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Social Support for War Veterans in the Social Protection System

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Abstract

War veterans are a vulnerable group due to economic, psychological, medical, and social factors. Modern society is to reintegrate veterans into the social environment, which is only possible through special social support programs. The purpose of the study is to determine the forms, methods, and instruments of social protection useful for Ukrainian social policy based on an analysis of global practices in social support for war veterans. Accordingly, the subject of the study is the global experience of social protection for war veterans. Methods of scientific research were used: analysis of documents, statistical processing of materials, and generalization of the empirical data obtained. The study yielded the following results. Research into the philosophy of social support in developed countries has shown the main direction of social support for war veterans: to build a ramified, multifactorial, effective system for reintegrating former military personnel into the social environment, rather than limiting oneself to the introduction of compensatory state payments and subsidies. Extensive experience in developing and implementing social support programs around the world shows that there is a need to create conditions for the resocialization of military personnel through state programs and the active participation of civil society. The Ukrainian state and society must accept the best patterns of the experience of the prominent countries of social aid for building their own system designed to address all the social problems of war veterans, which, unfortunately, is still ongoing.

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Keywords: social policy, war veterans, social support, state policy, social protection, social programs.

Introduction

One of the bloodiest wars in Europe in the XXI century has been going on for four years now. In addition to military, geopolitical, social, and economic problems, this war has given rise to the phenomenon of veteranism, which will require separate attention from the state, society, and civil society. The topic of social support for veterans of the armed forces, military conflicts, and other categories is not new in global practice. That is why summarizing global experience for its practical implementation in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war is a pressing task for modern science.

The aim of the study is to identify forms, methods, and instruments of social protection that can be used in Ukrainian social policy based on an analysis of global practices in providing social support to war veterans. Accordingly, the subject of the study is global experience in providing social protection to war veterans.

Literature Review

The topic of social protection for veterans is multifaceted and interdisciplinary. Among the main aspects developed in scientific literature, the following can be highlighted: social protection for veterans who are unable to earn a legal income (Newman & Lendák-Kabók, 2024); psychological protection aimed at overcoming Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (further – PTSD), severe psychological trauma, etc. (Hrynzovskyi *et al.*, 2022); the issue of economic integration of veterans after demobilization (Burtin, 2020); the heroization of veterans by grateful descendants, etc.

Among the most important topics of social protection are economic ones, i.e., the usefulness of veterans in civilian life. Researchers (McDermott, 2022, Geraci *et al.*, 2023) note the role of veterans in the economic life of the country, the return of former military personnel to the economic environment, especially in cases where demobilization coincides with the conversion of production. Scientific literature has developed stable terms that define the economic aspects of social protection for veterans: reintegration (Geraci *et al.*, 2023), incorporation (Britch *et al.*, 2024), adaptation (McDermott, 2007), etc.

Considering the circumstances of a veteran who has been removed from their usual way of life and social environment for a long time and has been forced to engage in activities that are not typical for them (military service, which for most veterans is not their profession). Accordingly, veterans lose not only the skills of

being in their society, but also their work experience, professional qualifications and others. According to McDermott (2022), employers should understand that by hiring a veteran, they will get a responsible person who is capable of effectively solving production tasks.

The psychological aspects of social support address the issue of psychological trauma, which is common to all combatants, psychological disorders, and ways to treat them (Mack *et al.*, 2023; Na *et al.*, 2022). The term rehabilitation (Sayer *et al.*, 2021) is widely used in the scientific community, taking into account the personal psychological problems of individuals and the social aspects of their reintegration into society. The work of Scoglio *et al.* (2023) analyzes data obtained from a longitudinal psychological study on the main psychological problems of veterans caused by psychological trauma and PTSD. According to their testimony, 40% of the veterans surveyed experienced problems with resocialization, 56% experienced communication difficulties, and most veterans felt alienated from their family and loved ones (Scoglio *et al.*, 2023). A separate question concerned psychological trauma, which was pointed out by (Cloitre *et al.*, 2012) and (Vranceanu *et al.*, 2007). This includes post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, severe forms of depression, etc. Rehabilitation tasks were seen as the application of professional psychological assistance and social support for the resocialization of military personnel.

The political and cultural aspects of social protection for veterans were considered in the work (Burtin, 2020). Aspects of increased political activity were taken into account (after each major war, a general, a hero of that war, became the American president—Grant, Eisenhower, etc.). Rettray and colleagues (Rettray *et al.*, 2023) showed that war veterans have a more acute perception of social injustice, their psychological state is quite vulnerable, and therefore they actively participate in various civil society actions. Culturally, veterans often become the founders of new art forms (soldier songs, soldier poetry, etc.). The spread of this artistic wave is becoming the subject of state policy in the field of culture, as the rest of society, which did not participate in military operations, has mixed feelings of gratitude for military exploits and guilt that someone else was responsible for their security issues.

A separate place in the scientific literature on the issue we have outlined is occupied by questions of state policy in the field of social protection of veterans. The regulatory and legal framework of state policy, the main directions of financial, economic, social, and cultural assistance are being studied. Considerable attention is paid to persons with disabilities who were injured during combat operations.

Thus, a review of the scientific literature has allowed us to outline the main directions of this study: forms, methods, and instruments of social assistance to war veterans in countries around the world.

Methodology

Scientific publications from various countries around the world, mainly Europe and the United States, were used as research materials, but African and Southeast Asian countries were selected for contrast. The research methods included document analysis, statistical processing of materials, and generalization of the empirical data obtained.

Results

Effective state social protection policy is impossible without a clear understanding of the policy's target audience and its needs. Among the most pressing tasks is the creation of a precise, legally recognized, and defined concept of war veteran status. It has become clear that government officials in different countries attach different meanings to this term. Here are some solutions to this problem in different countries around the world (Table 1).

Table 1. Definition of veteran status in different countries around the world

Country	Requirements for recognition of veteran status
United Kingdom	One (!) day of military service is sufficient
Australia, Netherlands	Participant in combat operations, including peacekeeping operations
United States	Only military personnel, reservists, and National Guard members are excluded. Participants in the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.
Croatia	Participants in World War II (Yugoslav partisans), participants in the 1991–1995 Patriotic War, as well as military personnel who served in the army after 1996
Estonia	Participants in the Defense Forces, including participants in peacekeeping operations. Please note that World War II veterans are excluded from the list.
Czech Republic	Participants in peacekeeping contingents (after 1945) in war zones or zones of increased military danger for 90 days, or those who served in foreign military missions during a calendar year (Laštovkova <i>et al.</i> , 2024).
South Africa	Participant in the war of liberation 1960-1994; military personnel who served in the Union Defense Forces until 1964; or discharged from military service in the South African National Defense Forces after 1994 (Heinecken & Bwalya, 2013).

Ukraine	combatants, persons with disabilities as a result of war, war veterans, including those who participated in all forms of armed struggle for Ukraine's independence in the 20th century.
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Source: compiled by the authors using material from (Truusa et al., 2019)

The second important issue is establishing a statistically significant number of representatives in this category in order to understand the scope and direction of state policy on social protection for war veterans.

Using the example of the United States, we will try to estimate the number of veterans in need of social protection, given that only representatives of the professional, i.e., contract army, participated in the wars of the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries. This example was not chosen by chance, as the United States officially participated in many military conflicts in the second half of the 20th century. According to estimates (Schaeffer, 2023), there were 18 million veterans in 2023, accounting for 6% of the country's population. Detailed information on the categories of veterans is presented in the diagrams prepared by Katherine Schaeffer.

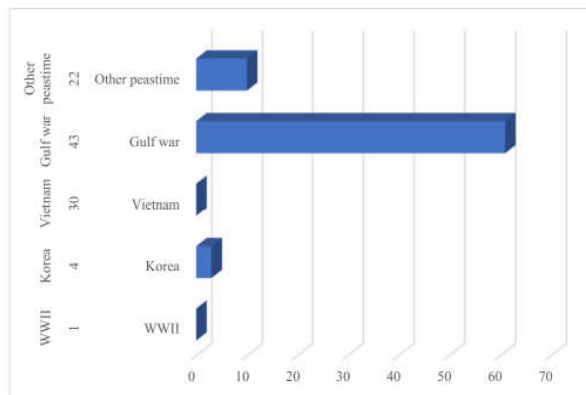


Figure 1. Social composition of veterans in the US

Source: Schaeffer (2023)

The exact number of war veterans in the UK is unknown. According to rough estimates, it is about 2 million people, which is about 3% of the population (Iversen et al., 2005). Of the estimated number of UK armed forces veterans in England and Wales in 2021, 13.6% (251,400) were women (13.8% in Wales and 13.5% in England) and 86.4% (1,601,705) were men (86.2% in Wales and 86.5% in England). Almost a third (31.8% or 589,640) of veterans were aged 80 and

over, reflecting the policy of the National Service (1939–1960), including military service (until 1948) (Office for National Statistics, 2023).

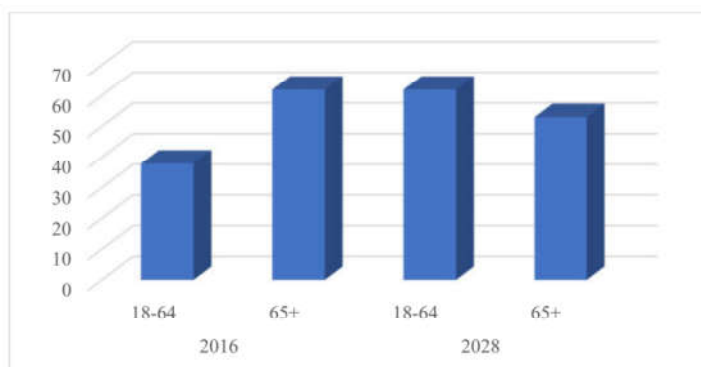


Figure 2. Age characteristics of British war veterans

Source: Office for National Statistics (2023)

At the other end of the spectrum in terms of the number of war veterans is the Czech Republic. In the Czech Republic, the number of veterans is determined by several categories: World War II veterans – 107,254 people, veterans of modern wars – 16,200 people, and veterans of the struggle against the communist regime – the exact number is unknown. In relation to the country's population, the percentage of war veterans is extremely low (Laštovková *et al.*, 2019).

The size of the war veteran group in each country determines the forms and methods of social support. The more veterans require a special approach, the more complex and costly social policy for these categories of the population must be. The American system of social support for war veterans fully corresponds to our observations. At the federal level, a Department of Veterans Affairs has been created, whose task is to develop a strategy for social programs for this category of the population. Each veteran receives special tax-free payments (about \$4,000). Special federal programs have been created, such as the Justice Program. The Disability Act is in force, under which the relevant categories receive preferential treatment and broad social support (Gade, 2013). A special social reintegration program (Community Reintegration) has been introduced (Heuer *et al.*, 2025). The program is designed to address the main problems of veterans: stable employment, financial and housing problems, physical and mental health, social and family relationships. Psychological assistance is based on a peer support program. This program is a type of social and emotional support, often combined with instrumental support, offered to people with mental disorders to share personal

experiences with the prospect of achieving desired social and personal growth (Odom *et al.*, 2024; Rattray *et al.*, 2024).

The British experience of social support is comprehensive and multifaceted. The country has established a system for retraining former military personnel from top to bottom in management, social skills, and technical professions (Stoflet, 2022; NHS England and NHS Improvement, n.d.). Research (McDermott, 2007) shows that most veterans successfully complete the period of involving into economy. Recently, the country completely changed its attitude towards veterans. In 2018, the “Strategy for Our Veterans” program was adopted, designed to run until 2028. At the state level, there is a Minister for Veterans Affairs, and in 2019, the Office for Veterans Affairs was created, headed by the aforementioned minister. There is also a Social Security Service for Veterans. New social support measures include several options for veterans’ pensions, free medical support, and employment programs with the high level of priority. The state allocates additional funds for veterans who is going to start their own business (Personalized care, 2019).

The Czech case of social support has three main directions: economics, social development, and medical guide. Economic support includes a system of training, retraining, and finding alternative employment options. Research (Meca, 2011) refers to the effectiveness of this economic model of veteran support. The social aspect is for the integration of former military people into the social environment. In this case, all veterans are divided into several categories: those in active service, those discharged to the reserve but economically active, and those discharged to retirement. For all categories, there were organized three Community Centers for War Veterans, where a series of public activities aimed at socializing veterans are organized, and hospitals for veterans operate at these centers. Care Homes for War Veterans have been organized for former military personnel with special needs (Laštovková, 2019). These measures partially address the medical problem. Professional medical care is also provided by municipal medical institutions through a system of financing, individual consultations, etc. The social status of veterans is supported by various cultural and social activities directed to enhance the prestige of the military man, the role of veterans in Czech society, etc.

To compare the forms and instruments of social support, let us check the countries where military operations were conducted relatively recently, namely South Africa. Social support in these countries has a clearly compensatory character, aimed to renew the economic and social possibilities of war veterans, often from civil wars lasted in these states for a fairly long time. In Zimbabwe, veterans received a small amount of money to start a private business, undergo professional retraining, or as a pension (Mazarire & Rupiya, 2000, Sadomba, 2008). In Mozambique, former military personnel were allowed to have plots of land to set up farms (Alden, 2002). In Namibia, veterans received grants for retraining, and a special state

employment program was launched for them. In Angola, independence fighters and their children received monthly pensions, annual subsidies, their own car, and the right to travel abroad free of charge each year for medical treatment. However, these forms of social support for veterans became the subject of a corruption scheme, which caused justified outrage among the military. In 1997, the War Veterans Compensation Scheme was launched, which was managed by the Ministry of War Veterans Affairs. This led to huge unbudgeted payments and some extra privileges and grants to former combatants, which were distributed on unclear grounds. These generous grants soon led to lots of state expenditures, inflation rose sharply and the economy began to decline. Veterans were involved into political manipulation by President Robert Mugabe, who encouraged them to seize thousands of farms belonging to white people (Mazarire & Rupiya, 2000). Such social support caused mass protests by veterans who felt cheated by the state and abandoned by society.

The main forms and methods of providing social support to war veterans are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Main forms and methods of state social assistance to war veterans

Form of assistance	Discharged military personnel	Veterans with special needs
Pension payments	Cash payments depend on the type of service, length of military service, and personal participation in combat operations	Special compensation for loss of working capacity or necessary medical care
Education and employment	Special government programs for job search, professional retraining, benefits for professional or academic training, including priority enrollment in educational programs	Additional expenses for the employment of persons with special needs, including part-time or part-week employment
Medical care	Creation of programs for preferential or free treatment, medical rehabilitation, etc.	Free provision of medical services, prostheses, etc.
Psychological support	Development of psychological assistance programs, provision of individual consultations, other forms of psychological support (e.g., peer groups in the US)	Provision of all forms of psychological assistance, including clinical assistance on a preferential or free basis.

Housing assistance	Provision of preferential loans for the purchase of housing, assistance in renting housing, benefits for utility payments, etc.	Creation of special conditions for the use of housing, especially for people with musculoskeletal injuries.
Social assistance	Development and implementation of various forms of socialization for former military personnel, necessary legal support	Enabling persons with special needs to become full members of society through numerous inclusion programs.

Source: created by the authors

Discussion

The studied cases of social policy in leading countries of the world testify the desire of the society to thank their veterans for their fight with special social support programs so that the veterans themselves feel their place in society, adapt to the social environment as quickly as possible, and restore their social communication skills. At the same time, these programs demonstrate society's understanding of the psychological problems veterans face, acquired during a period when they risked their lives on the battlefield. Figuratively speaking, social aid is not a crutch for veterans, but a guide, a gentle mentor who will lead them into a peaceful life.

There are many commons and differences in the forms of social support for veterans in different countries. The methods and tools include financial, social and medical aid. The common reintegration mechanisms are: different types of pensions, psychological support, training of soft skills, internships, informal and academic education, job search assistance, access to land and socialization support (Heuer *et al.*, 2025).

Comparing social support cases for different countries, we can note that there is a obvious correlation between the quantity of veterans and the number of social programs. The most extensive and multifaceted system has been developed in the US, as it concerns almost 6% of the country's population. Official state structures and programs have been developed and implemented to involve veterans in social life.

The British experience is focused on a smaller population, only about 3%, so the social support system is less institutionalized, uses fewer state resources, and actively involves civil society structures, etc. It should be noted that the British system of social support for veterans was really changed that seriously improved it (Grover *et al.*, 2025).

The Czech program of social support for war veterans shows that even limited resources and minimal formalization of state influence are enough to build a fairly effective system of social protection for former military personnel. The only condition is that the number of veterans in the country should be relatively small – less than 1% of the population.

The African case of social assistance to war veterans depicted that ineffective management of social programs can lead to their discrediting in society and to mass social protests (South African Department of Defence, 1998).

Because of the limited scope of our study, we did not examine informal forms and methods of social assistance to veterans, which are more akin to civil society structures: veterans' associations, volunteer organizations, interest clubs, charitable organizations, etc. This topic deserves separate study.

Conclusion

We understood the philosophy of the social support policies for war veterans in leading countries around the world – they don't encourage consumerist attitudes among former military personnel by handing out social subsidies and payments, but to organize the effective come back of former military personnel to civilian life and help them adapting to their social environment.

State structures and civil society units must create real possibilities for the reintegration of war veterans into society through a series of social programs, different kinds of the economic activities, wide access to psychological support, and the open space in political, social, cultural, and other initiatives coming from the veteran community. This should combine with the address payments in the form of pensions, etc. Direct financial assistance should be provided only for those categories of war veterans who have lost the opportunity for self-realization because of physical or psychological trauma leading to disability, or to those who need special targeted financial support.

For post-war Ukraine, the experience of social support for veterans should become a source of methods and instruments of social policy that could be aimed to solve complex social problems in the nearest perspective. It should be clear that elements of veteran policy can also be applied to the Ukrainian citizens, which also found itself in a difficult psychological situation during the war and has serious problems with PTSD, post-traumatic conditions, etc. Ukraine should also start the special program to reintegrate numerous refugees into society, but it would be the topic of our next research. The case of African countries shows that state programs for the social support of veterans must be under strict control by the public and veteran activists in order to prevent their discrediting.

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