

Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veterans' Benefits Utilization and Experiences

About the Series

The Veterans' Reintegration Survey (VRS) explored veterans' general experiences as they transition from military service due to the ongoing conflict that began in 2014. The topical areas in the VRS include veterans' service experience, healthcare, employment, well-being, and sociopolitical perspectives.

This report presents findings from the VRS on the topics of veterans' benefits, including their experiences in accessing benefits, satisfaction levels with various benefits, and willingness to use an electronic registry to apply for services.¹

Key takeaways:

- The benefits veterans need the most are utilities, healthcare service, and public transportation.
- For most veterans, applying for benefits is a burdensome bureaucratic process that required excessive paperwork.
- Veterans are willing to register in a MoVA electronic registry (e-registry) to apply for benefits.

Policy Recommendations

- Build a unified electronic registry² to provide information on the benefits available to veterans. This e-registry should be easily accessible to the public, and especially to veterans and their families. In addition, it should match each veteran's specific circumstances to relevant benefits. Moreover, this e-registry should especially highlight the forms of assistance that are as yet not well utilized by veterans. It should also reduce bureaucratic delays so that veterans can access their benefits when these benefits are needed and most useful to them.
- Create an interdepartmental working group to address the mismatch between benefits provision and the actual needs of veterans. Shift to a people-centered approach to adjust the policies that guide the benefits process.

Access to Benefits: Most Veterans Receive at Least One Benefit

Nearly all veterans (97%) received at least one benefit due to their service. There was no difference among veterans with a registered disability, unregistered disability, or no disability (see Table 1).

Table 1: Share of Benefits Recipients by Disability Status

<i>Received Benefit</i>	
No disability	97 %
Registered disability	99 %
Unregistered disability	98 %

¹ Given that veterans were sampled using a snowball approach, the sample is likely better connected to NGOs and other veterans than to the overall veteran population, which may skew some of the results of the survey.

² IREX is currently working with a local consultant to facilitate the creation of the e-registry by a local software development company.

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Types of Benefits: Does the Need Match the Use?

Benefits Received

Most veterans received free or subsidized public transportation (89%) and utilities discounts (81%). Only around half received medical care and priority in land ownership. The remaining benefits were accessed by less than a third of veterans (see Table 2).

Veterans have been generally satisfied with most of benefits they have received. Among veterans who received each form of assistance listed in Annex 1, at least 80% of veterans have been satisfied with receiving support for substance abuse treatment,³ admission support to universities, veteran support groups, professional development courses, and physiotherapy. Annex 1 gives a breakdown of veterans' levels of satisfaction.

Benefits Needed

Subsidies for utilities are the most needed benefit (45%), followed by healthcare services (38%) and public transportation (34%). Comparing the top three benefits received (Table 2) with the three most needed benefits (Table 3) shows some consistency of prioritized services. However, this may suggest that veterans are prone to say they need what they are already receiving.

Housing assistance (to include loans) was the fourth most needed benefit (22%; see Table 3). Only 8% of veterans have received housing benefits. Homeownership rates among veterans were low relative to the general population, only 53% of veterans compared to 71% for the general population. Conversely, more veterans lived in rented housing units (19%) compared to the general population (9%).

Table 2: Veterans' Ten Most Frequently Received Benefits

<i>Benefit type</i>	<i>Share</i>
Public transportation	89 %
Utilities discount	81 %
Medical care	55 %
Priority in land ownership	51 %
Additional 2 vacation weeks	30 %
Dental treatment and prosthesis	29 %
Sanatorium treatment	29 %
Legal advice	28 %
Pharmaceutical supplies	27 %
Psychological support	24 %

Table 3: Veterans' Ten Most Needed Benefits

<i>Benefit type</i>	<i>Share</i>
Subsidies for utilities	45 %
Healthcare services	38 %
Public transportation	34 %
Housing (including loans)	22 %
Rehabilitation, sanatorium treatment, rest	21 %
Getting land	14 %
Financial assistance (including pensions)	11 %
Psychological support	7 %
Employment	6 %
Education	6 %

³ The base for this rate is less than 20 respondents.

Veterans Find Obstacles in Accessing Benefits

Almost three-quarters (70%) of veterans reported that too much paperwork and bureaucracy created obstacles to accessing benefits (see Table 4). Combined with the second most common challenge, lack of information on benefit types and how to access them, it is clear that red tape created a considerable roadblock.

Systematic problems, such as poor service and slow process, significantly add to the challenges veterans face when trying to access benefits (Table 3). In contrast, only 3% of veterans did not have any problems in accessing benefits. Box 1 contains an example of veterans' frustration with the process.

Box 1: "They put you on the priority list. After a month-long wait, you get an MRI. If you need something else done, you have to wait another month. This is the so-called [priority] benefit." — Male veteran, from a focus-group discussion.

Table 4: Challenges Veterans Experienced in Accessing Benefits

Benefit type	Share
Too much paperwork and bureaucracy	70 %
Lack of information on types and how to access	46 %
Poor service from providers	37 %
Slow process	36 %
Corruption, nepotism, fraud	30 %
Shaming from others	23 %
Distance to the service	13 %
Other	3 %
No problems	3 %

Figure 1: Willingness to use an E-Registry to Apply for Services from MoVA

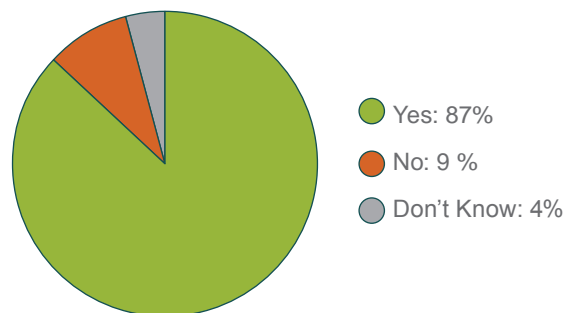
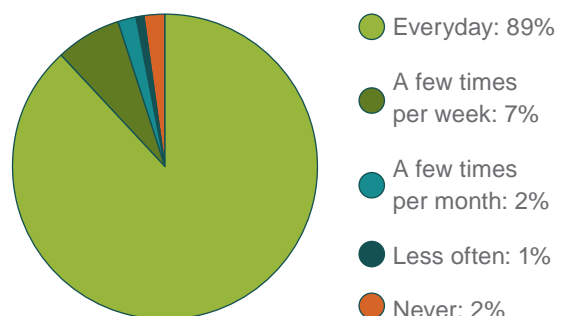


Figure 2: Veterans' Frequency of Internet Use



Most Veterans Are Willing to use an E-Registry

Overwhelmingly, veterans (87%) are willing to use an e-registry to apply for benefits from the Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA; see Figure 1). Only less than 10% said they were unwilling to use such an e-registry.

Nearly 90% of veterans use the internet every day, while only 2% never use it (see Figure 2).

Policy and Programming Implications

Based on the findings from the VRS on benefits usage and satisfaction, the following key areas should be considered for programming purposes:

Address operational Challenges

The challenges that veterans face in accessing their benefits point to several operational issues, as shown in Table 4. Most veterans say that bureaucratic obstacles and complex procedures are the biggest barriers to their obtaining benefits. And nearly half point to the lack of information on the types of benefits available and how to get them. To remedy these problems, MoVA should develop a comprehensive plan that addresses challenges identified by the veterans as part of a strategy for their reintegration. The first step would be a thorough review of the existing policies and processes aimed at digitizing and then creating the most accessible, simplified, and understandable online information and support for veterans. The next step would be automation of certain processes.

In addition, MoVA should develop standards for local governments responsible for delivering services and benefits to veterans under the decentralization reforms. This task requires sufficient funding and adequate institutional capacity of MoVA to fundamentally change its public policies and create a people-oriented service design. A nationwide tracking system, such as an e-registry, could fast-track access to benefits and services. Given that most veterans are willing to use an e-registry to apply for services and most use the internet every day, an e-registry and digitization of the process would be an effective way to improve and maintain their access to benefits from MoVA. The e-registry should capture and monitor which benefits are used and by whom, which will make the process

more transparent and address veterans' perceptions of corruption and nepotism.

Match benefit provision to the actual needs of Veterans

Many benefits that are currently included in the Ukrainian legislation are outdated and no longer relevant for veterans (e.g., installation of landline phones and the right to access discounted shops that no longer exist). Therefore, existing benefit provision practices and laws must be reviewed, and veterans need to be offered services that meet their actual needs. Moreover, applying for and accessing benefits need to be streamlined, and the red tape that causes delays eliminated. For example, while the allocation of state-owned land is one of the available rights according to the Ukrainian national law, veterans often find themselves unable to use that benefit. Instructions and help on how to access and use land for agricultural or business purposes should be included in the benefits package. Moreover, there should be greater cooperation and coordination among the national and local government bodies that handle the provision of benefits to the veterans and their families.

Revisit certain benefit provisions that may hamper economic integration of veterans

The Ukrainian government's Veteran Support Reform⁴ aims to promote the hiring of veterans into the civil service after they return from their military service. This effort is commendable, but the economic reintegration of veterans is often complicated by certain benefits that dis-

4 State Sites of Ukraine, "Veteran Support Reform," accessed June 9, 2021, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/reformi/bezpeka-ta-aborona/veteran-support-reform>

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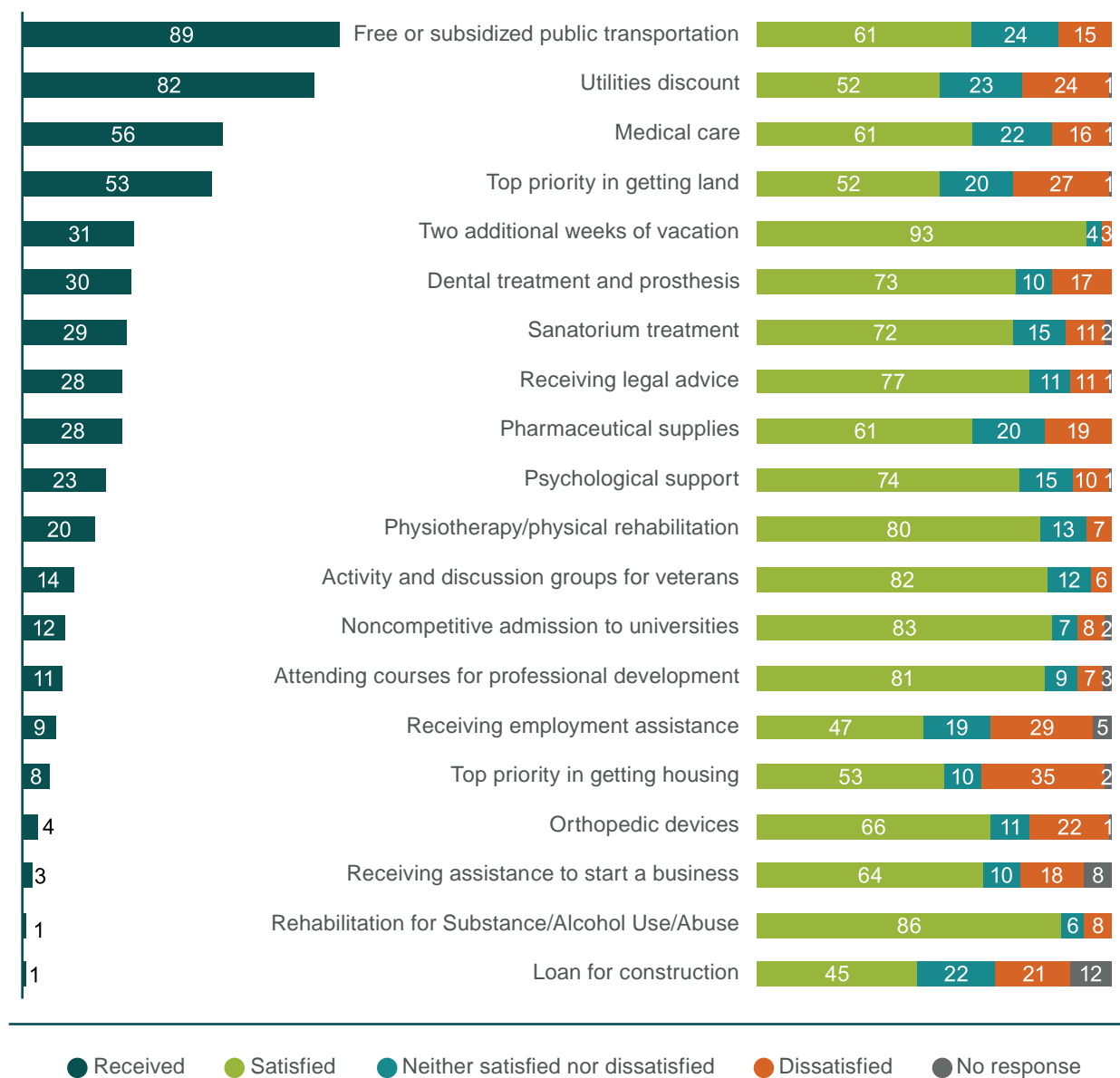
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courage employers from hiring them. For example, under the law, veterans are entitled to an additional fourteen days of leave and may also be called up for a mandatory military training. Covering this leave is the financial responsibil-

ity of the employers, who may be unwilling to hire veterans as a result. Offering economic incentives to employers, such as tax breaks, could thus encourage the hiring of veterans.

Annex 1: Benefits Received by Veterans and their Satisfaction Levels for Each



Notes:

1. Binary question for receiving the service: "Have you received this service?" (% of all veterans, base = 1800)

2. Categorical question for satisfaction: "Are you satisfied with this service?" (% of veterans who received a service, base is less than 20 for "Rehabilitation for Substance /Alcohol Use/Abuse" and "Loan for construction.")