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## Veterans in the Civil Service of Ukraine: Institutional Challenges and Prospects for HR Policy Development

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### ABSTRACT

The article provides a comprehensive analysis of institutional challenges and development prospects of human resource policy aimed at integrating veterans into Ukraine's civil service. In the context of a prolonged war and anticipated post-war recovery, the inclusion of veterans in public administration is considered a strategic resource for strengthening institutional capacity, enhancing public trust, and ensuring fair reintegration of defenders into civilian life. At the same time, the realization of this potential is constrained by systemic legal, organizational, and socio-psychological barriers that limit veterans' access to public service positions. The empirical basis of the study relies on analytical reports of the Ukrainian Veterans Fund regarding employment barriers and adaptation needs of veterans, as well as academic publications in public administration and human resource management. The normative framework is grounded in current Ukrainian legislation on civil service, employment, and veteran policy, alongside relevant government regulations and strategic documents. A comparative analysis of veteran employment models in Poland and the United States is also conducted. Based on a SWOT analysis, the study identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the Ukrainian model, as well as opportunities for development and potential risks. Key directions for improving HR policy include the institutional recognition of military experience in terms of civilian competencies, the implementation of veteran-oriented recruitment procedures, the development of workplace adaptation standards, and the strengthening of digital tools and evidence-based data management. The findings emphasize the importance of balancing meritocratic principles with targeted support mechanisms for veterans, ensuring effective integration without compromising equal access to civil service.



### KEYWORDS

veterans, civil service, public service, human resource policy, human resource management, adaptation, institutional capacity, veterans' preference.



## Ветерани на державній службі України: інституційні виклики та перспективи розвитку кадрової політики

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Стаття присвячена комплексному аналізу інституційних викликів та перспектив розвитку кадрової політики щодо залучення ветеранів і ветеранок до державної служби України. В умовах тривалої війни та майбутнього повоєнного відновлення участь ветеранів у публічному управлінні розглядається як стратегічний ресурс підвищення інституційної спроможності держави, зміцнення довіри до органів влади та забезпечення справедливої соціальної реінтеграції Захисників і Захисниць. Водночас реалізація цього потенціалу ускладнюється наявністю системних правових, організаційних та соціально-психологічних бар'єрів, що стримують доступ ветеранів до державної служби. Емпіричну основу дослідження становлять результати аналітичних звітів Українського ветеранського фонду щодо перешкод працевлаштування та адаптаційних потреб ветеранів і ветеранок, а також результати наукових публікацій у сфері державного управління та HRM. Нормативну основу формують чинні закони України у сфері державної служби, зайнятості та ветеранської політики, а також підзаконні акти й програмні документи уряду. Додатково здійснено порівняльний аналіз моделей працевлаштування ветеранів у Польщі та США. На основі SWOT-аналізу визначено сильні та слабкі сторони української моделі, а також можливості її розвитку та потенційні ризики. До ключових напрямів удосконалення кадрової політики віднесено: інституційне визнання військового досвіду у термінах цивільних компетентностей; впровадження ветераноорієнтованих процедур добору; розвиток стандартів адаптації на робочому місці; посилення ролі цифрових інструментів і доказового управління даними. Результати дослідження підкреслюють необхідність балансу між принципами меритократії та спеціальними механізмами підтримки ветеранів, що забезпечить ефективну інтеграцію без порушення засад рівного доступу до державної служби.



### КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

ветерани і ветеранки, державна служба, публічна служба, кадрова політика, управління людськими ресурсами, адаптація, інституційна спроможність, переваги ветеранів.

## 1. Introduction

Ukraine is entering a long period of formation of a “veteran society”, where the civil service is both a tool for reintegration into peaceful life and an “employer that sets the standard”. At the same time, the labor market for veterans is characterized by significant barriers: according to the UVF, more than half of the respondents’ reported obstacles to employment; among the most frequently named are the physical and psycho-emotional consequences of service, loss of professional skills, lack of inclusiveness, experience of discrimination and inconsistency of the expected level of remuneration [17, p. 10]. These factors are directly transmitted to the public service, where there are additional requirements within individual positions, procedural filters, and significant restrictions on the level of remuneration. At the same time, the public legitimacy of veterans’ involvement is high: the UVF records a consistently high level of respect of the population for veterans [16, p. 5], which creates a “window of opportunity” for systemic personnel decisions.

## 2. Literature Review

The Ukrainian scientific discourse of 2024–2025 is shifting from general social adaptation to institutional mechanisms of employment in the public sector and personnel policy. Thus, Servetnyk problematizes the employment of veterans in the public service system through the prism of selection procedures, matching qualifications and the need to adjust the legislation on civil service, emphasizing that veterans in relevant positions can strengthen trust in institutions, which represent [9, p. 73–78]. Researchers Vasylykovskiy and Prykhodko focuses on the leadership potential of veterans and offers her own tool for their reintegration, the very first stage of which is the stabilization of the psycho-emotional state of veterans [20]. In the scientific works of Ukrainian researchers, certain issues of employment of veterans and women veterans were considered, the greatest publication activity on this topic is demonstrated by O. Grishnova, V. Lysenko, T. Zakharin, S. Yehorycheva, M. Lakhizha, D. Postna, I. Grashchenko, O. Honchar., V. Kaspruk and others.

Of particular importance for the justification of personnel policy are the current analytical products of the UVF in the context of applied scientific analytics. The study “Employment of Veterans: Barriers and Adaptation Challenges” (2025) provides a structured description of barriers and adaptation needs [17]; the report “Challenges, Needs and Barriers to Employment” (2025) complements with the perspective of employers and an analysis of adaptation practices in the workplace [18]; Annual surveys on the needs and problems of veterans for 2024 (methodologically described online survey) clarify the profile of needs, in particular those related to career trajectories [15]. In addition, in 2025, the UVF published the results of a comprehensive study “Portrait of a Veteran 2025”, relevant for personnel policy due to the parameters of trust and public expectations [16].

In the practice-oriented plane, the NASC forms an institutional framework for the “veteran-oriented” HRM: it publishes explanations on entering the public service and requirements for seniority/qualifications [8], as well as an HR advisor with recommendations on adaptation, organization of work and communication with veterans in the public service [7]. In the international comparison, the most institutionalized is the American model of veterans’ preference and special mercenary powers (OPM), which has developed regulatory and methodological support [3; 10–14], while the Polish model combines the general principle of open selection in the civil service with point norms of priority for certain categories of veterans/discharged servicemen in the security sector [4; 5].

## 3. Problem Statement

The purpose of the study is to identify the key institutional challenges of employment of veterans in the civil service of Ukraine and substantiate the directions for the development of personnel policy based on current analytical data and comparative analysis of the Ukrainian, Polish and American models of veterans’ employment.

#### 4. Methods and Materials

The following research methods are used in the scientific article: analysis and synthesis, comparisons, secondary analysis of the results of empirical research and SWOT analysis as a tool for strategic diagnosis of personnel policy.

#### 5. Results and Discussion

The Ukrainian civil service operates under a combination of meritocratic principles of selection, the legal regime of martial law and the gradual formation of veteran policy as a separate sphere of public administration. At the level of general policy, the framework is formed by the Law of Ukraine “On the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection”, the Law of Ukraine “On Civil Service” and the Law of Ukraine “On Employment” [21; 22], as well as the Government’s decisions on the development of veterans’ employment programs, in particular, the Concept of the State Target Program “Veteran. Work” for 2026–2027 [1]. At the level of personnel practice, the NASC deploys methodological support: public explanations and HR recommendations on the adaptation of veterans in the public service [7; 8].

A key institutional challenge is the asymmetry between the scale of veterans’ demand for decent employment and the ability of public sector personnel systems to take military experience into account when hiring for civilian positions. UVF data suggest that employment barriers are not only “qualifying” but also adaptive in nature (health, psycho-emotional state, experience of discrimination, salary expectations, lack of experience, etc.) [17; 18]. For the civil service, this means: even if there are vacancies, entrance procedures and the work environment must be supplemented with adaptation standards (mentoring, sensitive communication, flexible regimes, if necessary, non-discriminatory practices), otherwise the risk of early offboarding, discouragement, etc. increases. To overcome this challenge, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, together with the Federation of Employers of Ukraine, the National Qualifications Agency and Helvetas Ukraine, conducted a study “Improving career paths and adaptation of Ukrainian veterans to civilian employment”, in which, among other things, 1000 military accounting specialties with professional standards and qualification characteristics were compared, 91 job descriptions and more than 2000 records were examined Classifier of professions. With the aim of helping Defenders find themselves in civilian life, the study creates a kind of “bridge” between the military and civilian spheres of employment and helps employers understand the military experience of candidates.

It is important that the personnel policy of the state should work in the context of public expectations: high trust in veterans [16] creates a legitimate resource for the introduction of special “veteran” HR tools, but such tools require a delicate balance with the principle of equal access to public service. Otherwise, the policy can generate secondary risks: from legal disputes over discrimination to a drop in trust due to non-transparent appointments.

Digital public services are Ukraine’s strength against the background of European countries. In 2025, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation, a state budgetary institution under the Ministry, with the support of the International Renaissance Foundation, launched the “Career of a Veteran” platform [6], which posts only those vacancies that are created for veterans or have priority for candidates with this status. In addition to the opportunity for employers to post vacancies immediately on the platform, exchanges with leading Ukrainian job search platforms have also been set up. The Veteran’s Career platform helps veterans create a resume based on their military experience, translates it into “civilian language”, and this is implemented using an AI tool. Only those combatants who have confirmed their status through the Unified State Register of War Veterans have access to vacancies on this platform.

At the time of writing this article, the legal regime of martial law continues in Ukraine [24]. For the employment of veterans in the civil service, this has a double effect. On the one hand, simplified procedures potentially reduce barriers to entry and speed up reintegration – especially for veterans with relevant management competencies and experience in high-risk environments. On the other hand, the long-term dominance of simplified appointments can reduce the transparency and predictability of selection (risks of discrimination, unequal access and reputational losses of the merit system), which is especially sensitive for veterans. At the same time, the highest level of trust among all Ukrainian institutions belongs to the Armed Forces of Ukraine [19], veterans have a consistently high level of

respect in society, which gives them a significant advantage in the conditions of forgiven procedures. In our opinion, the combination of the above conditions creates a window of opportunity for veterans to join the civil service at different levels (except for those that provide for elections), and even to take high political positions if they have relevant experience.

The Polish model in the studied plane demonstrates point preferences for certain categories of veterans and discharged servicemen in structures related to national defense and internal security. Thus, the law on veterans of actions outside the state establishes the priority in employment for “veterans poszkodowany” in certain organizational units under the supervision or subordination of the Minister of National Defense or the Minister of the Interior [5]. Separately, the Law on Defense of the Fatherland (2022) contains a provision on the priority of employment for certain categories of persons discharged from professional military service (in particular, under the conditions of a certain length of service) [4].

The American model is systemic: veterans’ preference is formalized as a set of norms that define the categories of “preference eligible” [10], provide an additional 5/10 points in competitive evaluation in competitive service [11] and influence the formation of registers of candidates (registers of eligibles) [12]. At the same time, there are special hiring powers (VRA, 30% or more disabled veterans, etc.), which allow appointments without competition or outside the general competitive procedure under certain conditions [3; 13; 14]. Such an architecture reduces the “transaction cost of entry” for the veteran and the employer and at the same time requires high institutional discipline so as not to undermine meritocratic principles.

**Table 1. SWOT analysis of approaches to the employment of veterans for civil service in Ukraine, Poland and the USA**

UKRAINIAN MODEL	POLISH MODEL	AMERICAN MODEL
<b>STRENGTHS</b>		
High public credit of trust in veterans; employment of veterans has been identified as a priority of the government (CP); platform “Career of a Veteran”; clarifications and recommendations of the NASC	Point Priority Norms for Vulnerable/Relevant Categories in the Defense and Security Sector [4; 5]; consistency with European principles of public administration (legal certainty of procedures)	Systemic, multi-level model of veterans’ preference: definition of categories, 5/10 points, order in registers [10–12]; developed “special hiring authorities” (VRA, 30% disabled, etc.) [3; 13; 14]; strong OPM methodological support
<b>WEAKNESSES</b>		
The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war and its consequences; risk of unpreparedness of the working environment for adaptive needs (health, psycho-emotional consequences, stigma)	The predominantly “sectoral” nature of preferences (focus on the Ministry of Defense/Ministry of Internal Affairs and related structures), which narrows the scale of the effect; potential fragmentation of tools between agencies	High regulatory and procedural complexity for candidates and HR; formal compliance risks without real integration; Possible discussions on the fairness of preferences in the competition
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>		
Introduction of veteran-oriented selection mechanisms with procedural guarantees of meritocracy; development of digital services; deployment of a “competence map” (MOS - civil competencies) and standardized adaptation programs in authorities; the use of the state as a “reference employer” for the labor market of veterans [7; 17–18].	Expanding practices from the security sector to a broader public service through HR standards; strengthening interagency coordination and programs for the transition of the military to civilian positions.	Transfer of tools to international practices (as “policy diffusion”), development of digital management of veteran-oriented hiring (reporting, auditing, performance evaluation) [2].
<b>THREATS</b>		
Overload of personnel systems in the war/post-war period; delay in the implementation of key projects (until complete demobilization); budget constraints (payment competitiveness); risks of stigmatization and discrimination, which reinforce “invisible barriers” [17; 18]; legal disputes regarding equal access without a clear procedure	Changing political priorities and budget constraints; public/departmental competition for jobs in the face of demographic pressure	Political polarization of the discussion on preferences; risks of bureaucratization and litigation; the need to constantly update the rules for new categories of service / operations

The Ukrainian model has distinct strengths in the form of high public trust in veterans, political prioritization of their employment, and the development of digital and methodological tools that reduce barriers to entry. At the same time, the key weakness is the war and its consequences, which are manifested in the risk of the work environment being unprepared for the adaptive needs and vulnerabilities of veterans. The comparison emphasizes that Poland acts mainly through point preferences in the security sector, while the United States has a systemic architecture of preferences and special HR mechanisms. For Ukraine, this highlights the possibility of institutional “stitching” of meritocracy with veteran-oriented procedures, but at the same time highlights the threat of potential budget constraints and risks of stigmatization, discrimination, and legal disputes in the event of unclear rules.

## 6. Conclusions

The involvement of veterans in public service in the conditions of a long war should be considered both as an element of just reintegration and as a resource for increasing institutional capacity and trust in the state. At the same time, the central institutional barrier lies not only in the formal requirements for positions, but in the “translation gap” between military experience and civilian qualification frameworks, exacerbated by adaptation difficulties and restrictions of the public sector (in particular in terms of pay levels and procedural filters).

The ongoing martial law regime has a double effect: simplification of procedures potentially reduces barriers to entry and opens a “window of opportunity” for veterans with relevant competencies, but the long-term dominance of simplified appointments can reduce the transparency and predictability of selection, creating risks of unequal access and reputational losses for the merit system. This leads to a managerial conclusion: veteran-oriented HR tools should not be situational, but procedurally balanced – so that support for veterans does not conflict with the principle of equal access and does not provoke secondary legal and trust risks.

In further research, we consider it important to concentrate on empirical verification of the effectiveness of specific tools for veteran integration in the public service. Do the existing mechanisms for “translating” military experience into civilian competencies and qualification requirements of positions work in practice, and do they reduce barriers to entry without losing the quality of selection? The results of HR adaptation practices (mentoring, management of work modes, communication protocols, work with the team) in terms of retention, service efficiency and professional well-being of veterans also need to be measured. A separate area should be the study of the impact of digital services and “veteran routes” on the transparency, speed and fairness of personnel decisions. Methodologically, we see a combination of comparisons between authorities with different models of implementation of these tools and longer observations of career trajectories in order to separate the effect of personnel policy from the broader consequences of the war and labor market dynamics.

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