a sense of control over one's own life. For informants, defined service terms mean the ability to plan for the future and to strengthen the willingness to continue service for a defined period.

The **impact of the PH status on career** remains contested. Although combat experience is recognised as important and even necessary for holding command positions, the formal status of the participant in hostilities is not considered a sufficient basis for career preferences.

The prevailing position is that competence, skills and real combat experience should be decisive, not formalised status.

Material provision emerges as one of the key factors directly influencing the decision to remain in service. Although financial motivation was not primary for many at the time of joining the troop, the duration of the war, changes in the nature of combat operations and systematic expenses for supplying the unit have made the issue of monetary allowance more urgent. The basic level of pay is perceived as insufficient, especially compared with the civilian sector and given the constant risk to life. Service members are forced to spend a significant share of additional payments on unit needs, from fuel and vehicle repairs to equipment purchases, which effectively neutralises the financial effect of bonuses and reduces the resources available to support the family.

The **bonus system** is further complicated by unclear accrual mechanisms and ambiguous criteria. No clear definition of participation in combat operations, different approaches to units within the strike zone but not directly on the line of contact, and the possibility of subjective influence by commanders create a sense of inequality.

At the same time, most informants agree that the level of risk and intensity of involvement should be the main criteria for differentiating payments. Separately, they emphasise support for infantry units without reducing rewards for others.

Treatment, rehabilitation and health support constitute a separate important block. During service, the key barriers to preserving health are limited access to referrals, dependence on the decisions of the head of the medical service and the commander, and the absence of replacement personnel, which often makes treatment impossible.

The head of the medical service plays a major role in supporting service members' health, and their actions can significantly improve or worsen the situation depending on their qualifications and management abilities.

Mental health support is identified as an important component. The needs primarily concern the professionalism of specialists, their understanding of the specific nature of combat experience and the availability of regular psychological assistance. Additional needs include health insurance for service members and their families, the development of veteran sports, and expanded opportunities for rest. Leave is viewed not as a right in the context of a career but as an instrument to support physical and mental health, with a separate request to distinguish between leave for treatment and leave for rest.

Family and close circle often shape service members' motivation and subjective sense of well-being. Family support acts as a basic pillar, while its absence or prolonged separation increases psychological strain and affects decisions on continuing service.

Material provision, social guarantees and housing programmes are viewed primarily as instruments for supporting the family, but they cannot fully compensate for the lack of time and physical presence. Therefore, systemic solutions, including predictable service terms, flexible leave mechanisms, and, in the future, opportunities to serve near the family's place of residence, may be considered as part of the personnel retention policy.

Study findings demonstrate a systemic demand for renewed approaches to human resource management in the troop. This is not only about increasing payments or expanding benefits, but about establishing a holistic, fair and predictable model of service in which career growth, material provision, medical support and social guarantees are aligned with one another and correspond to the realities of prolonged war. Without comprehensive changes in these areas, retaining experienced personnel after the end of martial law may become significantly more difficult, thereby creating risks to the country's security.

General conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

International experience

Personnel policy regarding service members with combat experience varies significantly depending on the overall security situation in the region, the frequency of the state's contingent participation in armed conflicts, and the general level of social support and provision for a person serving in the armed forces of a particular state.

When analysing the well-being of veterans with combat experience in the military environment, we focused on components of well-being, such as **military career (vocation), financial provision, medical provision, and social connections**. We also separately analysed countries' practices regarding recognition of the fact of a service member's participation in combat operations, i.e., **the granting of a status** similar to the Ukrainian status of the participant in hostilities.

The study of the practices of five countries, namely **France, the United States, Israel, Finland and the United Kingdom**, showed that these states have quite different approaches to ensuring the needs of veterans with combat experience **during military service**.

- The most developed practice of recognising those who have directly participated in combat operations is found in **Israel**. There are 22 different types of status, depending on the conditions of military service, combat missions and proximity to the line of contact. The condition for obtaining a card confirming participation in combat operations is a period of performing such tasks, which varies from 14 to 21 months.
- Other countries' approaches to recognising participation in combat operations differ significantly. There is a practice of awarding special ribbons or medals for participation in a mission or operation, but such an award does not depend on the position held or the period spent in the combat area. Under this procedure, basically, a cook

and a rifleman will be entitled to the same social benefits and guarantees, and their status will not differ at the legislative level.

- The system for granting ranks and appointing people to positions for those with experience in combat operations works similarly. For example, in the **United States**, combat experience, although taken into account during periodic assessments of service members, is not decisive in decisions on promotion in rank or position.

In all analysed countries, effective task performance by service members in a crisis situation may become an important criterion for **promotion in service**, but the mere fact of participation in missions is not the most important factor.

At the same time, actual presence in the territory where combat operations are conducted may significantly affect service members' **material provision**.

- Thus, in **France**, the **United Kingdom** and the **United States**, during participation in a mission, service members receive additional allowances and tax exemptions, which may affect their overall material well-being.
- In **Israel**, by contrast, increased monetary allowance depends on service in a combat unit, regardless of direct presence on the line of contact. In other words, approaches to payment for service may differ from country to country.

Sometimes, the state may invest more resources in other types of material provision, even where the additional payment for participation in a mission appears insignificant.

- For example, the **United Kingdom** has an additional allowance for prolonged separation, which increases with each day the service member spends on a mission. In this way, the state recognises that a person who spends a long period separated from family needs additional compensation for the impact of military service on social connections as an element of well-being.

- **The United States** supports the service member's family through payments for housing rent or mortgage costs. These conditions are created so that a service member on a mission does not have to worry about housing for their family.
-

Another important element of well-being for veterans with combat experience in military service is their **physical and mental health**. It should be noted that in the analysed countries, mental health remains stigmatised, so service members often do not report existing complaints because of fear of judgement or the impact of mental disorders on their military career.

- In response to this challenge, **the United Kingdom** and **the United States** pay considerable attention to the framework of chaplaincy: service members can anonymously turn to a chaplain and talk through their experiences without fear of negative consequences from such contact. In all the countries we analysed, a mandatory decompression period has also been introduced, lasting from several days to several weeks after return from a mission.
 - Regarding physical health, the troops of all the countries studied undertake to cover any costs related to medical provision for service members who have developed illnesses or sustained injuries or wounds during military service. This support system does not depend on participation in combat operations. In addition, **France** and **Israel** offer increased payments to service members who have lost limbs, ensuring access to more advanced prostheses.
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Social protection for service members' families in the analysed countries depends primarily on the general level of social provision in the state and on approaches to care and support for the population.

- For example, given the high cost of education, children of service members in **the United Kingdom** have the opportunity to study in boarding schools to ensure continuity of the child's education.

In addition, a system of reimbursement for childcare costs for young children is in place.

- In the event that a service member is missing in action, held as a prisoner of war or killed, each of the states provides payments to family members. The most comprehensive system of benefits and social guarantees for the family of a missing, captured, or fallen service member is found in **Israel**, where different forms of cash assistance are provided depending on the age and working capacity of the widow or widower, as well as the number and ages of children.

Guarantees in Ukraine

Granting the status of the participant in hostilities

The analysis of the legal and regulatory framework for ensuring the well-being of veterans in the military environment in Ukraine, as well as the study of their needs, showed that long-term experience of participation in the war against Russia has changed the grounds for granting the status of the participant in hostilities and the social benefits and guarantees linked to it.

At the same time, the analysis shows that a significant share of problems arising in the areas of career development, material provision, medical provision, and social guarantees for service members with combat experience is linked not only to shortcomings in specific mechanisms for granting the status of the participant in hostilities or individual benefits. Many of them result from the broader lack of reform in the military service system and in human resource management in the security and defence sector.

- The state has continuously changed the grounds for granting the status of the participant in hostilities and the groups of people who may claim it since 2014. At the beginning of the ATO, the status could be granted only to service members of military formations who

participated in the ATO, regardless of the duration of such participation, but this approach later changed.

Obtaining status of the participant in hostilities became possible for a broader cohort of categories: volunteers, law enforcement officers and other security forces were added. At the same time, an additional criterion appeared – the duration of direct participation (30 days in total, except in cases of direct engagement and fire contact with the enemy or sustaining a wound, concussion or mutilation while performing tasks).

- With the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the mere performance of combat missions in territory where hostilities were taking place was sufficient to obtain the status of the participant in hostilities. The list of groups eligible for this status has also been significantly expanded due to the lack of a dedicated legal and regulatory framework and social guarantees.
- Ukrainian legislation recognises the additional experience, skills, and abilities of service members who participated in combat operations. Thus, during the full-scale invasion, enlisted and non-commissioned personnel were eligible to receive initial non-commissioned and commissioned officer ranks if they had combat experience. This enabled promotion in rank and position, even for service members who lacked the relevant training or education.
- Another innovation was the shortening of service periods in military ranks, which allowed people serving in combat brigades to attain higher military ranks within accelerated timeframes. At the same time, this practice requires attention to potential abuse and the development of fair rules to prevent so-called military tourism, in which service members are attached for a month or several months to combat units to obtain additional opportunities associated with the status of the participant in hostilities. Such practice may negatively affect the overall work of military units and deepen the sense of social injustice.

Military career

Service members view a career not as a formal increase in status, but as an instrument for effective task performance and the protection of subordinates. In practice, however, appointments are often perceived as subjective and dependent on the commander's position or informal relationships.

- Even having specialised education or completing specialised courses does not guarantee predictable advancement. Combined with the low quality of certain training programmes detached from the realities of war, this reinforces scepticism among personnel.
 - The current system of awards and material incentives does not fully serve the functions of recognition and motivation. The lack of clear criteria and transparency in the distribution of awards, as well as long delays in nominations, lead to the devaluation of decorations and the development of a sense of injustice.
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Monetary allowance

This situation is further complicated by issues of monetary allowance, where the basic level of payments is perceived as insufficient, given the risks to life and the need for constant spending on unit needs.

- Service members are forced to spend a significant share of their monetary rewards for participation in combat operations on equipment repairs and fuel, which neutralises the financial effect of the payments.
- In addition, the lack of clarity in the mechanisms for accruing additional rewards and the ambiguity in defining participation in combat operations for different categories of units only reinforce the sense of inequality within the system.

Medical support

Medical support remains an area where legislative guarantees often fail to be implemented in practice due to the difficulty of accessing services in combat zones.

- Currently, general regulations on medical provision for service members, treatment and rehabilitation in connection with wounds or captivity and additional guarantees concerning reproductive health apply to persons with combat experience.
 - The system primarily responds to established diagnoses, ignoring preventive work.
 - There is a strong demand for professional psychological support, expanded opportunities for rest and a clear distinction between leave for treatment and leave for recovery.
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Support for families and predictability of the future

An important factor in retaining service members is support for their families and predictability of the future, particularly through the possibility of concluding fixed-term contracts.

The ability to plan one's life and feel control over one's own time is considered a key element of motivation to remain in service after the end of martial law, while social guarantees and housing programmes are perceived primarily as instruments for protecting family interests.

Thus, the legal and regulatory analysis and the study of needs indicate the need to move from fragmented, targeted changes towards the development of a holistic public policy. Veterans' well-being in the military environment cannot be ensured solely by increasing payments or expanding the list of benefits without creating a fair, transparent and predictable model of service. Only by overcoming the lack of systemic human resource management, in which career growth, medical provision, and material stability are aligned with real combat experience, will it be possible to preserve the army's professional core and ensure the country's long-term sustainable security.

Recommendations

Regarding the granting of the status of the participant in hostilities

- Continue developing a systemic assessment of the grounds for granting the status of the participant in hostilities. Consider the possibility of differentiating the grounds for obtaining the status of the participant in hostilities by introducing additional criteria depending on the nature of the combat or (special) missions performed.
- Conduct a detailed analysis and develop legal and regulatory provisions on obtaining the status of the participant in hostilities for people who perform official duties in a combat area but are not involved in repelling the armed aggression of the Russian Federation. Separately, provide for the regulation of the status of people affected by the armed aggression of the Russian Federation who are currently receiving PWDW status.
- Analyse the causes and conditions that give rise to practices of so-called military tourism during military service or the performance of tasks in combat areas. Based on the findings of this analysis, develop and implement mechanisms to prevent abuse related to formal presence in combat areas for the purpose of obtaining statuses, benefits or social guarantees provided by law.

Regarding a military career

- Provide for amendments to the Regulation on Military Service by Citizens of Ukraine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 1153/2008 of 10 December 2008) that would allow shortened periods of service in military rank to apply to service members with confirmed combat experience of at least three months, regardless of their subsequent place of service, including in the event of transfer to non-combat military units or military command bodies, in order to prevent loss of motivation for professional development.
- Continue implementing strategic goal 2 of the Strategy for Attracting, Developing and Retaining Human Capital in the Defence Forces of Ukraine (MoD Order No. 862/НМ of 29 December 2024) in order to take acquired combat experience into account in the content of military education by integrating the unique experience of war veterans into the educational process and ensuring the maximum relevance of the knowledge acquired to the requirements of modern combat command and control.
- Provide for a review of the duration of commissioned officer training programmes under the legal regime of martial law, in particular for service members with the status of the participant in hostilities, in order to remove barriers to access to such courses related to commanders' management readiness and the ability of service members to leave their units for an extended period.
- Improve living conditions in places where additional training or retraining of professionals is conducted, particularly at training centres and HMEIs, for service members arriving from the combat area, to increase their comfort and enable this period to serve as an instrument of recovery.
- Conduct a comprehensive audit of the awards system in order to increase motivation and ensure proper recognition of the personal contribution of service members who directly perform combat

missions, as well as to develop clear and objective criteria for nomination for state and departmental decorations, while ensuring maximum transparency and clarity of the process for personnel and military units. Consider creating a procedure for reviewing and appealing decisions.

- Develop and communicate to military units clarifications on the legal grounds and procedures for signing commissioned officer and non-commissioned officer contracts with service members who are recognised as fit for service in support military units, ensuring, where necessary, the relevant amendments to the Regulation on Military Service by Citizens of Ukraine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, in order to remove ambiguities in law enforcement practice. Ensure that these provisions extend not only to the AFU, but also to other military formations.
- Develop a systemic solution for creating and implementing guidelines for military units and MMCs on determining the list of positions in which people recognised as fit for service in support military units or unfit for military service on health grounds can effectively serve. Such guidelines should be based on a comprehensive analysis of service members' functional capabilities and the compatibility of their health condition with the specific tasks of particular positions, ensuring the maximum fulfilment of professional potential while maintaining an appropriate level of well-being.
- Provide for the introduction of additional incentives for people with the PH status when formulating public policy to increase the attractiveness of a military career, in particular through priority right to choose the place of service and vacant position, in order to recognise combat merit and retain experienced personnel in the system by creating conditions for their maximum professional and personal self-fulfilment.

Regarding monetary and pension provision

- Review CMU Resolution No. 168 regarding differences in the payment of additional rewards to service members of different Defence Forces in order to avoid differences in the practice of paying additional monetary rewards for the same tasks.
- Review the Procedure for Payment of Monetary Allowance to Service Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Certain Other Persons (MoD Order No. 260 of 7 June 2018) and, accordingly, the list of tasks approved by the MoD for the UAH 30,000 AMR, in order to avoid differences in the payment of this monetary reward to service members of different Defence Forces and officials of other public authorities.
- Review the criteria for granting the additional monetary reward of UAH 100,000 in order to take into account the current conditions of combat operations. In particular, update the main assessment criterion, which is currently based on task performance within the battalion defence area (3–3.5 km), taking into account the expansion of the kill zone (the zone affected by enemy weapons) to 20 km, which significantly increases the scope of tasks performed by combat units and battalion commands. Ensure corresponding amendments to the Procedure for Payment of Monetary Allowance approved by MoD Order No. 260 of 7 June 2018, MIA Order No. 478 of 17 July 2025 and other legal acts that determine the payment of additional rewards in the Defence Forces of Ukraine, in order to ensure fair and proportionate accrual of additional payments.
- Introduce systemic mechanisms to prevent delays in the payment of monetary allowance and additional rewards, ensuring the unconditional priority and stability of financial settlements for service members who directly participate in combat operations.
- Introduce a methodology for realistically assessing the attractiveness of service members' monetary allowance, taking into account the actual additional expenses borne by personnel for

housing rent, vehicle maintenance and other operational needs of units. Ensure the development of systemic solutions for centralised state coverage of these needs, without creating bureaucratic obstacles, to eliminate the practice of financing service tasks at personnel's expense and preserve the real income level of service members.

- Ensure improved quality and consistency of strategic communications by the Defence Forces regarding procedures and timeframes for payment of monetary allowance.
- Introduce the possibility of counting preferential service credit (one month as three) when granting and calculating civilian pensions, which will allow the duration of participation in combat operations to be taken into account.
- Regulate the procedure for calculating pensions for service members who were removed from the staffing list or were placed at the commander's disposal after being wounded or returning from captivity, so that a reduction in monetary allowance during this period does not lead to a decrease in the pension amount.
- Provide for the possibility of granting a civilian disability pension without the requirement for an insurance record for service members who acquired a disability as a result of participation in combat operations.
- Review the procedure for calculating monetary allowance for service members who are at the disposal of the commander of a military unit (removed from the staffing list) to ensure a minimum level of social protection for them. Establish a guaranteed payment of monetary allowance to such service members at a level not lower than the minimum level of monetary allowance for service members (UAH 20,100), except in the cases provided for in subparas. 12-1 and 13 of para. 116, as well as para. 122 of the Regulation on Military Service by Citizens of Ukraine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, approved by Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 1153/2008 of 10 December 2008.

Regarding medical provision

- Ensure expanded access for people with combat experience to medical support directly during military service. Develop the capacity of medical services of military units to independently diagnose health conditions and objectively assess the criticality of personnel's functional conditions. This should introduce an effective mechanism to verify medical needs, promptly refer people requiring medical assistance for treatment, and rationally manage the units' human resources.
- Pay particular attention to ensuring service members' access to mental health services directly during service, in particular through the introduction of systemic psychological recovery programmes.
- Introduce a specialised mechanism for medical screening, comprehensive check-ups, or other diagnostic services for service members with combat experience during military service, providing priority access to these services. A key condition for implementing this initiative should be the prompt conduct of examinations, adapted to the limited leave timeframe, which would allow service members to obtain complete information about their health condition without excessive bureaucratic burden or time lost waiting.

Regarding family and the close circle

- Provide in strategic documents on personnel policy and social provision for service members of the Defence Forces for the possibility of maintaining family connections and elements of civilian well-being. Treat these factors as key factors influencing service members' motivation to continue serving or to end their service. On this basis, develop and implement appropriate mechanisms for putting these approaches into practice.

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