

# IMPROVING CAREER PATHS AND ADAPTATION OF UKRAINIAN VETERANS TO CIVILIAN EMPLOYMENT



The study «Improving Career Paths and Adaptation of Ukrainian Veterans to Civilian Employment» was conducted within the framework of the project «Stykist: Building a sustainable and inclusive Ukrainian Labor Market». The project is implemented under an agreement between the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation with the support of Sweden.

The study was carried out to support veterans in their transition to civilian life by developing effective career pathways, improving the quality of career guidance services, expanding access to short-term training, promoting skills recognition, and facilitating employment opportunities.

The research was conducted between June 26 and November 25, 2025, in cooperation with the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine and Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation. The study is based not only on the formal characteristics of military occupational specialties and job vacancy requirements, but also on a comprehensive analysis of the occupational classification system, qualification characteristics, professional standards, and the practical experience of veterans acquired during military service.

Previous international studies indicate that veterans face a complex set of interrelated challenges when integrating into the labour market and require coordinated medical, psychological, legal, career guidance, and employment support. At the same time, military experience often includes universal skills that, if properly described and recognized, can be effectively converted into civilian professional qualifications. The findings of this study are intended to support the development of pathways for identifying and recognizing military competencies in the labour market.

Increased awareness among veterans and employers emerged as an indirect outcome of participation in focus groups, public events, and expert discussions.

All views and opinions expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Government of Sweden, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, or Helvetas.

# Acknowledgments

The research was made possible thanks to the coordinated efforts of the team and partner organisations that participated in the project.

## We express our sincere gratitude to:

### **The Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine**

for the strategic vision and support of the research.

### **The Federation of Employers of Ukraine**

for the initiative, involvement of the business community and organisational support.

### **The National Qualifications Agency**

for expert support and participation in the professional discussion of the research results.

### **The National Technical University of Ukraine “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute” (KPI)**

for facilitating the public presentation of the research.

Special thanks to all participants in the focus groups and interviews — veterans and employers — for their openness, constructive engagement, and willingness to share their experiences.

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# Introduction

The report was prepared as part of a study aimed at deepening understanding of the challenges and needs of veterans returning to civilian professional activities, as well as the barriers and opportunities employers face when hiring defenders of Ukraine.

The changes brought by the full-scale war have brought to the fore the issue of the effective reintegration of veterans into civilian life. Their experience is unique and valuable, but it requires adaptation to the conditions of the modern civilian labour market. At the same time, employers need clear and understandable mechanisms for recognising and acknowledging the competencies acquired during military service, and they also draw attention to the need to create an inclusive work environment and adapt workplaces, which was repeatedly voiced during the study.

## ■ The purpose of the study

To develop conceptual routes for recognising military competencies and converting them into civilian professional qualifications, as well as to create examples of the application of such routes for 30 military occupational specialities. Additionally, the study aims to develop a methodological approach for further scaling the developed routes to other military occupational specialities.

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## ■ Task 1

Conduct an analytical assessment of the list of military occupational specialties provided by the Ministry of Veterans of Ukraine, together with the corresponding job descriptions, the classifier of professions, qualification characteristics and professional standards; to determine the level of correspondence between military and civilian professional descriptions, identify complete and partial coincidences, as well as lack of correspondence; to form a generalised comparison table.

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## ■ Task 2

Conduct focus groups and surveys among veterans to study their needs for professional adaptation, retraining and building career paths after returning from military service; to identify the main difficulties of returning to civilian employment; to investigate the level of preservation or loss of professional skills; to assess the request for additional training and retraining.

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## ■ Task 3

Conduct in-depth interviews with employers to analyse their needs in the context of veteran employment; identify barriers employers face when hiring veterans; assess the level of employers' readiness to adapt their workplaces; examine attitudes towards internship programmes, career guidance, mentoring, and support.

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## ■ Task 4

Summarise the results of focus groups, surveys, and in-depth interviews with veterans and employers to identify key needs, barriers, and requests from both sides relevant to shaping pathways for recognising and acknowledging military competencies.

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## ■ Task 5

Develop examples of routes for converting military competencies into civilian professional qualifications, using specific military occupational specialities as examples, and describe a methodological approach suitable for further scaling such routes to other MOS.

The results of the study will serve as the basis for the formulation and implementation of systemic solutions in the field of state policy and employer and public-sector initiatives. In a broader context, the professional reintegration of veterans is an important factor in social cohesion and the sustainability of society.

# The methodology of the research

The research methodology is based on a combination of analytical and qualitative scientific methods and is implemented through three interrelated components. The overall coordination of the research, methodological integrity and agreement of the results were ensured by the team lead.


## 1 Desk research and analytical data collation

The first component comprised desk research and analytical processing of structured data, with the involvement of a data analysis specialist. At this stage, methods of data analysis, comparison, and structuring were used, along with structural-functional and content analyses of regulatory and personnel documents.

The provided list of military occupational specialities was compared with the occupational classifier records. A separate stage involved processing job descriptions for relevant military personnel to identify labour functions and competencies inherent in military roles.

The labour functions and competencies identified in the MOS and job descriptions were structured, grouped, and compared with the requirements of professional standards, and, where these were absent, with qualification characteristics. This allowed us to determine the level of correspondence between military and civilian professional descriptions and to form an analytical basis for further development of routes for converting competencies.

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№	Regular positions of privates, sergeants and officers		Position title as specified in the duties	Competencies	Code (numerical) designation of the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) for positions of privates, sergeant and senior personnel serving under contract, as well as for positions filled by conscript service members	National Classifier code (CC)	Occupational title according to the National Classifier	Competencies	Reference to the Occupational standard
	Code	Position title							
104	997	Electrician	Electrician of the maintenance group of the combat and logistics support	<p><b>Professional competencies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical maintenance and repair of electrical networks — operation, diagnostics and repair of electrical networks and electrical equipment of the unit.</li> <li>• Installation works — installation and dismantling of electrical networks up to 0.4 kV, lighting and power installations, low-voltage equipment and grounding systems.</li> <li>• Technical condition control — daily and weekly inspection of switchgear, protection devices, cable networks, electric motors and input devices.</li> <li>• Electrical safety — compliance with safety regulations, checking equipment operability and providing first aid in case of electric shock.</li> <li>• Scheduled maintenance — performing routine works within established timeframes and maintaining equipment in proper technical condition and cleanliness.</li> </ul> <p><b>General competencies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of the fundamentals of electrical engineering and the operating principles of electrical equipment.</li> <li>• Ability to apply safety regulations and operational rules for electrical installations.</li> <li>• Responsibility for maintaining the safety and operational condition of equipment.</li> <li>• Independence and discipline in the performance of official duties.</li> <li>• Compliance with military discipline and ensuring the safety of personnel.</li> </ul>	All MOS	7241	Electrician for operation of distribution networks	<p><b>Professional competencies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation for work — checking the technical condition of tools and personal protective equipment, preparing the workplace and issuing work permits.</li> <li>• Maintenance and repair of networks — installation, technical maintenance and repair of overhead and cable lines of 0.4–20 kV.</li> <li>• Work with transformer substations — maintenance of power transformers, switching equipment and relay protection and automation devices.</li> <li>• Working with electrical voltage — performing safe operations on 0.4 kV lines and in metering cabinets under voltage.</li> <li>• Digital interaction — use of digital communication tools and maintenance of technical documentation.</li> </ul> <p><b>General competencies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance with occupational safety and electrical safety regulations.</li> <li>• Ability to assess risks and prevent hazards.</li> <li>• Effective communication within a team and clear transmission of technical information.</li> <li>• Independence, responsibility and attentiveness when working with equipment.</li> </ul>	

## 2 Focus groups and surveys of veterans

The second component of the methodology was implemented using qualitative sociological methods, including focus groups and surveys among veterans. The focus group facilitator collected qualitative data and facilitated the sessions, while the survey data analysis specialist processed the survey results.

The focus groups and surveys were designed to examine veterans' educational and professional experiences before entering the military, the roles they performed during service, and their subsequent career trajectories after discharge.

Particular attention was paid to the maintenance or loss of professional knowledge and skills, the acquisition of new competencies, the need for additional training and retraining, and requests for documentary confirmation of competencies acquired during military service. The data obtained were systematised using thematic analysis and generalisation methods.

To illustrate the applied approach to collecting qualitative data, an example is a list of thematic blocks for a survey of veterans aimed at identifying professional experience and needs in the process of returning to civilian activity provided.

### Data collection Tool Illustration

#### 1 General information about the participant

- Level and direction of education
- Civilian professional activity before the start of military service

#### 2 Professional experience during military service

- Functions and tasks actually performed during the service
- Records of speciality and position in military documents
- Assessment of the correspondence between the entries in the documents and the actual content of the work performed

#### 3 Ratio of military and civilian experience

- Compliance of the civilian profession with the functions performed during military service
- Availability of skills and competencies applicable to civilian professional activities

#### 4 Current professional status

- Status after military service

- Current professional activity or job search

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## 5 Issues and requests

- Main difficulties in the employment process
- Need for additional training, retraining or confirmation of competencies
- Proposals to improve mechanisms for the recognition and recognition of military competencies

## 3 In-depth interviews with employers

The third component of the methodology involved conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with employers from various sectors of the economy. The interviews were facilitated, and the subsequent analysis of the collected data was carried out by a specialist in survey data processing and analysis, under the coordination of the team leader.

The interviews were designed to analyse veterans' employment practices, approaches to training and retraining, and the barriers employers face when hiring veterans. The results enabled a comparison of business expectations and requests with the possibilities of recognising military competencies within the current qualifications system.

The format of in-depth individual interviews turned out to be the most appropriate for interaction with employers for several reasons:

- The busy schedules of managers and HR managers make it difficult for them to participate in focus groups at the same time, while interviews allow you to choose a convenient time and format of communication.
- Individual conversations provided a higher level of openness and confidentiality, enabling discussion of sensitive issues, including veterans' psychological adaptation, existing prejudices, peculiarities of the organisation of working hours, and restrictions on the instruments of state support.
- In-depth interviews enabled consideration of the industry-specific characteristics of each enterprise — from physical working conditions to internal standards and personnel requirements. This provided a more accurate understanding of business needs and enabled coverage of a wide range of sectors of the economy, which would be difficult to achieve in a focus-group format.

The applied approach enabled identification of the key needs and barriers employers face when employing veterans, taking into account industry differences and the peculiarities of labour organisation.

To illustrate the applied approach to data collection, the structural blocks of the employers' questionnaire used in the study are presented.

### Data Collection Tool Illustration

- **General characteristics of the enterprise**

(industry of activity, company size, organisational context)

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- **Experience in employing veterans**

(the presence of veterans among employees, the nature of interaction experience, and the assessment of readiness for further hiring)

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- **Assessment of candidates' skills and qualifications**

(approaches to testing professional knowledge and skills, the role of documents on education and/or professional qualifications, actions in the absence of supporting documents)

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- **Barriers and restrictions on employment**

(mismatch of qualifications, documentary and medical limitations, psychological adaptation, organisational and bureaucratic factors)

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- **Employers' needs and recommendations**

(request for training and retraining, job adaptation, state and institutional support, internship and mentoring programmes)

Questionnaires and in-depth interviews with employers were used to analyse veterans' hiring practices, identify barriers and business requests, and examine the field of recognition of military competencies.

## Research results: analytical data comparison

### 1.1 Correlation of military occupational specialities with the Classifier of Professions and civilian professional qualifications

According to the results of the analytical survey of military occupational specialities, in conjunction with the records of the Classifier of Professions and civilian professional qualifications, the level of correspondence between military and civilian professional descriptions was found to be heterogeneous. Within the framework of the study, the correspondence of labour functions and competencies was assessed, not only the formal similarity of names.

## As a result of the analysis out of more than 1000 MOS allocated

- ≈500 with full compliance with civilian professional qualifications (almost complete overlap of labour functions, competencies and related skills);
- ≈ 300 with partial compliance (approximately 80% of requirements);
- ≈ 200 MOS hardly meet any civilian professional qualifications.

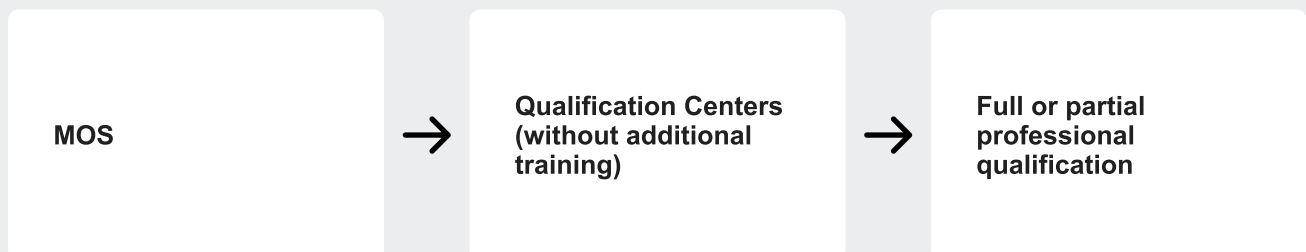
## Accordingly, three types of routes have been defined:

- for group 1 – full compliance;
- for group 2 – partial compliance;
- or group 3 – no correspondence (non-obvious solutions).

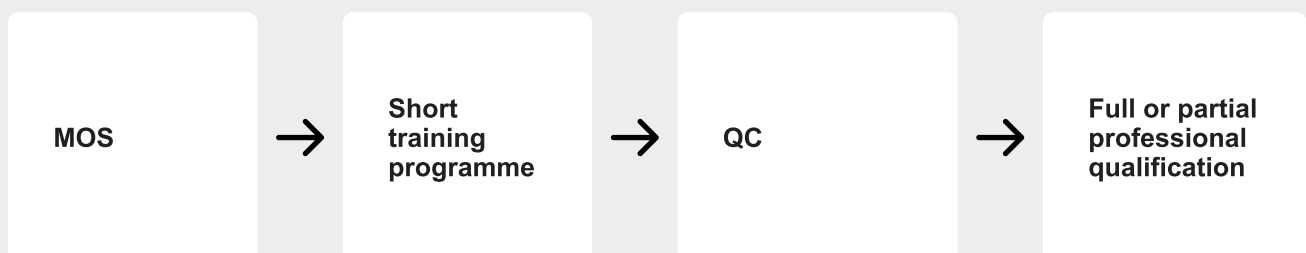
Examples of individual routes are provided in the appendices to the report

## 1.2 Illustrative groups of matches

### FULLY ALIGNED



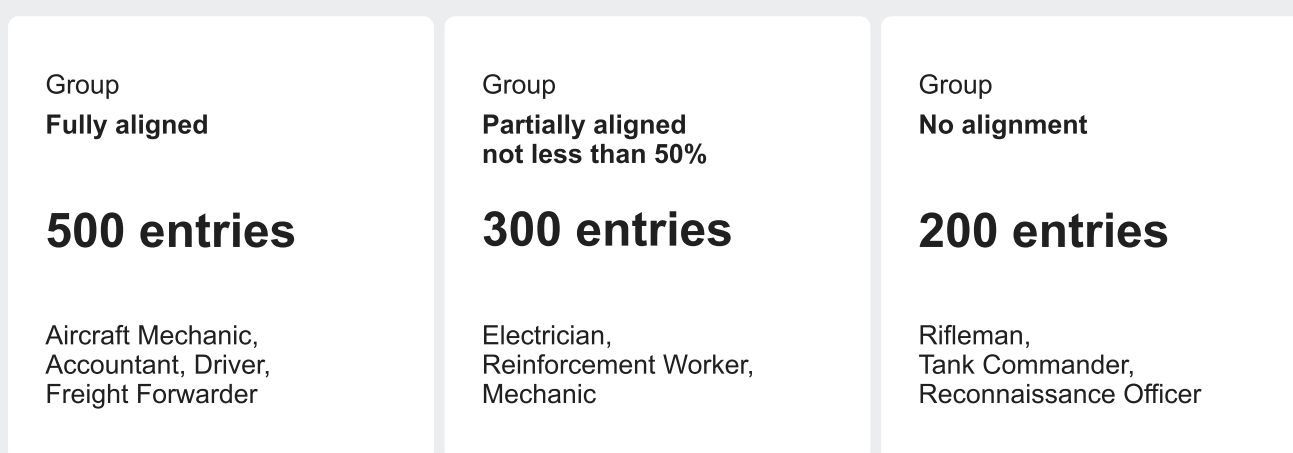
### PARTIALLY ALIGNED



## NO ALIGNMENT



## In accordance with the Occupational Classification (OC)



## 2. Results of focus groups with veterans

### 2.1. Quantitative indicators of veterans' participation in focus groups and surveys

As part of the study, a series of focus group discussions was held with veterans to provide an in-depth analysis of the professional experience gained during military service, as well as the challenges they face upon returning to civilian life and employment. A separate survey was also conducted to assess the needs for training, retraining and advanced training.

Focus group participants highlighted discrepancies between military occupational specialities recorded in official documents and the actual functional duties performed during service. Special attention was paid to the difficulties in recognising and acknowledging acquired competencies in the civilian labour market, as well as expectations for effective mechanisms for professional adaptation and support.

As part of the study, **109** veterans were invited to participate. Of these, **83** agreed to take part, while **26** declined. In total, **49** veterans participated in the study: **14** joined focus group discussions and **35** participated in a separate survey.

Indicator	% of total
Agreed to participate from the number of invitees	≈ 76 %
The actual no of participants from the no of invitees	≈ 45%
Joined online focus groups from among the invitees	≈ 13%
Took part in a separate survey	≈ 32%
Declined	≈ 24 %

## 2.2. Statistical portrait of the participants of the three groups

Education	Occupation before the service	Type of occupation during service
Higher education (bachelor's/ master's degree — 45%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ engineers (Electrical, Automation, Ventilation, Design)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ unmanned Aerial Vehicles</li> </ul>
Vocational — about 40%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ lawyers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ intelligence</li> </ul>
Non-formal learning, self-study — 10-15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ IT / System Operators</li> <li>■ sales and Commerce Specialists</li> <li>■ drivers, mechanics</li> <li>■ welders, locksmiths</li> <li>■ civil servants / analytical specialties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ logistics</li> <li>■ communications / document management</li> <li>■ engineering and technical works</li> <li>■ maintenance</li> <li>■ driving / transportation</li> <li>■ guarding of objects</li> <li>■ tactical assault units</li> <li>■ connectivity</li> </ul>

## 2.3. Correspondence of the military occupational speciality (MOS) to real functions

Based on the focus group results, it was determined that it is important to collect information on civilian work experience (positions held, types of activities), as participants indicated that their professional skills were often developed in civilian roles. It is necessary to take into account the level of education and professional qualifications (including the availability of educational documents), as well as any existing certificates confirming the award or advancement of qualifications. In addition, psychological factors should be considered: the veteran's motivation (leadership qualities, career aspirations, etc.), service status (e.g., contract service or drafting), and experience in active combat operations. In summary, the criteria should form a comprehensive profile of the veteran, combining service experience, civilian background, education, and personal preferences.

Category	Share
MOS fully corresponds to the labour functions	~30%
MOS partially corresponds to labor functions	~35%
MOS does not correspond to labor functions	~35%

### Key reasons for non-compliance:

- "MOS lost or unregistered"
- "Units moved and reassigned people "where there was a need"
- "The work was done according to skills, not the position"
- "Over time, the role has expanded (functions are wider than recording)"
- "MOS is very "narrow" compared to the real functionality"

### Quote repeated in different variations across all three groups:

«MOS is too narrow; it does not reflect what we are really doing»

**Focus groups confirm that MOS does not capture all relevant skills of a veteran.** As one participant emphasised, "The military occupational speciality is narrower than the real functionality; it is inexpedient to rely on it." Therefore, the algorithm should use the MOS as one of its initial variables, but also check its consistency with other information (real tasks, experience, self-employment, etc.).

“ Based on a single military occupational speciality, you cannot assess a person’s skills. You need to ask where they were and what they did

“ ...more comprehensive surveying is needed... to hear each soldier individually...

“ ...how will the team react if you do something wrong?... It’s a kind of small fear...

“ Not in that sense. Here, it’s more about the employer’s psychological adaptation

“ ...it’s more of a public service... but I don’t know whether it will be relevant or interesting

“ ...the desire to return. But my desire... I don’t even know what it is...

“ ...old skills... they have already lost their relevance. They need to be renewed

“ ...they are not ready for veterans; they don’t know what kind of jobs they can offer such people

“ ...so that this training is accompanied by official documents... so that a person has the right to choose among companies with this diploma

“ ...the skills helped a lot... when we were setting up special communications... now I use them in my job... I manage... remotely

“ ...so that at some enterprise one could gain experience and then move forward with that experience...

“ ...a person with a high-level amputation... logically, it is difficult to find a job without stairs/lifts... not all employers can provide such conditions

“ ...at the front you receive a bonus... in civilian life — it’s a drop down...

“ ...the survey should not be just about MOS... but something like an employment record: where you were, what you did

## 2.4 Dynamics of skills (retained, lost, acquired)

**Retained skills** — 30–40% — Mostly basic technical, engineering, managerial.

**Lost or partially lost** — 50–60%, especially: analytics, law, design, specialized technical competencies, software skills

## 90% of participants have new skills:

- ✓ technical: UAVs, communications, logistics
- ✓ team: leadership, group coordination, management
- ✓ stress resistance, quick decision-making, interaction skills in difficult conditions
- ✓ medical skills

**But 70% of participants note that these skills are not documented**

## 2.5 Barriers to employment and adaptation identified by veterans

During the focus groups, the participants voiced a number of systemic problems they face when returning to civilian life:

- Discrepancy between the MOS and the actual work
- Loss of previously acquired skills due to many years of service
- The need for short retraining programmes in a narrow field
- A large difference between military and civilian wages
- Inability or unwillingness of civilian collectives to integrate veterans
- Employers' lack of understanding of veterans' skills
- Veterans' fear of being "unprofessional" after prolonged military service
- Positions are filled or not retained during service
- The need for continued support from the military community, even after discharge
- The absence of a single platform providing guidance on the pathway to reintegration after discharge from the military

## 2.6. Generalized recommendations based on the results of the veterans' survey

Based on the results of focus groups and a survey of veterans, key recommendations were summarized that reflect their priority needs in the field of professional adaptation and employment.

### Training and confirmation of qualifications:

- Short, practice-oriented training programmes: Veterans prefer short-term courses, without "school subjects", that focus on acquiring specific practical skills without excessive theoretical load.
- Ability to validate acquired skills without re-learning: Participants emphasise that they often already have the necessary competencies (in particular, in the fields of driving, equipment repair, and management), but they need mechanisms to confirm them without completing a full training cycle from the initial level.
- Differentiation of educational programs for contract soldiers and mobilized: Veterans highlight significant differences in professional experience, motivation, and expectations between career military personnel and personnel mobilised for military service, which necessitates adapting the content and format of training programmes.

### Job search and career opportunities

- Consideration of actual functions rather than only military occupational specialities (MOS): Veterans emphasise that a military occupational speciality does not always reflect the actual tasks performed during service, which complicates the search for relevant civilian employment.
- Expanding employment opportunities in veteran-led companies: there is demand for access to vacancies in companies founded by veterans, where veterans work or hold leadership positions, as this is associated with easier adaptation and greater support.
- Shifting from individual job vacancies to career pathways: veterans stress the importance of not only job offers but also a clear vision of opportunities for professional development, upskilling, or a change in career direction.

### Support and guidance

- Mentoring and peer support from fellow veterans: Support from individuals who have already undergone professional adaptation is viewed as an effective tool for increasing confidence, reducing anxiety, and accelerating integration into civilian life.
- Raising awareness: Veterans note insufficient awareness of available opportunities — such as educational programmes, grants, and other forms of support — and emphasise the need for systematic information dissemination through accessible, clear channels.
- Psychological adaptation not only for veterans but also for employers: Study participants point to the need to prepare employers to work with veterans, particularly regarding communication, workplace adaptation, and overcoming biases.

## 2.7. The consolidated analysis of the focus group discussions and survey results

The consolidated analysis of the focus group discussions and survey results indicates a high level of interest among veterans in employment and professional adaptation. However, actual participation in related activities was lower, with participants attributing this to time constraints and other objective factors associated with returning to civilian life.

The findings confirm that a military occupational speciality (MOS) often fails to reflect the roles, functions, and competencies veterans acquire during their service. Participants repeatedly noted that they performed tasks that went well beyond their formally assigned speciality. As one respondent observed, “the military occupational speciality is narrower than the actual functional scope.” This highlights the limitations of relying solely on formal military records when assessing veterans’ professional potential.

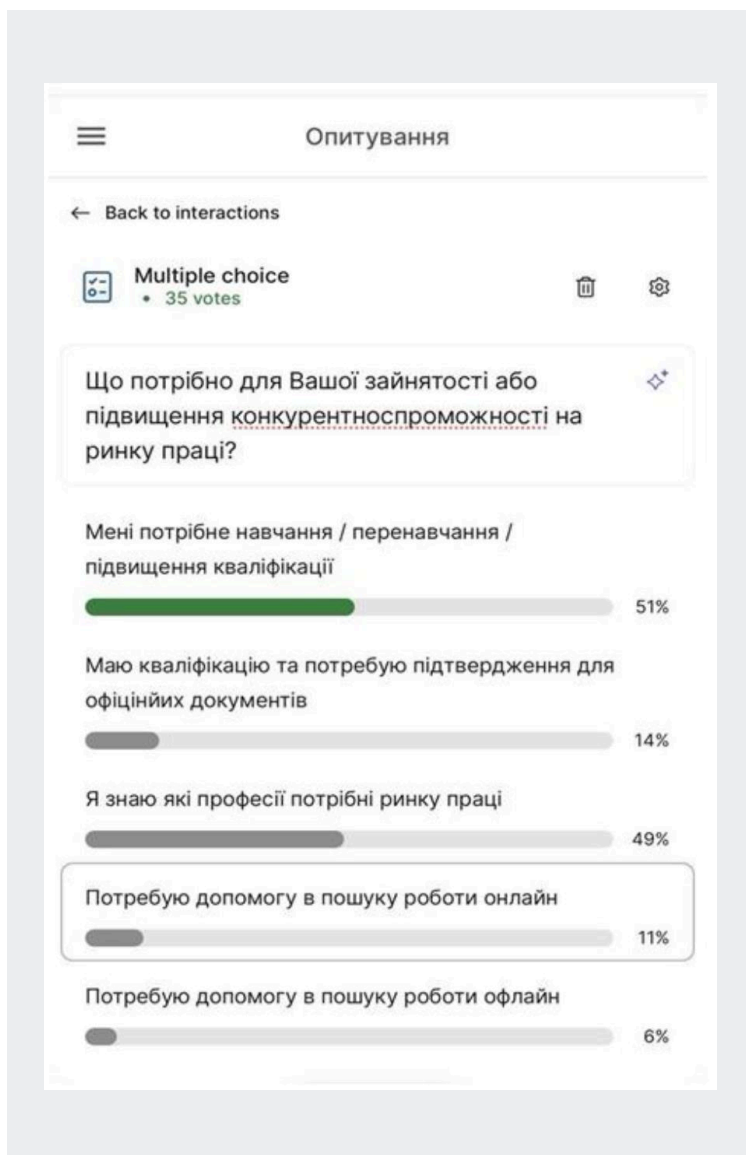
Thus, aligning formal records with actual competencies remains a key challenge in professional reintegration. Relying solely on entries in military registration documents is insufficient to determine potential civilian career pathways.

Veterans also identified a set of interconnected barriers, including discrepancies between documentation and actual skills, gaps in education or its formal recognition, social biases, and the need for additional training or retraining. Taken together, these factors require a comprehensive approach to designing employment support mechanisms for veterans.

Given the findings, effective approaches to matching veterans with civilian professions should be based on a comprehensive analysis of individual profiles. In addition to the military occupational speciality, it is important to consider actual military experience, including positions held, duties performed, and competencies acquired.

Equally important is prior civilian professional experience, as many skills were developed or strengthened before military service. The level of education, existing professional qualifications and certificates, and other factors influencing career expectations and motivation should also be taken into account.

Therefore, the study confirms the relevance of a multidimensional approach, in which veterans' career decisions are shaped by combining their military experience, civilian background, educational achievements, and individual preferences.



The analysis of responses from a separate survey revealed varying needs among veterans undergoing professional adaptation and employment.

The most common need identified by participants (**51%**) is training, retraining, or upskilling, indicating a strong demand for education as a key instrument for re-entering the labour market.

At the same time, **49%** of respondents are aware of which professions are in demand, suggesting a sufficient level of labour market awareness, but also highlighting the need for support in obtaining the relevant qualifications.

Additionally, **14%** of respondents already hold qualifications but require official recognition of their skills, indicating a demand for mechanisms to validate military experience.

A further **11%** and **6%** require assistance with online and offline job searches, underscoring the need for guidance and accessible employment support services.

Overall, the results highlight key priorities for the development of support services: upskilling and reskilling programmes, qualification recognition mechanisms, career counselling and guidance, and practical tools to facilitate employment.

### 3. Results of in-depth interviews with employers

As part of the study, a survey questionnaire for employers was developed, and in-depth individual interviews were conducted with 10 representatives from small, medium, and large businesses across various sectors of the economy, including metallurgy, mechanical engineering, agriculture, engineering, and services. The study included both manufacturing enterprises (plants and metal-processing companies) and service companies (repair, engineering, and consulting firms).

The interviews covered the presence of veterans among employees, experience of hiring them, assessments of their professional and personal qualities, and the barriers employers face in recruiting and integrating veterans.

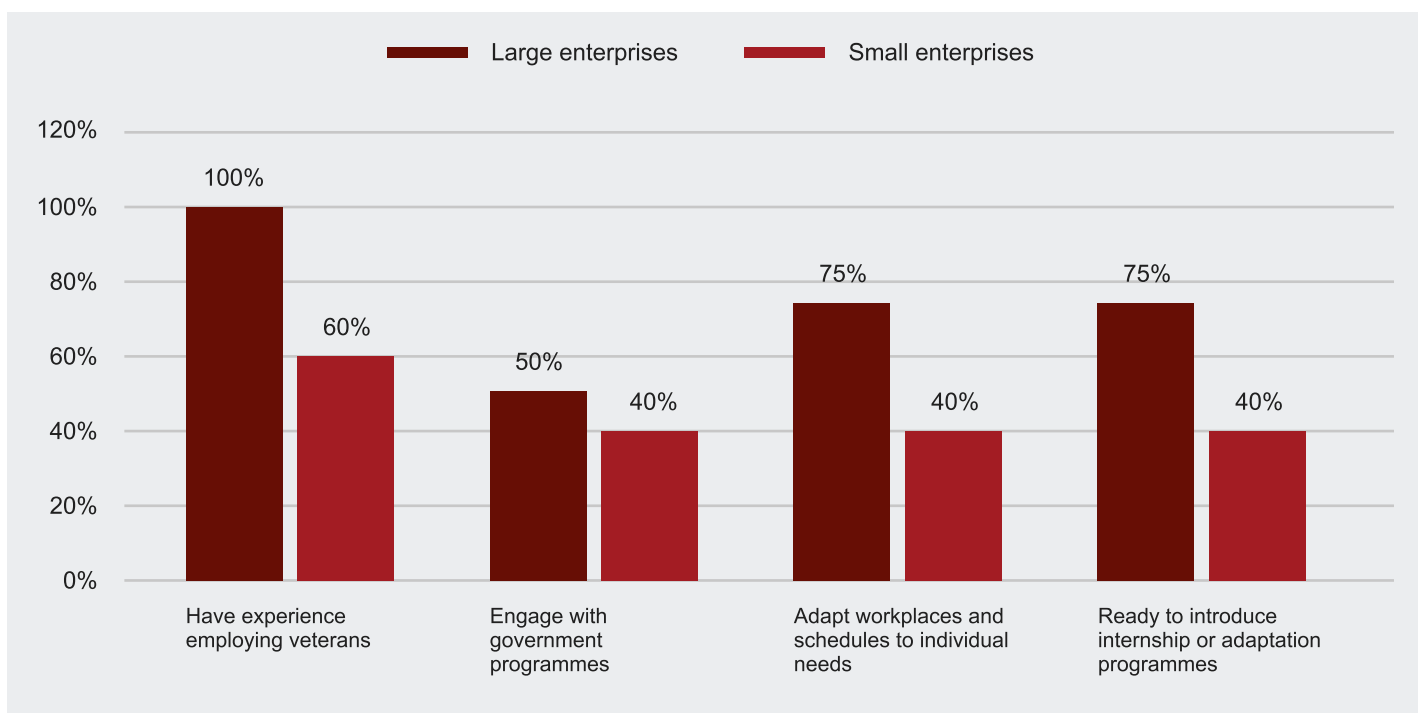
The collected data enabled a summary of employer expectations, identification of successful interaction practices, and outlining of the main risks and concerns expressed by businesses.

### Employers' position on the employment of veterans

Most surveyed employers hold a positive attitude towards hiring veterans and view them as a potentially valuable human resource. Among the key strengths of veterans, employers highlight high motivation, discipline, responsibility, the ability to work in challenging conditions, and technical literacy. As one respondent noted: “We have had a positive experience working with a veteran — initially there was a difficult psychological adjustment period, but thanks to the team’s support, the work is now stable.”

At the same time, employers point to challenges in assessing veterans’ actual professional skills. Formal documents do not always provide sufficient grounds to determine whether a candidate meets job requirements, which creates a need for practical test assignments, probation periods, or additional internal training.

### 3.1 Comparison of the Experience of Large and Small Enterprises



**Small enterprises** tend to operate more flexibly: they allow practical skills assessments, are willing to adapt work schedules, and show interest in an individualised approach, but are less likely to have formal CSR policies or dedicated internship resources.

**Large enterprises** are more oriented towards formal criteria and require supporting documentation; however, they have greater resources for training and adaptation programmes and are more prepared to create adapted workplaces.

The study demonstrated that different sectors of industry have distinct perceptions and needs regarding veterans. In technical and industrial sectors (e.g., mechanical engineering, metallurgy, automotive repair), employers particularly value discipline, technical literacy, and teamwork. The survey findings indicate that the most valued skills among veterans in these sectors include technical competence, teamwork, and analytical thinking. A client engineering company identified the following professions as priorities: mechanics, equipment adjusters, machine operators, and process engineers. In the automotive transport sector, a company noted that veterans could be employed as mechanics or technical workshop workers — roles that do not require high levels of formal qualifications. At the same time, in sectors related to analytics and IT, attention was drawn to soft skills. For example, a sniper with strong stress resilience, rapid decision-making, and solid calculation skills could transition into a virtual asset analyst role.

In addition, businesses emphasise the importance of sector-specific internship programmes and cooperation with veteran centres: the majority of respondents expressed willingness to partner with such organisations. For example, companies are prepared to establish internal internship programmes for veterans, supported by employment centres. Some companies offer online training for staff, mentorship pairings (“experienced employee–veteran”), and psychological support for newcomers during their first months of employment.

Mechanical engineering/ Industry	Motor transport	Analytics/IT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Technical literacy</li> <li>■ Team interaction</li> <li>■ Analytical thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Responsibility</li> <li>■ Accuracy and attentiveness</li> <li>■ Adaptability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Stress resistance</li> <li>■ Speed of decision-making</li> <li>■ Analytical skills</li> </ul>

The analysis showed that veterans with technical and engineering skills are best suited to roles such as equipment operators, mechanics, electricians, welders, and similar positions. High-demand sectors were also identified, including engineering (mechanical engineering and metalworking), energy, transport (drivers and freight forwarders), agriculture (tractor drivers and machine operators), and the IT/analytics field (for veterans with relevant specialised training).

## 4. Key barriers identified by employers

Regardless of sector, employers identified similar barriers to hiring veterans. In particular, these include the absence of documents confirming education and/or professional qualifications (diplomas, certificates), as well as medical restrictions that complicate the employment process.

Some veterans have diagnosed medical restrictions, including limb amputations, that typically preclude employment in high-risk occupations.

At the same time, study participants highlighted the discrepancy between medical commission assessments and veterans' actual physical capabilities. In particular, even when a person has a modern, high-quality prosthesis that enables full functional capacity, medical commissions often impose restrictions that do not reflect their real abilities. This is because the final decision is made not by a prosthetics specialist but by a medical board, which may not take into account the prosthesis's technological capabilities or the patient's individual adaptation.

As a result, veterans lose the opportunity to be formally employed in certain types of work, including high-risk occupations, despite being fully capable of performing the required job functions.

Almost all enterprise representatives identified psychological adaptation as a key challenge. For example, one manufacturing plant explicitly identified "psychological adaptation" as the primary issue.

Companies propose various approaches: some are willing to hire a veteran on a probationary basis "without paperwork," assessing their competencies in practice, while others suggest adapting job descriptions or modifying job functions to align with the veteran's capabilities.

In addition, businesses emphasise the importance of sector-specific internship programmes and cooperation with veteran centres: the majority of respondents expressed readiness to partner with such organisations. For example, they indicated a willingness to establish internal internship programmes for veterans with the support of public employment services. Some companies offer online training for staff, mentorship pairings ("experienced employee–veteran"), and psychological support for newcomers during their first months of employment.

Business representatives positively assessed veterans' motivation and competencies, while also noting adaptation challenges. For example, the head of one enterprise stated that "the motivation to work and contribute to the state exceeds the average level at our enterprise." However, he also noted that initially "there was a certain difficult psychological process" until the veteran was provided with stability and support. Similarly, a small manufacturing plant acknowledged that veterans are "employees equal to all others," yet identified psychological adaptation after service as the primary issue. One employer explicitly emphasised the need for the rapid integration of veterans into the production process and their effective performance.

#### **4.1. Competency mismatch between military skills and civilian professions.**

The results of in-depth interviews with employers confirm significant heterogeneity in the alignment between military competencies and the requirements of civilian professions. Depending on the nature of the military occupational speciality and the actual functional responsibilities performed, employers distinguish three types of situation.

First, some military specialities have full or near-full correspondence with civilian professions. In such cases (for example, a battery technician), businesses are willing to hire veterans without additional training or with only minimal adaptation.

Second, a significant number of specialities are characterised by partial correspondence, with core skills already present but requiring refinement or adaptation to civilian standards. In such cases, employers consider short-term, practice-oriented courses appropriate (for example, for an instructor in operating combat vehicles).

Third, certain military occupational specialities are almost non-transferable to civilian professions. In such cases (for example, a sniper), employment is possible only after full retraining and the acquisition of a new profession.

Mechanical Engineering, Manufacturing, Engineering	Mining enterprises	Service sector and small businesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ready to take if the state covers the training or helps with the confirmation of qualifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High safety requirements → even with experience, proof of qualification is required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>require short practical courses and simple proof of skills</li> </ul>

### Need for additional training and qualifications assessment.

Employers emphasise that, given production demands and labour shortages, they cannot afford to wait for an extended period of 3–6 months to train veterans “from scratch.” This creates demand for rapid, transparent mechanisms to assess existing competencies and determine the minimum necessary scope of additional training.

At the same time, employers point to the absence of a clear, transparent algorithm that would enable them to answer key questions: what competencies a veteran actually possesses; which knowledge and skills are lacking for a specific position; and what document or qualification certificate will be obtained as a result of assessment or training.

A separate issue is the limited awareness among businesses of existing qualification assessment tools. Some employers lack a clear understanding of the roles and capacities of qualification centres and do not know how to use them in practice during the hiring process for veterans.

In addition, the study’s findings indicate that employers’ needs differ significantly across sectors. Expectations regarding the level of preparedness, the need for additional training, and the timeframe for veterans’ adaptation vary across the manufacturing, agricultural, service and engineering sectors, underscoring the need for flexible, sector-specific solutions.

## 4.2 Psychological adaptation of veterans and employers' fears

Businesses are often reluctant to hire veterans because of the perceived risk of PTSD; concerns about potential conflict behaviour; a lack of understanding of how to provide appropriate support; and the absence of internal HR tools.

Veterans, conversely, fear “making a mistake in a new team”, being misunderstood, and being perceived through the stereotype that “military equals problem”.

## Industry differences:

- Large businesses have psychologists and HR mentors and can establish support programmes.
- Small businesses and sole proprietors lack the necessary resources and do not know how to work with veterans from a psychological perspective

### 4.3. Barriers related to special needs

Many enterprises lack adapted workplaces. Companies do not know how to employ veterans with disabilities in a legally compliant manner. They also do not understand how to compensate for reduced work capacity, as the state does not provide clear mechanisms.

Medical commission conclusions: approaches taken by physicians in assessing veterans' work capacity. Medical commission decisions regarding fitness for work often do not align with an individual's actual capabilities. Hazardous or physically demanding working conditions require impeccable health. Veterans with medical contraindications are frequently denied access to jobs in which they could otherwise perform effectively.

For example, a person with a functional prosthesis may be technically capable of performing welding work; however, medical commissions often automatically deny access to such roles. One way to circumvent this restriction is to register as a self-employed sole proprietor, allowing independent work without formal medical clearance. However, this option is not suitable for everyone, creating a gap between actual capabilities and access to employment.

### 4.4. Information gap

#### Employers say they don't know:

- where to find veterans — there is a lack of clarity about which platforms or databases employers can use to access contact details, CVs, or profiles of veterans interested in employment.
- how the retraining system works — employers do not have a clear understanding of which institutions provide training for veterans, how long programmes last, or the outcomes veterans achieve upon completion
- how to obtain funding or compensation — employers are often unaware of state or international support programmes, including subsidies, tax incentives, or cost reimbursement for hiring veterans.
- what benefits exist — there is limited awareness of legal provisions on the preferential employment of veterans and how these mechanisms can be applied in practice.
- how assessment in Qualification Centres is conducted — employers lack clarity on how veterans' skills are validated, the role of these centres, and whether the results meet their hiring requirements.

## Veterans don't know:

- how to validate skills — veterans are aware of Qualification Centres where they can undergo assessment and gain recognition for competencies acquired during service.
- how to choose a civilian profession — there is a lack of guidance tools (testing, counselling, clear algorithms) to match military experience with labour market opportunities.
- available training programmes — not all veterans are aware of short-term programmes or state and grant-funded initiatives that support reskilling or upskilling.
- what employers value — many lack clarity about employer expectations, including in-demand skills, how to prepare a CV, and how to present military experience in a civilian context.

This is a two-sided information problem, recognised by all respondents without exception

## 5. The role of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine and the National Qualifications Agency in supporting veterans' transition to civilian professions

### Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine – information support and awareness raising

The Ministry ensures systematic communication and informs veterans of opportunities to re-enter the labour market including:

- disseminates information on the procedure for recognising military competencies in Qualification Centres;
- clarifies that a veteran may undergo assessment, obtain an official qualification certificate, and work in the corresponding civilian profession;
- promotes awareness of available professional transition pathways, including opportunities for upskilling, reskilling, and further training;
- coordinates information campaigns and communication products for veterans.

### National Qualifications Agency – coordination of the work of qualification centres

NQA ensures organisational and methodological coordination of the Qualification Centres network including:

- organises QC's work in conducting initial interviews with veterans to assess the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired during service;
- ensures unified assessment approaches, standardised procedures, and quality assurance of the centres' activities;
- oversees the transparency, objectivity, and accessibility of the qualification validation process for veterans.

Comprehensive measures — from training and certification to financial incentives and psychosocial support — will deliver sustainable results and create viable career opportunities for demobilised service members in civilian professions.

## 6. Recommendations for next steps

### 1 Expanding the study of military occupational specialities and identifying new pathways to align them with civilian professions

It is advisable to further expand the study of military occupational specialities in order to develop additional pathways for aligning them with civilian professional qualifications.

Particular attention should be given to those specialities that do not have a direct or obvious correspondence in the Occupational Classification. This would broaden the coverage of military specialities and ensure a more inclusive approach to developing employment pathways for veterans.

### 2 Digitalisation of analysis and adaptation processes

It is recommended to develop AI-based digital tools to support the analysis of veterans' professional competencies and the design of individual pathways to help them adapt to the civilian labour market. Such tools could use algorithmic approaches and automated data analysis to match acquired skills with the Occupational Classification and descriptions of civilian professional qualifications, identify suitable occupations for veterans, and indicate whether additional training or reskilling is required.

In practical terms, this could enable more transparent, faster, and more accurate identification of veterans' potential career pathways in the civilian labour market.

### 3 European Integration of Qualifications

It is advisable to supplement the alignment pathways for military occupational specialities with corresponding civilian professional qualifications and ESCO codes (the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations classification). This would enable veterans to navigate not only the national but also the European qualifications system, thereby expanding their opportunities for professional integration, particularly in the context of labour market mobility beyond Ukraine.

## **4 Coordination with the National Qualifications Agency and qualification system reform initiatives**

It is advisable to ensure close coordination with the National Qualifications Agency (NQA) and with qualification system reform projects, including the “Qualifications Forged in Battle” initiative. Such coordination would support a systemic approach and ensure the regulatory and institutional sustainability of veterans’ professional reintegration into civilian life.

## **5 Expand cooperation with business**

Increase awareness across all sectors of the economy of the benefits of employing veterans and support the capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises to engage them.

Encourage cooperation between businesses and vocational education institutions to develop human capital, align training programmes with labour market needs, and facilitate the effective professional reintegration of veterans.

## 7. Appendices

### EXAMPLE 1:

### Battery technician

#### Military occupational speciality:

MOS 262005, 366005, 792005

#### Civil profession:

Battery Technician (Occupational Classification Code 7241)

The competencies defined for the military speciality “Battery Technician” fully correspond to the professional standard of the respective civilian profession “Battery Technician” (7241). Thus, there is a 100% **alignment** of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform professional tasks in the civilian sector. A servicemember with experience as a battery technician possesses all the competencies of a civilian specialist and also has additional skills related to the maintenance and operation of military equipment.

#### Pathway.

The Qualification Centre (QC) conducts a short interview to assess professional experience, knowledge, and skills (diagnostics, maintenance, and repair of batteries).

#### Conclusion on the absence of additional training needs.

Based on the interview, the QC confirms that the servicemember’s competencies fully meet the professional standard (100% alignment), and no additional training is required.

#### Assessment process.

The QC conducts a full assessment, including a theoretical component and a practical task.

#### Assessment outcome.

Upon successful completion, the QC issues a certificate awarding the professional qualification “Battery Technician”.

#### Grounds for employment.

The issued certificate is recognised by employers and serves as an official basis for employment in the relevant profession.

## EXAMPLE 2:

### **Instructor in operating combat vehicles (tanks, armoured vehicles, and vehicles on an armoured chassis) → tractor driver-machine operator**

#### **Military occupational speciality:**

MOS 113126, 116126–118126, 121126–126126, 130126, 132126, 134126, 136126, 140126, 144126, 157126, 168126, 178126, 179126

#### **Civil profession:**

Tractor Driver–Machine Operator in Agricultural (Forestry) Production (Occupational Classification Code 8331)

The competencies developed in the military speciality “Instructor in Operating Tanks, Armoured Vehicles, and Vehicles on an Armoured Chassis” largely align with the requirements of the civilian profession “Tractor Driver–Machine Operator in Agricultural (Forestry) Production” (8331). This primarily concerns operating tracked and wheeled vehicles, performing maintenance, diagnostics and troubleshooting, and complying with safety requirements during equipment operation. Overall, there is a high level of alignment (approximately 80%) between the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to operate agricultural and land-reclamation machinery. However, some competencies of the civilian profession relate to agronomy and the specific nature of agricultural work, which require short-term additional training.

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## **RECOGNITION AND TRANSITION PATHW**

### **Initial assessment at the Qualification Centre.**

The QC conducts an interview to evaluate professional experience, knowledge, and skills, including: operation of tracked and wheeled vehicles; routine maintenance, diagnostics, and minor repairs; compliance with safety requirements and operating procedures.

### **Conclusion on the need for additional training.**

Based on the interview, the QC confirms that the servicemember possesses the core competencies required to operate tractors and self-propelled machinery. However, to fully meet the qualification requirements of the profession, a short course is recommended, covering:

- fundamentals of agronomy and agricultural technologies;
- design features and adjustment of agricultural and land-reclamation machinery operated with tractors;

- basic rules for performing mechanised agricultural work (ploughing, cultivation, sowing, harvesting, etc.);
- maintenance of primary operational documentation for tractor driver–machine operators.

**Short training course. The participant completes a concise course covering:**

a theoretical module in agronomy; introduction to key types of agricultural machinery; equipment coupling procedures; requirements for performing core mechanised operations; and documentation (log sheets, waybills, fuel consumption standards).

**Assessment process.**

After completing the course, the QC conducts a full assessment, including:

- a theoretical component (machine design and agronomic requirements);
- a practical task (tractor operation, basic operations, and elements of maintenance).

**Assessment outcome.**

Upon successful completion, the QC issues a certificate awarding the professional qualification “Tractor Driver–Machine Operator in Agricultural (Forestry) Production”(8331).

**EXAMPLE 3:**

**Sniper → virtual asset analyst**

**Military occupational speciality:**

MOS 110750, 110751

**Civil Profession:**

Virtual Asset Analyst (Occupational Classification Code 2441.2)

**Compliance of competencies.**

The professional activities of a sniper include: high concentration; working with large volumes of information under stress; systematic and analytical thinking; scenario forecasting; risk assessment; discipline, responsibility, and autonomy; precision and attention to detail; and proficiency with digital devices and observational tools. These competencies partially overlap with the professional standard for a “Virtual Assets Analyst,” particularly in analytical thinking; data processing and interpretation; risk assessment; evidence-based decision-making; independent task performance; use of digital tools; and adherence to security procedures.

However, a significant portion of the civilian profession's requirements concerns knowledge of digital assets, blockchain, and fundamental and on-chain analysis, which are not covered by military training. With an estimated 40–50% alignment of competencies, targeted additional training is required.

## **RECOGNITION AND TRANSITION PATHWAY**

### **Initial assessment at the Qualification Centre.**

The QC conducts an interview to evaluate analytical thinking and approaches to information assessment; the ability to work with digital tools; understanding of risk and scenario forecasting; and decision-making under uncertainty.

### **Conclusion on the need for additional training.**

Based on the interview, the QC determines that the servicemember has strong potential for analytical roles but requires a short course covering: fundamentals of digital assets; basic blockchain concepts and DLT; on-chain analysis methodology; fundamental project analysis; technical analysis and data handling; specialised software tools (TradingView, CoinGlass, Dune, Arkham); basics of cybersecurity and digital asset protection; preparation of analytical reports; and digital communication and data ethics.

### **Short training course. Indicative structure:**

Theory: types and characteristics of virtual assets; blockchain technology and DLT principles; cryptocurrencies, tokens, NFTs, DeFi; basics of market research (data, indicators, metrics); fundamental analysis of digital projects; on-chain analytics and blockchain data interpretation; quantitative and qualitative analytical methods; risk management principles in high-volatility markets.

### **Practice:**

use of TradingView, CoinGlass, Dune, and Arkham; analytical tasks (asset comparison, project evaluation); preparation of concise analytical reports; working with digital data in structured environments.

### **The QC conducts the assessment.**

The theoretical component includes testing knowledge of digital assets, markets, technologies, and analytical approaches, as well as case analysis. The practical component includes performing on-chain and market analysis, preparing a brief analytical report, and working with specialised platforms.

### **Assessment outcome.**

Upon successful completion, the QC issues a certificate awarding the professional qualification "Virtual Assets Analyst."

## Indicative list of questions for a focus group with veterans

- 1 What was your professional experience before military service?  
.....
- 2 What were your responsibilities during service?  
.....
- 3 To what extent did your duties align with your military occupational speciality (MOS)?  
.....
- 4 What new skills did you acquire during service?  
.....
- 5 Do you believe you lost any civilian skills during your service?  
.....
- 6 Do you plan to return to your previous profession after service? If not, why?  
.....
- 7 What could facilitate your transition to a civilian profession?  
.....
- 8 What barriers do you see to employment after service (health, documentation, experience, team integration, etc.)?  
.....
- 9 How important is support to you (training, mentoring, assistance with documentation, psychological support)?  
.....
- 10 How do you view the idea of a digital platform that automatically matches military experience with civilian job opportunities?  
.....
- 11 Have you had experience of employment services or state programmes? How would you assess this experience?  
.....

## Questionnaire for employers on the employment of veterans

### 1 General information

Name of the enterprise/organization: \_\_\_\_\_

■ Field of activity: \_\_\_\_\_

■ Number of employees: \_\_\_\_\_

■ Contact person (position, phone, e-mail): \_\_\_\_\_

## 2 Experience with and Readiness to Employ Veterans

- Does your company employ any veterans? (Yes/No)
  - If yes, how many and in what positions do they hold?
  - Have you had a positive or negative experience of working with veterans?
  - What strengths of veterans have you noted?
  - What difficulties arose during work?
  - How ready is your company to hire veterans in future (1–5)?
  - Is there demand for such workers in your industry? If so, in which professions or areas?
- 

## 3 Skills and qualifications assessment

- How does your company assess candidates' professional skills?
    - Interview
    - Test task
    - Probationary period
    - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - What documents do you consider when hiring a veteran (military ID, diploma, certificates, statements, etc.)?
  - If a person has the necessary skills but lacks supporting documents, how do you proceed?
    - Hire after a practical check
    - Require a document
    - Recommend training/certification
    - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - How do you think the veteran skills validation process can be simplified or improved?
-

## 4 Obstacles and problems

- What are the main obstacles to hiring veterans (please indicate all that are relevant):
    - Non-compliance with qualifications
    - Lack of supporting documents
    - Medical restrictions (Medical Commission conclusions)
    - Psychological adaptation
    - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Have there been cases where a veteran could not be hired because of a Medical Commission conclusion?
  - In your opinion, how could this issue be addressed?
  - Do you consider it appropriate to create adapted workplaces for such individuals?
- 

## 5 Employers' recommendations

- Which skills do you consider most valuable among veterans for your sector?
  - Which professions or areas do you consider most suitable for veterans in your field?
  - Are you interested in setting up special internship or training programmes for veterans?
  - What forms of support from the state or business associations could increase willingness to hire veterans?
- 

## 6 Additional questions

- Does your company have a corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy that supports veterans?
- Are you willing to collaborate with veteran organisations or retraining centres?
- What proposals do you have for improving the integration of veterans into the workforce?

<https://www.helvetas.org/en/eastern-europe/ukraine>

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Kyiv 2025

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