

Veteran Reintegration in Ukraine

Background

Men and women who have participated in the defence of Ukraine during the Russian annexation of Crimea, the Russian-backed separatists' takeover of parts of Donbass, and subsequently Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as well as Ukrainians that have participated in international military operations abroad, are recognized as veterans. Currently, the estimated number of veterans is 1 200 000, a figure expected to increase significantly by the end of the war. Women constitute 22 percent of the Ukrainian armed forces and, eventually, of the veteran population.

Why is the veteran issue crucial to Ukraine's post-war reconstruction?

The reintegration of Ukrainian veterans is pivotal for the social and physical reconstruction of the country. The group could represent more than 10 percent of Ukraine's working-age population by the end of the war, and will be crucial for the reconstruction, economic development, and social cohesion of the country. From a political perspective, the group needs mechanisms to channel their needs and participate in the public debate without the risk of radicalization or overshadowing other issues on the political agenda.

Reintegration is the process where men and women transition from a military structure to becoming part of civilian society. Successful reintegration is a socio-economic process where the individual perceives themselves, and is viewed by their surroundings, as an integral part of society, meanwhile being able to sustain an economic standard that meets their basic needs, as well as being able to actively influence their local community. It is an active process based on the will of the

reintegrating individual combined with the local community's receptive attitude and capacity.



What are the challenges?

Veterans are a heterogeneous group with different needs, capacities, and expectations for civilian life. Physical and/or mental disabilities are common, limiting veterans' ability to engage in the labour market and become part of social life, which can lead to a worsened mental health, substance abuse, higher levels of domestic violence, and social isolation.

Some veterans with political capital may seek prominent political roles in society but may lack necessary skills for effective and inclusive participation, which may have negative consequences for the political landscape. Younger veterans mobilized shortly after leaving often miss the civilian foundations

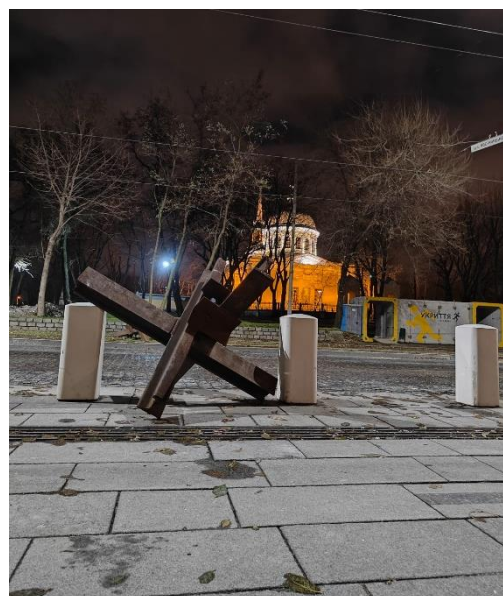
and social safety nets that older veterans can benefit from in the reintegration process.

Challenges affecting the sustainable reintegration of veterans also exist at the national level and in the recipient communities. There is a lack of effective coordination between relevant state and civil society actors, and the policy and legal frameworks in the field are unclear. The absence of a central reintegration policy leads civil society and state structures alike to prioritize offering targeted benefits to veterans. International experiences indicate that a targeted approach over time promotes reintegration by portraying veterans as a privileged group rather than as an integrated part of society.

FBA advocates for a community-based approach to reintegration, where targeted support to veterans aligns with efforts to enhance the capacity of local communities to receive veterans alongside e.g. refugees and internally displaced persons.

Challenges are partly different in liberated and adjacent territories. Social services in these areas are often insufficient to meet the needs of returning IDPs, veterans, and individuals who remained during the Russian occupation. Competition for resources and diverse experiences from the invasion can negatively impact social cohesion in these areas.

Despite the challenges, there are significant opportunities for national and international actors to leverage their strengths to bring about a positive change. Veterans' reintegration is a politically prioritised issue that is gaining momentum, and coordination among actors can lead foster good conditions for progress within the domain.



FBA's offer

FBA is a Swedish government agency under the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, mandated to strengthen the conditions for the sustainable reintegration of veterans in Ukraine. FBA does not finance other actors but, independently or with partners, implements evidence- and experience-based catalytic interventions, provides advice, and offers policy support related to veterans' reintegration. FBA also seconds expertise to national and international institutions and organizations.

Drawing from operational and policy development experience of reintegration in Colombia, DR Congo and the Great Lakes region, Myanmar, Mozambique, and Nigeria, as well as within the UN and EU systems, FBA can provide tailored training and advisory services that meet local needs and conditions. FBA's extensive international network enables effective knowledge sharing between reintegration processes in different parts of the world.