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Towards coherent policies on veterans in Europe

Report[1]
Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development
Rapporteur: Ms Lesia ZABURANNA, Ukraine, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

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1. Reference to committee: Doc. 16280, Reference 4922 of 26 January 2026.

A. Draft resolution[2]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly draws attention to the fact that Europe today faces the largest cohort of veterans since the Second World War, due to the full-scale war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which has already resulted in more than 2 million veterans.

2. Moreover, the geopolitical context and changes in the European security environment leading to increased defence spending and the reintroduction of military service in several member States mean that veteran populations are likely to increase across Europe in the coming decades.

3. The Assembly expresses its full respect and support for those who served in defence of Ukraine and the principles of democracy, sovereignty and international law in Europe. It calls for vigorous measures to be taken to ensure that as veterans of this war their human rights and dignity are placed at the forefront and respected.

4. It emphasises the importance of a strong veteran policy at national, regional and local levels as a pillar of social cohesion and stability, and as a matter of human rights protection.

5. The Assembly highlights the necessity for European countries to work together and take immediate steps to devise and co-ordinate a comprehensive, whole-of-life standard of support for veterans and their families, covering mental health, rehabilitation, employment, education, housing and recognition, as anchored in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163, "the revised Charter"). It calls on member States of the Council of Europe to:

5.1. enact or update legislation defining "veteran" as including any person who has performed military service in the armed forces of their country – including military personnel, conscripts, reservists, peacekeepers, personnel of recognised resistance and territorial-defence formations;

5.2. guarantee a comprehensive minimum support package for veterans, with formal recognition of their status, designed around a well-being framework covering physical and mental health, relationships and recognition, vocation, material security, housing and the physical environment, and life skills. Such package should include physical rehabilitation and prosthetics, mental health and suicide prevention, social protection, access to employment and education/reskilling, housing assistance, and legal and financial support. It should include a system of personalised support provided by qualified specialists. It should also establish a defined recovery period of at least three years following discharge from military service, during which the State shall provide enhanced, co-ordinated support for veterans' physical, psychological, social, professional and everyday-life recovery;

5.3. introduce national legislation requiring public bodies to take due account of veterans' needs in the areas of health, housing, education and employment;

5.4. establish a single national contact point responsible for matters relating to veterans, with the power to co-ordinate between ministries, agencies and public bodies;

5.5. ensure that public registries and data systems track the multiplicity of statuses that a single veteran may hold simultaneously – such as veteran, internally displaced person, person with a disability, or person in difficult life circumstances – so that entitlements are co-ordinated and the individual is not treated as several separate cases;

5.6. build a digital, single window service ecosystem incorporating State and charitable sector organisations and a veterans' registry;

5.7. earmark dedicated budget lines for mental health and trauma services, prosthetics and rehabilitation, women veterans, and family carers, subject to annual parliamentary review;

5.8. facilitate return to work by taking all necessary measures to eliminate discrimination in employment, recognising military qualifications for the purposes of obtaining a civilian qualification, and supporting entrepreneurship and employment amongst veterans through grants and "veteran-friendly employer" certification;

5.9. ensure the portability of veterans' rights across member States of the Council of Europe by establishing agreements between States, in particular regarding the recognition of disability status, access to healthcare and transferability of pension rights;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 10 September 2026.

5.10. provide mental health support to veterans and their families in order to prevent and combat domestic violence;

5.11. provide specialised pathways for former prisoners of war and survivors of torture, including documentation that can serve national or international accountability processes;

5.12. strengthen international co-operation, assistance and exchange of experience in veteran policy;

5.13. support Ukraine, currently absorbing Europe's largest veteran cohort, in consolidating its system for veterans across all levels of government.

6. The Assembly calls on member States to cover family members of the fallen and personnel missing in action in a parallel framework.

7. It calls on Ukraine and the Council of Europe Development Bank to step up their co-operation in operations to support reconstruction, social cohesion and inclusive growth as a part of the Bank's engagement in the country.

8. Finally, it calls on member States that have not yet done so, to sign and ratify the revised Charter, with a view to ensuring that the social rights of veterans and their families are fully protected.

B. Draft recommendation[3]

1. Referring to its Resolution … (2026) "Towards coherent policies on veterans in Europe", the Parliamentary Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

1.1. draw up a recommendation on the rights and well-being of veterans, aligned with the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) which will be the first European text to set out common human rights standards for veterans. This recommendation should include guidance on veteran mental health, employment and career transition for veterans and combat-related disabilities, and should be developed in collaboration with the relevant international organisations and bodies, such as the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Union, and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the United Nations;

1.2. prioritise and develop, in the next Council of Europe Action Plan "Democratic Security for Ukraine", specific actions towards veterans, through support to Ukraine in building and sustaining a veteran policy across employment, healthcare, housing, education, social policies, recognising coherent veteran support as a contribution to social cohesion, democratic stability and the protection of human rights, including by considering ways to strengthen the Council of Europe's presence in Ukraine and dedicated capacity in Ukraine, in order to support Ukraine in collecting, analysing and sharing lessons learned and good practices, with a view to share them with other Council of Europe's member States, and in co-ordinating the support and efforts of the Organisation's member States.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 10 September 2026.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Lesia Zaburanna, rapporteur[4]

1. Introduction

1. The Russian Federation full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine has produced the largest cohort of combat veterans in Europe since the Second World War.[5] In Ukraine, the number of veterans and their family members totals 5-6 million, or approximately 15 % of Ukraine's 38 million population.[6] More than 2 million people hold veteran status. Of the total 2,014,623 veterans, 1,471,193 have the status of combatant (UChB), while 159,132 have been granted the status of a person with a war-related disability. While conscription applies to men aged 25-60, the average age of a veteran is estimated to be around 45 years. Over 75 000 women serve in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, constituting 21 % of the officer corps.[7] In addition, increasing rearmament and the reintroduction of conscription in some countries signals that veteran communities across Europe will continue to grow in coming years. Historical experience shows that veteran reintegration is a decades-long endeavour requiring planning, resources, and policy of inclusiveness. For example, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) prevalence among Balkans veterans remained high a decade after the fighting.[8]

2. However, Europe's current approach is deeply fragmented: definitions vary, entitlements and rights granted are inconsistent, and vulnerable groups such as women veterans, family carers and cross-border veterans are systematically underserved. The rapporteur believes that successful policies and actions in this area will strengthen social cohesion, democratic stability and human rights at national and European level and will serve as a valuable benchmark for assessing the ability of European countries to provide veterans with the dignified life they deserve.

3. For the purpose of the report, the rapporteur took into consideration the hearings of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development that were held in the framework of the preparation of the report of Mr Jan Filip Libicki (Poland, EPP/CD) on "The need for systemic support to Ukrainian soldiers who became disabled as a result of hostilities"[9] and of the joint hearing held on veterans with disabilities by the same committee and the sub-committee on Disability, Multiple and Intersectional Discrimination (of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination).[10] She drew on historical experience and effective national policies to develop a European benchmark for veterans' human rights.

4. In the course of preparing this report, the rapporteur conducted detailed substantive consultations with a number of civil society organisations working on veteran policy in Ukraine, including Veteran Hub (Ветеран Хаб),[11] Principle (Принцип),[12] Legal Hundred (Юридична сотня)[13] and Place of Opportunities (Простір Можливостей).[14] These organisations have produced a comprehensive policy framework for Ukrainian veterans, including a well-being model, veteran journey mapping, target support models for different veteran profiles and their families, and financial calculations for proposed entitlements. Their work, carried out in partnership with the Ministry for Veterans Affairs, contributed significantly to the evidence base and policy proposals underpinning this report.

2. Defining "veteran" in a European context: scope and inclusivity

5. National definitions of "veteran" ("ancient combattant" in French[15]) range from narrow (combat or international operations abroad only) to broad (any military service, including conscription and reserve as in Ukraine and France). Indeed, a comparative analysis of the definitions used in different countries reveals a very wide range of concepts. At the narrow end, several Nordic States reserve "veteran" for those who served in combat or international operations abroad. At the broad end, countries such as France and the United

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4. This explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.
5. For the scale of the issue in Ukraine, see: OECD Policy paper (2026) "Ukraine veteran support".
6. Ukraine veteran cohort projected at 5-6 million including families: Ministry for Veterans Affairs forecast, reported by The Ukrainian Week, "Careers, business, digitalisation: Ukraine rethinks its veteran policy", 27 April 2026.
7. "Ukraine's veterans policy", European Parliament Briefing, 9 April 2026.
8. "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Kosovo Veterans", Mimoza Shahini and Merita Shala, March 2016; Ivana Nikolic, "Neglected Wartime Traumas Haunt Serbian Soldiers", 12 June 2015.
9. Minutes of the hearing on 4 December 2025; minutes of the hearing on 6 February 2026.
10. Minutes of the joint hearing on 23 June 2026. [The link will be added once the minutes have been declassified]
11. https://veteranhub.com.ua/.
12. www.pryncyp.org/en/.
13. https://legal100.org.ua/en/.
14. https://restartukraine.com.ua/.

Kingdom extend the term to anyone who has served, including national-service conscripts and reservists. The United States ties the status to active-duty service and discharge conditions, then layers entitlements by service-connection. Ukraine, set by the Law "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection" and administered by the Ministry for Veterans Affairs, recognises distinct legal categories – combatants (UBD), persons with a war-related disability (OIVV), and family members of the fallen (ChSZ) – and increasingly frames the whole community as “Defenders of Ukraine” (“Захисники і Захисниці”), women and men. In Ukraine, foreign nationals and stateless persons who have served side by side with Ukrainians in the ranks of the Defence Forces have the same right to recognition of their contribution as Ukrainian citizens. Ukraine guarantees equal access to obtaining Veteran Status for all service members, irrespective of citizenship.[16] In Ukraine, the protective status is acquired even before the end of military service.

6. A narrow definition leaves combat-wounded conscripts, reservists, territorial-defence personnel and the families of the fallen outside the entitlement perimeter at the moment they most need protection.

7. The rapporteur is in favour of a shared definition across the continent that helps determine entitlement, statistical comparability, cross-border portability of rights and parliamentary oversight.

8. In addition, she favours the more comprehensive end of this spectrum – a definition wide enough to capture all who served and those who depend on them. Indeed, a comprehensive definition should ensure the inclusion of combat-wounded, all persons who served independently of their gender, sexual orientation and backgrounds, international volunteers, former prisoners of war, and families of the fallen.

9. The rapporteur thus proposes a working definition as a starting point for consideration, wide enough to encompass all who served in the armed forces and those who depend on them, while leaving the calibration of specific entitlements to member States. The following definition is therefore proposed: any person who has performed military service in the armed forces of a member State – including conscripts, reservists, peacekeepers, personnel of recognised resistance and territorial-defence formations – and who has been released from such service. Family members of the fallen and personnel missing in action should be covered by a parallel framework.

10. Furthermore, tailored attention should be paid to the following categories: combat-wounded and veterans with disabilitie,[17] women veterans, LGBTI veterans, veterans from minority and migrant backgrounds, veterans of international missions, former prisoners of war, and veterans returning from active conflict.

3. Historical experience of the reintegration of veterans after 1945

11. Europe and the USA have faced and dealt with the question of caring for veterans before, and the post-1945 record is the closest precedent for the scale now facing the continent. The demobilisation after the Second World War returned tens of millions of combatants to civilian life within a few years. The systems built to absorb them – and the places where those systems failed – are not history for its own sake. They are a tested evidence base for the standard this report proposes. Three lessons emerge, each of which maps onto an operative conclusion, as described below.

12. First, a comprehensive economic package works. The United States Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 – the “GI Bill of Rights” – bundled funded education and training, guaranteed home loans and unemployment support into a single entitlement. It moved millions of veterans through universities and into home ownership within a decade[18] and is widely credited with building the post-war American middle class. The lesson is structural: the domains this report treats as a connected whole-of-life standard (education, housing, employment) deliver most when they are guaranteed together rather than as disconnected benefits.

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15. The status of “ancient combatant” is a legal status recognised by a country’s military and civil authorities for any person who has served under their authority during a war. It entitles the holder to certain benefits and an enhanced retirement pension.

The term is distinct from that of “veteran”, which, in France for example, in its military sense, refers to any soldier with a long record of service. In the United States, on the other hand, the term “veteran” refers to an individual who has served in uniform in an armed conflict, regardless of its duration, and who has survived it. In France, the “carte du combattant” (“combatant’s card”) is awarded to anyone who has spent more than 120 days in a theatre of operations. Those who have been wounded are also eligible Combattant(e) d’hier et d’aujourd’hui | ONaCVG (French only).

16. Combatant Status for foreign nationals: rights and granting procedure | MoD News.

17. Concerning veterans with disabilities, the rapporteur refers to the report by Mr Jan Filip Libicki (Poland, EPP/CD) entitled “The need for systemic support to Ukrainian soldiers who became disabled as a result of hostilities” (Doc.16464).

18. “Research Starters: The GI Bill” | The National WWII Museum | New Orleans.

13. Second, selective or neglectful systems entrench grievance. The same "GI Bill" that built a middle class delivered its benefits unequally: administered through local and segregated institutions, it largely excluded Black veterans from its housing and education gains, widening rather than closing a social divide.[19] In the Soviet Union, disabled Second World War veterans were celebrated in official rhetoric but often received inadequate support in practice. Although accounts of the systematic removal of disabled veterans from major cities have become part of popular historical memory, recent archival research suggests that these narratives considerably overstate what actually occurred. Nevertheless, the marginalisation of many disabled veterans remains well documented. The two cases point the same way: where support is selective, late or used to make veterans invisible, the cost is paid in social fracture. This is the historical form of the "postcode lottery" and the social-cohesion risk. This is why the report frames veteran support as a human-rights obligation rather than discretionary welfare.

14. Third, mental health was the systematic blind spot, and returning captives were not always allowed a dedicated track to meet their specific needs. Post-war systems were built around the visible wound. Psychological injury – then "combat fatigue" or "war neurosis" – was under-recognised and under-treated for decades, a gap whose consequences surfaced long after the parades ended. Among them, returning prisoners of war were a distinct case. For example, the Federal Republic of Germany legislated specifically for them in its 1950 Heimkehrergesetz (Returnees Law) as hundreds of thousands came back from Soviet captivity, acknowledging that captivity demanded its own legal and material response.[20] Both points are covered in this report – the standardised mental-health entitlement and the specialised prisoners of war and torture-survivor pathways that Ukraine is building today.

15. In addition, two institutional legacies of this period still shape European practice. France consolidated its veterans' administration around the "Office national des anciens combattants" (today "Office national des combattants et des victimes de guerre" or ONaCVG[21]), giving veterans a permanent public interlocutor. The United Kingdom chose instead to absorb most veteran needs into universal post-war institutions, the National Health Service (NHS) from 1948 among them,[22] supplemented by a strong charitable sector. The two routes – a dedicated focal point versus integration into mainstream services – frame the institutional choice member States still face.

16. The overarching lesson is that societies that planned reintegration in advance, and resourced it generously and inclusively, fared better than those that improvised after the fact. Europe is once again facing its largest veteran cohort since 1945. The rapporteur strongly believes that it is time to establish the standard before the need peaks, rather than decades later.

4. Importance of a coherent veteran policy today in Europe: a human rights obligation

17. Four structural failures underlie the European veteran file. First, fragmentation: no shared definition as described above, no minimum standards, no Council of Europe instrument – veteran status remains a national silo. Second, an invisible burden: mental health, women veterans, family carers and cross-border veterans are systematically under-counted and under-resourced. Third, a postcode lottery: entitlements depend on where a veteran lives, within and between States, in big cities or in rural zones. Fourth, reactive policymaking: States build systems late and under pressure, resulting in lost opportunities for cross-learning and a patchwork of benefits. Historical lessons from post-1945 reintegration highlight the need for comprehensive, connected support packages and caution against selective, neglectful or invisible systems.

18. The rapporteur believes that veteran policy must move beyond welfare, becoming a pillar of social cohesion and democratic stability. Conversely, inaction carries a direct cost to these. Large veteran cohorts that are left unsupported do not remain quiet: unmet medical both physical and mental-health needs, joblessness and a sense of broken faith with the State feed isolation, family breakdown, substance misuse and elevated suicide. Perceived neglect hardens into grievance that anti-democratic and hostile actors are quick to exploit. Ukraine's own data already register the strain: 24 % of veterans perceive community tensions, nearly double the non-veteran rate.[23] Veteran policy is therefore not only a welfare question but a question of social cohesion, democratic stability and the protection of human rights; where support fails, the cost is paid in fractured communities, not in budget lines alone.

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19. "Not all WWII veterans benefited equally from the GI Bill" | The Heller School.
20. "Returning Memories Former Prisoners of War in Divided and Reunited Germany", Christiane Wienand, publisher Boydell & Brewer, 2021, summary published online by Cambridge University Press.
21. Les missions de l'ONaCVG (French only).
22. NHS website: "Healthcare for the armed forces community".

19. The risks of inadequate veteran policy extend beyond social tension. Unmet real needs, combined with declarative rather than substantive state support and irrational public spending, create a cascading chain of negative consequences: social discontent leads to destabilisation, which in turn undermines mobilisation capacity; fear of repeated conscription drives emigration of working-age population; veterans may seek employment with foreign private military companies; and reduced economic participation diminishes tax revenue. In addition, a large dissatisfied veteran cohort creates a vulnerability to manipulation by hostile actors, particularly during election cycles.

20. The Council of Europe's unique role is then to frame veterans' welfare as a human-rights obligation, using its legal instruments to set standards across member States. The rapporteur considers that veteran policy should also be viewed through the lens of human rights and social rights, complementing national defence policies.

21. She believes that the Council of Europe is the best place to draw up a recommendation for member States on the rights and well-being of veterans. As a starting point, she would like to recall the fundamental rights described in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) (the Convention) and the European Social Charter (revised), ETS No. 163, "the revised Charter" (ESC (Revised)), as basic provisions for drafting such a recommendation, in the following table:

Areas of concern	**The Convention / ESC (Revised) provisions**
Suicide prevention; quality of medical care	Art. 2 of the Convention (positive obligation to protect life)
Denial of essential care to the combat-wounded	Art. 3 of the Convention (inhuman or degrading treatment)
Mental health, housing, family reunion	Art. 8 of the Convention (private and family life)
Non-discrimination (women, disabled, LGBTI veterans)	Art. 14[24] of the Convention
Pensions and compensation	Protocol 1, Art. 1 of the Convention
Health protection; social security; medical assistance	Art. 11, 12, 13 of the ESC (Revised)
Rights of persons with disabilities	Art. 15[25] of the ESC (Revised)
Protection against poverty and exclusion	Art. 30 of the ESC (Revised)
Right to housing	Art. 31 of the ESC (Revised)
Non-discrimination	Article E of the ESC (Revised)

22. The rapporteur also welcomes the relevance of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine, entitled "Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction" covering the years 2023 to 2026.[26] For example, within this framework, the Council of Europe Project "Strengthening the social dimension in Ukraine"[27] aims to ensure that general public and people from vulnerable groups, including war-affected population in Ukraine, benefit from targeted social protection and support. The rapporteur would like the issue of war veterans to be given greater attention in the forthcoming action plan.

23. The rapporteur will next move to gap-mapping and the policy model.

5. Mapping the gaps: areas requiring urgent action

24. Research[28] and practice reveal significant gaps across healthcare, mental health, disability access, employment, education, housing, social reintegration, discrimination, family support, support for former prisoners of war, cross-border veterans, data and oversight.

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23. International Organization for Migration (IOM), March 2025, "Thematic brief – Veteran Profiles and Reintegration Challenges in Ukraine".
24. See also the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention").
25. See also the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
26. Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine "Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction" 2023-2026.
27. Council of Europe project "Strengthening the social dimension in Ukraine".
28. See, for example, Hannah Johnstone, "'The Best Place to Be a Veteran' (?): An Examination of the Current Veteran Experience Within the United Kingdom", Journal of veterans studies, March 2024; Jack Stai, "Homelessness Among U.S. Veterans: Critical Perspectives", Oxford University Press, December 2018; Nathaniel Herzberg, "Les anciens combattants étrangers demandent justice à l'État français", article published in Le Monde on 10-11 November 1996, Website of the NGO GISTI (Groupe d'information et de soutien des immigré·es / Information and Support Group for Migrants) (French only).

25. The first gap concerns healthcare and rehabilitation. By December 2024, 40 % of veterans in Ukraine cited a need for medical care, significantly above non-veterans (30 %).[29] Additional evidence suggests that many injured veterans receive neither timely nor adequate services in State hospitals, prompting them to seek costly private options.[30] Long waits within the State healthcare system are driving veterans towards costly private care; there is unequal access to prosthetics, rehabilitation for brain injuries and complex trauma surgery. Member States must quickly provide complete medical rehabilitation and prosthetics.

26. The second area concerned is that of mental health and suicide. PTSD, depression, substance abuse, psychological trauma and head injuries are just a few examples, all of which are associated with an increased risk of suicide. Stigma deters those affected from seeking help. Peer-support models work but are not harmonised at European level. This issue was rightly highlighted by Mr Libicki in his report.

27. As described in Mr Libicki's report, barrier-free environments for the disabled are essential. Member States should put in place adequate prosthetic supply chains, make accessibility for buildings, transports and workplaces a must-have.

28. Employment, education and reskilling are keys to the return to civilian life. States must facilitate return to work and ensure that skills acquired in a military context can be transferred to the civilian sector, actively combat employer prejudice, provide robust transition services, and guarantee full recognition of military qualifications.

29. Housing and homelessness are a huge issue for veterans. Dedicated pathways exist in the UK but are absent or embryonic in most member States. In Ukraine, the Council of Europe Development Bank has developed housing initiatives, including preferential housing loans for veterans.[31]

30. It is a fact that multiple forms of discrimination prevent their reintegration into society: hiring discrimination; mental-health stigma; and LGBTI veterans (discharged under historical provisions). During the joint hearing of sub-committee on Disability, Multiple and Intersectional Discrimination (of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination) with the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, Ukrainian women soldiers and veterans testified the specific barriers they are facing (motherhood, sexual violence in service, lack of female-only services). They expressed the difficulties to return to civilian life, after living in a military community.

31. Member States must ease the burden on families and carers. Spouses, children and parents carry heavy unpaid care. Bereaved families face procedural and emotional barriers to recognition and compensation.

32. The rapporteur underlines that families of veterans should be formally defined and recognised as beneficiaries of veteran policy from the first day of the veteran's combat experience. Family members requiring recognition include, as a minimum: children of veterans (with unconditional priority for education support, free school and kindergarten meals, and priority enrolment in childcare); spouses and partners, including non-registered partners (with psychological support and medical services as priority entitlements); parents of veterans, especially mothers, where the veteran has no spouse or children; and persons who provide care for a veteran with a disability, regardless of formal family ties. Distinct support tracks should be established for families of veterans with different experiences: families of active service members, families of veterans with disabilities, families of the fallen, families of prisoners of war, and families of those missing in action.

33. Former prisoners of war need specialised medical, psychological, and legal support, and records of their captivity should serve as important evidence for accountability.

34. The situation of cross-border veterans is not always easy. Non-portable pensions, difficulty to obtain the disability status and healthcare for those living outside the State they served is a European issue that should be solved. Foreign volunteers, notably the International Legionnaires fighting in Ukraine,[32] should equally be recognised.

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29. IOM, aforementioned thematic brief.
30. "The Importance of Aiding Ukrainian Veterans", Lena Denman, March 2024, New Lines Institute for strategy and policy.
31. Council of Europe Development Bank's projects in Ukraine.
32. Website of the International Legionnaires.

35. Lastly, there is a lack of data and oversight. Few States collect veteran-specific outcome data. Scrutiny is thin outside the largest militaries. Parliamentarians have a crucial role to play here in reviewing and monitoring the effective implementation and improvement of policies.

6. A policy model designed to cover the human rights of veterans

36. Veterans and their families deserve a unified, comprehensive model of support that responds to every stage of post-service life. For too long, many countries have relied on fragmented, charity-driven systems that leave critical gaps in care and entitlements. The rapporteur proposes a "whole-of-life" standard grounded in binding legal obligations, ensuring that mental health, physical rehabilitation, employment, education, housing, economic agency, family support, and recognition are guaranteed – not discretionary – rights. By anchoring each domain of support to concrete statutory provisions, member States can dismantle bureaucratic fragmentation and deliver genuine well-being for veterans.

37. The rapporteur proposes that such a standard be structured around a comprehensive well-being framework. Well-being is understood as encompassing six interconnected domains: health (physical and mental), relationships and recognition (family, comrades, community), vocation (education, employment and other meaningful activity), material security (finances, legal protection and assets), housing and physical environment (housing, mobility and public space), and life skills and spirituality (resilience, long-term planning, sense of purpose). A policy that addresses only some of these domains, while neglecting others, will fail to achieve sustainable reintegration.

38. Furthermore, support should be explicitly distributed across clearly defined stages of the veteran journey: the beginning of military service (baseline data collection and information about the future pathway), the transition from military to civilian life (planning, bureaucratic simplification), the recovery period, civilian life, retirement and end-of-life care and memorialisation. The rapporteur proposes that member States establish a defined recovery period of at least three years following discharge, during which veterans receive enhanced, proactive support across all domains of well-being. This recovery period should restart if the veteran returns to service and is discharged again.

39. It is essential that public systems recognise the multiplicity of statuses and conditions that a single veteran may experience simultaneously. A veteran may also be an internally displaced person, a person with a disability, or a person in difficult life circumstances. National data systems should track these intersecting statuses so that entitlements are coordinated and no one is treated as multiple separate cases by different agencies.

40. A comparative analysis of selected national policies highlights tested building blocks and lessons from national practice. The rapporteur proposes to directly lift best practice. Examples range from dedicated ministries and integrated digital platforms to statutory commitments such as the UK Armed Forces Covenant, and lifelong service connection presumption as seen in Canada and the United States. The role of digital government – such as Ukraine's Veteran PRO – shows how a single-window portal can overcome traditional barriers and connect veterans to all available services efficiently. The Veteran PRO is a flagship innovation (with a dedicated space in the Diia app), built by the Ministry for Veterans Affairs with the Ministry of Digital Transformation and United Development Programme (UNDP) support.[33] It is a single-window digital ecosystem giving veterans including women veterans and their families one access point to state and local services – social protection and payments, housing and infrastructure, transport and utility benefits, documents and status, education and employment, tax and administrative relief, sport, and business grants – with plain-language "how to apply" guidance and, in Diia, direct services such as finding a veteran support specialist and establishing war-disability status. Historical redress and longitudinal outcome tracking are also benchmarks of modern, responsive systems. Attention is also given to the special needs of women veterans, as seen in the joint hearing on 23 June 2026 and the importance of the Veteranka movement.[34]

33. Ветеран PRO – Державні послуги для ветеранів та ветеранок, www.veteranpro.gov.ua. Diia is Ukraine's digital government app, where citizens can access official documents and public services on their smartphones; UNDP website: Veteran PRO, a separate section for veterans, launched in Diia.

34. Minutes of the joint hearing on 23 June 2026 [The link will be added once the minutes have been declassified]; website of the Veteranka Movement: Veteranka.

41. Ukraine has developed several innovative approaches that may provide valuable lessons for other member States. Its holistic approach combines digital delivery, municipal case management, and advanced rehabilitation, with gender-responsive policy and innovative pathways for prisoners of war and torture survivors. The rapporteur urges member States to study these lessons proactively before their own veteran populations grow, incorporating digital, legal, and case management innovations.

42. Ultimately, comprehensive veteran support anchors the social contract, honours service and strengthens national cohesion. The rapporteur sees it both as a moral imperative and a practical necessity.

7. Conclusion

43. The scale and urgency of European veteran needs demand a coherent, unified policy response. The rapporteur proposes standards and recommendations for comprehensive support and social cohesion, ensuring that all those who have served – and their families – are assured dignity, opportunity and recognition throughout their lives. She describes the first comprehensive benchmark for veteran policy, focusing on human and social rights, with Ukraine's ongoing reforms as a model and mature approaches from the United Kingdom, France, and the United States as references. She calls for statutory guarantees, integrated service delivery. She finally recommends to the Committee of Ministers the drafting of a recommendation for Council of Europe member States on the rights and well-being of veterans, aligned with the European Convention on Human Rights and the Revised European Social Charter, which will be the first European text to set out human rights common standards for veterans.

44. Supporting veterans is not only an act of gratitude; it is an investment in social cohesion, democratic resilience and lasting peace.