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The need for systemic support to Ukrainian soldiers who became disabled as a result of hostilities

Committee Opinion[1]
Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination
Rapporteur: Mr Georgios STAMATIS, Greece, Group of the European People's Party

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination welcomes the report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development. It shares its focus on the need to fully support the rehabilitation and effective reintegration of veterans[2] to active social, professional, and family life through a holistic approach.

2. The committee welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the recommendations made in the draft resolution and in the draft recommendation, and to reinforce them as regards the protection of women, LGBTI persons and foreign nationals who serve in the Ukrainian armed forces. It considers that the Ukrainian authorities should take measures to ensure that all members of the armed forces and veterans who become persons with disabilities as a result of the war of aggression of the Russian Federation receive support and assistance, on an equal basis and without any discrimination.

3. The draft resolution and draft recommendation highlight the need to raise awareness about the situation of members of the Ukrainian armed forces and veterans. The proposed amendments to the draft resolution and draft recommendation aim to consider the specific needs and experiences of women veterans in Ukraine. They also address the situation of LGBTI soldiers and veterans, as the lack of legislation recognising same-sex marriage or civil partnerships in Ukraine implies that LGBTI veterans, as well as their partners and families, do not have the same rights to access the support and assistance available. Finally, even though the title of the report refers to "Ukrainian soldiers", the committee considers that foreign veterans who fight in Ukraine and become disabled as a result of hostilities should also have access to the support and assistance available to Ukrainian veterans.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 16063, Reference 4845 of 27 January 2025. Reporting committee: Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development. See Doc. 1 6464. Opinion approved by the committee on 18 September 2026.
2. This opinion uses the term "veterans", which is defined in Ukrainian law as "individuals who participated in the defence of Ukraine, either as part of the Ukrainian Armed Forces or within partisan units". The term is also used in the draft resolution.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 3, insert the following paragraph:

> *"As there are over 75 000 women serving in the Ukrainian armed forces, their specific needs and circumstances should be integrated in the country's veterans' policy so that it fully addresses the reintegration and rehabilitation of women veterans with disabilities".*

Explanatory note

Women actively participate in the Ukrainian armed forces, in a variety of roles. Some of them have also become persons with disabilities as a result of hostilities and therefore their specific needs to recover and reintegrate should also be an integral part of Ukraine's national veterans' policy.

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 8, insert the following sentence:

> *"It further highlights the particular needs of women veterans, who should be given visibility, in particular as they face gender stereotypes concerning their role in society".*

Explanatory note

Many Ukrainian women play a very active role in the army, but they face a lack of recognition as veterans, including as veterans with disabilities, which can have an impact on their access to rights and support services.

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 11.1, insert the following sentence:

> *"All veterans with disabilities should have access to all the rights, benefits and support services included in the veterans' policy, without discrimination on any ground".*

Explanatory note

It would be appropriate to explicitly spell out that the veterans' policy should be applied in a non-discriminatory way encompassing all possible grounds of discrimination, as this may require specific measures to ensure that all veterans are treated equally.

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 11.1, insert the following paragraph:

> *"ensure the full participation of veterans with disabilities in all their diversity, and the organisations that represent them, in the development of Ukraine's veterans' policy;"*

Explanatory note

It is critical that those directly affected by veterans' policies, including women and LGBTI veterans, have the opportunity to participate in their formulation so that their lived experiences and needs can be fully considered.

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 11.3, insert the following sentence:

> *"The partners of LGBTI veterans with disabilities should be considered as 'families and informal caregivers' of veterans and be given access to the support programmes, psychological care, training and respite services available".*

Explanatory note

The fact that there is no legislation expressly recognising same-sex couples in Ukraine should not lead to the discrimination of LGBTI veterans with disabilities as regards access to rights and services by them and their families, including their partners.

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 11.4, last sentence, after the words “Such data should be”, insert the following words:

“disaggregated by sex and”

Explanatory note

It would be important to give visibility to the needs and experiences of women veterans and ensure that they inform the implementation of public policies and the development of future ones.

Amendment G (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 11.4, insert the following paragraph:

“implement programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence targeting military personnel and veterans”;

Explanatory note

The Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence – GREVIO’s first evaluation report on Ukraine, published on 4 September 2026, notes with concern that the war of aggression by the Russian Federation has resulted in an increase in violence against women perpetrated by military personnel and veterans, in particular soldiers returning from the frontlines suffering from war-related trauma.

Amendment H (to the draft recommendation)

At the end of paragraph 1, replace the words “soldiers with disabilities” with the following words:

“the reintegration and rehabilitation of veterans with disabilities, including women, LGBTI persons and non-nationals”.

Explanatory note

The next Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine should contain measures addressing the reintegration and rehabilitation needs of all persons who participate in the defence of Ukraine against the aggression of the Russian Federation, and who become disabled as a result, including men, women, LGBTI persons and foreign veterans.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Georgios Stamatis, rapporteur for opinion[3]

1. Introduction

1. The explanatory memorandum by Mr Jan Filip Libicki (Poland, EPP/CD) and the draft resolution and draft recommendation adopted by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, are a wake-up call to raise awareness about one of the most devastating consequences of the war of aggression carried out by the Russian federation in Ukraine since February 2022.

2. In this regard, I would like to express my satisfaction, alongside that of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, for the opportunity to contribute to an important text tackling the needs of veterans and soldiers in Ukraine who become persons with disabilities during the war of aggression.

3. In November 2024, the Ukrainian Government approved a Veterans Policy Strategy until 2030. Its implementation should be reviewed so that it can be adapted to the evolving needs and circumstances of veterans in Ukraine, including those with disabilities. At the hearing held in June 2026, the then Minister of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, Ms Kalmykova, underlined that the most important message from the Ukrainian experience is that “rehabilitation does not end when the person leaves the hospital”, as returning to independent living also requires accessible infrastructure, employment opportunities, psychological support, community acceptance, and strong family networks. These issues are indeed included in the draft resolution, and I commend Mr Libicki for his report.

3. This explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.

4. With more than two million veterans in Ukraine,[4] it is critical that national policies and measures to support their reintegration adequately address the diversity of needs of veterans and the challenges they face, based on their active participation and experience.

5. At the hearing held on 23 June 2026, we learnt that there are approximately 3.6 million people with disabilities in Ukraine, which is one million more than before the war. The National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities, set up in Ukraine in 2002, now has a Veterans Council to consider the situation and needs of persons who become disabled as a result of the war of aggression. They contribute to shaping veteran policy in Ukraine by working with the Ministry of Veteran Affairs and other authorities providing advice to ensure equal rights and accessible services.

6. The number of persons with disabilities in Ukraine has grown and will continue to grow as the war of aggression continues, affecting both veterans and civilians. At our hearing, we heard from Ms Olga Rudneva, the director of the Superhumans War Trauma Center – a clinic that provides psychological support, prosthetics, reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation for people injured during the war – that the estimated number of people who have lost limbs in Ukraine is about 100 000. Hearing impairments affect roughly 200 000 people, including partially or fully losing their hearing.

7. In addition, mental health issues are a serious concern. Ms Rudneva explained that this is one of the biggest challenges that Ukraine has, as a country, in the next five to ten years. She underlined the need for international support to build their capacity to treat many mental cases in civilians and military personnel. She called for a war trauma national hospital so that data and experience can be collected.

8. As it was stated by Minister Kalmykova at the hearing in June 2026, veteran policy "is ultimately about dignity, participation, and equal opportunities". This means that all veterans who become disabled during the war of aggression need to have access to the same support and assistance towards their rehabilitation.

9. Mr Libicki's report, draft resolution and draft recommendation are timely and important. I can only support this text and encourage the members of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, as well as the Assembly as a whole, to do the same. The amendments I propose aim to strengthen the text as regards the need to recognise and cater for the needs of the full diversity of soldiers who become disabled as a result of the hostilities in Ukraine, including women, LGBTI persons and foreign veterans. In addition, working to increase the public understanding and acceptance of persons with disabilities, including veterans, is crucial, as is a pre-condition for their full reintegration in society.

2. The importance of considering the needs of all veterans, including women, LGBTI persons and foreign nationals

10. The Fifth Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment of the situation in Ukraine published in February 2026 by the World Bank, the Government of Ukraine, the European Union and the United Nations, covering the period from February 2022 to December 2025, indicates that war veterans and members of the armed forces, both women and men, experience gender-specific impacts related to combat exposure, injury and disability, reintegration challenges, and mental health needs. This justifies that a gender-specific assessment and consideration of the needs of men and women veterans be carried out.

11. EU reports[5] note that veterans in Ukraine face various difficulties depending on their educational background, military role, access to healthcare (including psychological assistance), gender and access to housing, especially for those from the territories occupied by Russia.

12. In 2018, the Ukrainian Government opened for the first time 63 combat positions to women in the Armed Forces. That led to the foundation of the Women Veterans Movement (VETERANKA), a community of women veterans that supports women in the military and helps women veterans return to civilian life. Adequate uniforms for women have been provided since 2024, but there was no body armour vests adapted to the female anatomy until July 2026, which resulted in injuries to female soldiers.[6]

13. In our hearing held on 23 June 2026, we heard first-hand from one of the founders of VETERANKA, Ms Primark, about the army's masculine environment, which is not always welcoming for women. Ms Primark remarked that women must prove themselves on duty every day to show that they can fight on alongside men

4. As stated by the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, see web news of 1 September 2026.
5. See European Parliament Briefing, April 2026, "Ukraine's veterans policy".
6. See Amnesty International, web news, 28 May 2026, Ukrainian war veteran on fighting for recognition and change.

on equal terms, and after they are discharged, they are "forced to prove their contribution all over again, because the state and society still predominantly view veterans as men". She stressed the direct impact of such stereotypes and bias on veteran policies, as public policies "are not built in a vacuum".

14. Nearly 16 000 foreign volunteers from at least 72 countries serve in Ukraine's Defence Forces.[7] The Office of the Military Ombudsman has set up a working group to examine the situation of foreign servicemen, from their recruitment and deployment to being discharged and the return to their home countries or transition to civilian life in Ukraine. These non-national veterans should also be able to access and benefit from the support and assistance available for veterans who become disabled during the war of aggression.

15. Experts at the hearing also conveyed the strong message that Europe should not fear the radicalisation of Ukrainian veterans, but rather their mental health and the impact of addictions, chronic unemployment and persistent grief. The best help for veterans who become disabled is to invest in accessibility and remove barriers to employment, housing and recovery, focusing on their mental health and dignity.

3. Gaps in the protection of the rights of LGBTI persons in Ukraine

16. A draft new Civil Code, submitted by a group of MPs led by the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, Ruslan Stefanchuk, caused great concern among organisations defending the rights of LGBTI persons as it would deprive same-sex couples and their family members of the limited recognition that currently exists – which is subject to a court decision. The draft new Civil Code defines a "de facto family union" as the cohabitation of two persons of different sex living as one family. This means that the draft new code deprives same-sex couples of any recognition as family members.[8] The Verkhovna Rada adopted the draft in the first reading but, following public protests and negative reactions, the possibility of amending it remains open.

17. The situation of transgender persons in the Ukrainian army is also a source of concern, as those who serve in the Ukrainian army face discrimination and legal restrictions. The official change of gender is not regulated as regards military registration and transgender persons cannot hold positions of command, given that the diagnosis of "Transsexualism" continues to be linked to mental disorders,[9] despite the changes brought by the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11).

18. Protests against the draft Civil Code and demands to legalise registered civil partnerships for same-sex couples have become the main focus of LGBTI events in 2026. The Ukrainian Government and President have made statements in support of equal rights for LGBTI persons, but the adoption of legislation is being slowed down in parliament by conservative parliamentarians and the lobbying of certain Ukrainian churches.

4. Activities of the Council of Europe on veterans in Ukraine

19. The Council of Europe is conducting a co-operation project on "Rights of Veterans and Personnel of Armed Forces in Ukraine", as part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine "Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction" 2023-2026. The project aims at contributing to the protection of human rights of military personnel, veterans, law enforcement officers and their families, including their social rights.

20. The project integrates a gender-sensitive and inclusive approach throughout its activities, recognising that veterans have diverse experiences, needs and vulnerabilities. Particular attention is paid to the challenges that women veterans may face, as well as to practical approaches for addressing these challenges and providing appropriate support. This approach is reflected in the main activities of the project:

– Trauma-sensitive communication and support to persons released from captivity: Particular attention is paid to the specific experiences and vulnerabilities of women in the armed forces, including their heightened exposure to risks of discrimination, harassment and gender-based violence, which may have an impact on their psychological well-being and recovery.

– Support to the integration of veterans in the labour market: Training for career counsellors included the specific challenges that women veterans may face in accessing and participating in employment, including gender stereotypes, potential discriminatory attitudes and practices, and other barriers that may affect their labour market integration.

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7. See Euractiv online article of 6 August 2026 "Ukraine says nearly 16,000 foreign volunteers serve in its army".
8. See Statement of Nash Svit Center regarding the draft of the new Civil Code (Code of Private Law) of Ukraine (Bill 14394), of 11 February 2026.
9. See "LGBTQ situation in Ukraine in the first half of 2026", published by the NGO "NASH SVIT Center" on 17 July 2026.

– Case management and comprehensive support: Training is provided to specialists providing support to veterans, including practical cases addressing the complex and intersecting circumstances that women veterans may experience, i.e. situations where women veterans may simultaneously be veterans, spouses or family members of military personnel, persons with disabilities, or persons originating from temporarily occupied territories.

21. On 27 August 2026, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights presented the Special Report "On the State of Implementation of Veterans' Policy in Ukraine".[10] The public event was supported by the Council of Europe project "Rights of Veterans and Personnel of Armed Forces in Ukraine". The Special report analyses the current state of veteran policy, and it includes information provided by government authorities and citizens, as well as the results of a survey of 1000 male and female veterans.

22. On 4 September 2026, the GREVIO published its first evaluation report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Ukraine. The report welcomes the measures taken by the Ukrainian authorities to actively prepare demobilised men and veterans for their return to civil life, given the escalation of domestic violence cases largely due to the experiences and trauma related to the war. The report recommends targeted perpetrator programmes for military personnel and veterans, which could be set up within existing perpetrator programmes or as part of the work of veteran centres or other institutions supporting them (see paragraphs 65, 68, 71, 99 and 101).

10. See web news of 28 August 2026.