

Achievements of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center

June – December 2024

The Kyiv-Mohyla Academy has a unique ability to combine high-quality educational services and a powerful community. And it is precisely these abilities the Kyiv-Mohyla students have used as the basis for the systematic support of our Defenders since the first days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Academy's community has been helping the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Ukrainian veterans since the beginning of the Russian invasion in 2014. Since 2022, with the onset of the full-scale Russian war against Ukraine, the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy has designated activities supporting the military and veterans as a distinct focus. In the spring of 2024, the Student Veteran Service began operating under the Department of Student Affairs. This initiative aims to make the educational process more accessible for military students and their children.

In June 2024, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, the Veterans Resource Center at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, began its work. The Center was officially established on August 29, the Day of Remembrance of the Defenders of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center shares the values and mission of NaUKMA – to promote the development of a nationally-conscious, honest, caring, creative personalities, who think independently and act responsibly in accordance with the universal principles of Good and Justice, for the development of an open and democratic society.

The mission of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, Ukraine's first university-based veteran center focused on leadership and transformative change, is to empower veterans to take on leadership roles and influence the development of the state.



From left: Hennadiy Zubko, Head of the NaUKMA Supervisory Board; Serhiy Kvit, President of NaUKMA; Liudmyla Kryvoruchka, Head of the Yukhymenko Family Doctoral School of NaUKMA; Olha Poliukhovych, Vice President for Research and Academic Affairs; Yana Chapailo, Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center; Mariia Savrun, Head of Strategic Development and Partnerships of the Leadership Center

Rooted in the community and values of NaUKMA, the Center fosters open dialogue and the generation of new ideas. It strengthens cooperation between state institutions, communities, businesses and the public sector with service members, veterans and their families.



A class at the "Leadership and Resilience" program, Fall 2024

We are grateful to our colleagues who have worked with us on projects to support and assist veterans. The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center's initiatives are university-wide efforts involving various departments, faculties, and centers across NaUKMA. Our valued partners include the Center for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support at NaUKMA, the Yukhymenko Family Doctoral School, the Kyiv-Mohyla School of Professional and Continuing Education, Kyiv-Mohyla departments and research centers, the NaUKMA Supervisory Board, the Kyiv-Mohyla Foundation in Ukraine, and the Kyiv-Mohyla Foundation of America.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to our external partners: Veteran Hub Charitable foundation, NGO Vilnyi Vybir, NGO Prostir Mozhlivostey, Invictus Games, Come Back Alive Foundation, NGO Lobby X, NGO Women's Veterans Movement, and everyone who has contributed to implementing impactful projects and fostering a supportive community.

Chapter 1 “Leadership and Resilience” Certificate Program

In September 2024, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center launched its flagship project – the “Leadership and Resilience” certificate program. This program and all the others mentioned here are available for veterans free of charge thanks to philanthropists and the support of partner organizations.



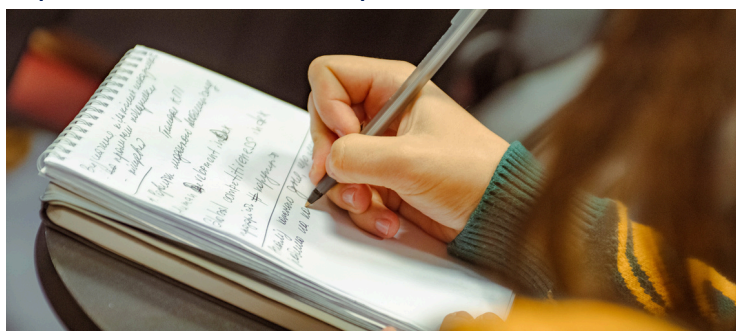
Opening meeting with the participants of the “Leadership and Resilience” program at the NaUKMA Museum

The “Leadership and Resilience” program aims to support and strengthen the expertise of veterans who want to work in the field of public policy, community building, and other leadership initiatives to rebuild and strengthen Ukraine.

It provides an opportunity to deepen theoretical knowledge of public administration, explore the historical and political contexts of Ukraine's development, and understand the modern Ukrainian state, its role in the international arena. It also focuses on building an understanding of leadership and the importance of a leader's reputation.



Kateryna Rotar, participant of the program



The program lasted two months and welcomed its first group of 13 participants, nominated by partner veteran organizations for their leadership potential. Nine participants successfully completed the program, while the remaining participants planned to resume their studies in the Spring of 2025.

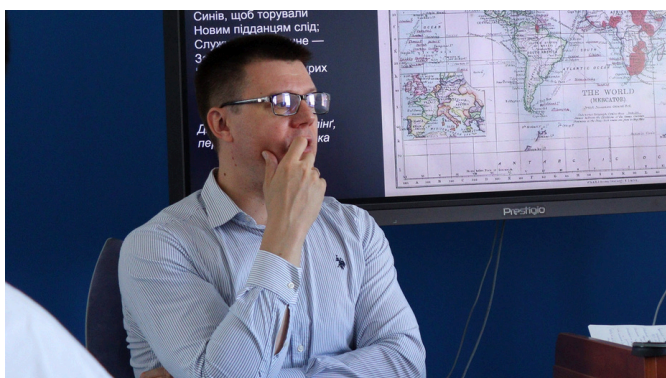
“Leadership and Resilience” certificate program was designed by the team of: Yana Chapailo, Director of the Center, Mariia Savrun, Head of Strategic Partnerships at the Center, Oksana Syroyid, lecturer in public policy, governance, and law, and Volodymyr Dehtyarov, business coach and CEO of Newsfront Communications.

To ensure the program's successful implementation, the Defenders Leadership Center held a focus group with NaUKMA students - veterans, who provided valuable insights and recommendations for its improvement. The NaUKMA Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Center offered training for the faculty on trauma-informed approaches to create a supportive and comfortable learning environment. The trauma-informed approach, an essential component of teaching during a full-scale war, incorporates theoretical knowledge, ethical principles, and teaching practices tailored to the unique, often traumatic, experiences of military personnel and veterans. This approach fosters a calmer and more supportive learning environment, aiding participants in their adaptation to the civilian life.



The “Leadership and Resilience” program includes the following topics:

- The Philosophy of Public Administration in Western and Eastern Civilizations
- The History of Ukraine in Phenomena. The Nature of War and the Concept of Leadership. International Organizations after the World War II
- The Phenomenon of Private Property. Challenges of Public Service. Virtues and Lifestyle of a Leader
- Organization of Public Administration in Ukraine. Decentralization
- Interaction with Nonprofit Organizations, Businesses, and Religious organizations. Tools of Political Influence and Propaganda
- Public Communication. The Concept of Reputation and Information Hygiene
- Leadership. Examining the Strengths and Weaknesses of a Leader. Understanding the Followers' Needs and the Authenticity of the Leader
- Practicums: Project Management, Interaction with Authorities
- Preparation and Presentation of Final Group Projects with Supervision



Maksym Yakovliev, Head of the Department of International Relations at NaUKMA, lecturer of the “Leadership and Resilience” program



Tetyana Berezhna, Deputy Minister of Economy of Ukraine, NaUKMA alumni, lecturer of the “Leadership and Resilience” program

We are grateful to the NaUKMA faculty, in particular, Taras Lyutyi, Liudmyla Kryvoruchka, Maksym Yaremenko, Volodymyr Masliychuk, Volodymyr Yermolenko, Maksym Yakovliev, Volodymyr Venher, Alina Khaletska, Oksana Syroid, Volodymyr Degtiarov, Natalia Shlikhta, and Sergiy Nozdrachov for implementing the program. Special appreciation goes to Hennadiy Zubko and Tetyana Berezchna, who taught additional lectures for our students.



Group photo with Volodymyr Degtyarov, lecturer of the “Leadership and Resilience” course, CEO of Newsfront Communications, co-author of the leadership program for tactical-level commanders of the Territorial Defense Forces and Head of Public Relations for the 13th Operational Brigade of National Guard of Ukraine “Khartia”

The “Leadership and Resilience” certificate program awards ECTS credits in Management and Political Science. Participants studied intensively over two months, attending classes every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, with more than 120 hours of joint work. As a graduation project, participants worked in groups to develop educational programs for two target audiences:

- Veterans who want to acquire skills and experience to advocate for changes in veterans' policies
- HR managers who work with veterans (recruit veterans or work with teams that have team members - veterans)

This work format allowed us to develop new ideas and better understand the problems veterans face in various spheres of life. This emphasizes the importance of the “nothing for veterans without veterans” principle that the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center follows. Policies, programs, and courses should be created with veterans to meet their real needs. The results of this work were later successfully used by the Leadership Center in practice during a training session offered for HR professionals.

In October 2024, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center launched the “Career Guidance and Career Counselling for War Veterans” course. It was designed for veterans seeking to embark on a path toward professional fulfillment. The course helps participants take their first steps toward securing a job that aligns with their expectations, talents, and acquired professional skills.

“Career Guidance and Career Counselling for War Veterans” course was designed and taught by Serhiy Nozdrachov, a certified Gallup expert in talent and strengths development, professor at Kyiv Mohyla Business School, and a partner at Oxford Leadership Consulting in the UK.

The course was conducted in two formats: in-person sessions for veterans nominated by partner organizations and online sessions (via Zoom) for participants from communities in Lutsk (Volyn Oblast), Opishnia (Poltava Oblast) and Chernihiv (Chernihiv Oblast).



Serhiy Nozdrachov, professor at the Kyiv-Mohyla Business School and lecturer of the “Leadership and Resilience” course



The final module of the “Career Guidance and Career Counselling for War Veterans Adaptation” course

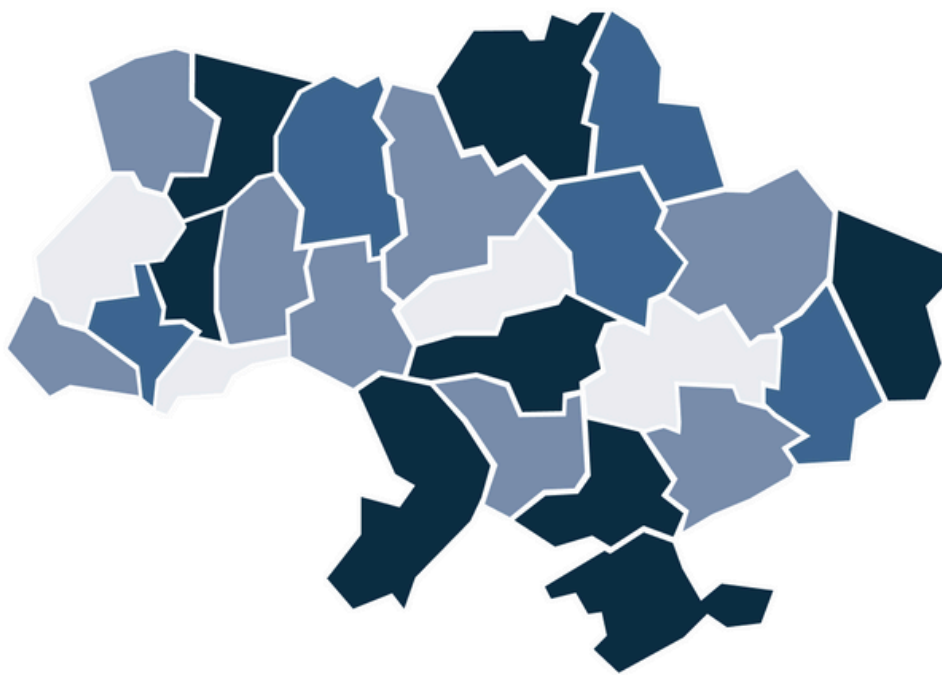
The course became not only an educational program but a true space for transformation. By the end of the program the veterans shared their experiences of change, reflected on what they had learned and outlined ambitious plans for the future. A total of 26 veterans successfully completed the program, each taking an important step toward new opportunities and personal growth.

*Note: all sections marked with an asterisk were implemented as part of the Good Governance Fund (GGF) project “Inclusive Economy,” funded by UK International Development from the UK Government. The project was implemented by Abt Global in partnership with the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.

Since the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine, communities have played a critical role in supporting the Ukrainian Armed Forces and helping veterans transition to civilian life. Recognizing this, one of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center's key goals is to strengthen the capacity of communities and public institutions to build and maintain effective relationships with service members, veterans, and their families.

In September 2024, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center launched its first initiative in response to this need. The initiative focused on assessing the needs for career guidance, counseling, and developing inclusive employment programs for veterans in three focus communities: Lutsk (Volyn Oblast), Opishnia (Poltava Oblast), and Chernihiv (Chernihiv Oblast). As part of the project, a series of focus group discussions were held with representatives of local self-government bodies, specialists from regional employment centers, and members of local veteran organizations. Through open and constructive conversations with participants, the team was able to identify and document the key needs and challenges faced by community stakeholders.

Veterans face several challenges including excessive bureaucracy in obtaining combat veteran or disability statuses, difficulties with document processing, limited inclusivity and accessibility of workplaces for veterans with disabilities, and a lack of awareness about employment opportunities and career counseling. At the community level, the key needs include establishing educational centers and other resources for veterans, providing psychological support for staff involved in veterans' social integration, and ensuring the availability of mentors and consultants within the community.



HR professionals play a pivotal role in supporting veterans during their transition from military to civilian employment. On this journey, skilled HR specialists not only provide essential guidance but also serve as catalysts for meaningful, broader changes.

This broader impact involves developing workplace policies that prioritize human-centered approaches and creating supportive environments for war veterans across both the business and public sectors.



Roundtable “Human-2-Human: A People-Centered Approach and Best Practices for Recruitment, Adaptation, and Reintegration of War Veterans into the Workplace”



From left: Mariia Savrun, Head of Strategic Development and Partnerships at the Leadership Center, Olesya Pitsyk, HR consultant at the Leadership Center

In September 2024, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center hosted a roundtable discussion with HR specialists from Ukraine’s public sector, businesses and professional NGOs. The event, titled “Human-2-Human: A People-Centered Approach and Best Practices for Recruitment, Adaptation and Reintegration of War Veterans into the Workplace,” provided a valuable platform for sharing practical experience both from the ATO/JFO (Anti-Terrorist Operation/Joint Forces Operation) period and insights gained since the start of the full-scale russian invasion.

Participants discussed new human-centered HRM standards, best practices for fostering veterans' career development, and strategies for adapting workplaces to meet their needs. This exchange of knowledge and experience was a significant step toward improving veteran reintegration processes.

Shortly after the “Human-2-Human” roundtable, its key insights became the foundation for a training session titled “Trauma-Informed Communication in Working with Veterans.” On November 29, 2024, the Leadership Center organized this training for HR professionals from large Ukrainian businesses: Agromat, Epicenter K, Unique Trade, SoftServe, Ukrenergo and Ukrtelecom. The training aimed to enhance participants’ understanding and practical communication skills through a trauma-informed approach. It also emphasized the role and impact of HR management in creating safe and supportive environments for veterans, highlighting best practices for fostering their successful reintegration into the workplace.



The roundtable “Made in Ukraine” (from left): Oleksandr Palazov, Yana Chapailo, Olesya Pitsyk, Hlib Stryzhko, and Yana Honcharenko

On December 3, 2024, the Leadership Center hosted a roundtable discussion on cross-sectoral support for veterans transitioning to civilian life.

The event brought together representatives from the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, the State Employment Service and its regional centers/branches, HR specialists from Ukrainian businesses, and members of veteran NGOs and communities.

The purpose of the event was to discuss initiatives and experiences from the private sector and NGOs in creating favorable conditions for the professional development of war veterans, as well as their proactive engagement in the processes of rebuilding the nation.

As aptly noted by a participant of the December 2024 roundtable, Starlight Media representative and graduate of the “Leadership and Resilience” program, Hlib Stryzhko, “Businesses don’t hire social statuses: veterans are not about statuses, they are about principles.”

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center team can only emphasize: when businesses hire a veteran, they gain an employee who brings responsibility, strong values and often exceptional, unique skills. The collective responsibility of employers across all sectors – public, private, and non-governmental— is to create workplace conditions that empower veterans to enhance these qualities, along with their invaluable experience.



Ruslan Prykhodko, Deputy Minister of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, Mariia Tyshchenko, representative of GGF

The team at the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center recognizes the vital importance of strengthening international support for Ukraine and building partnerships with like-minded allies to advance initiatives for veteran support. In September 2024, the Leadership Center's director, Yana Chapailo, participated in a panel discussion titled "Strengthening Ukraine's Workforce and Human Capital" during the second "Doing Business in Ukraine" conference, organized by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C., USA.



Panel discussion "Strengthening Ukraine's Workforce and Human Capital," Washington, D.C., USA

During the discussion, Yana Chapailo addressed the ongoing challenges veterans in Ukraine face with adaptation and employment. She emphasized that adapting society, the labor market, employers, workplaces and teams to meet veterans' needs, as well as creating suitable conditions for them, are long-term tasks requiring sustained efforts from multiple stakeholders. Yana highlighted that veterans aspire to be active members of society, have a strong demand for justice and aim to make meaningful contributions to the country's development. She also shared insights into the Leadership Center's initiatives supporting veterans in their professional self-realization and stressed the importance of greater involvement from government institutions, businesses and society. It is essential to ensure that veterans have opportunities to live with dignity and achieve self-fulfillment.



Panel discussion "Strengthening Ukraine's Workforce and Human Capital," Washington, D.C., USA

The National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy is committed to fostering strong, dedicated and value-driven individuals who are prepared to face challenges and actively shape a free and prosperous future. Veterans are highly motivated individuals seeking opportunities to fulfill their potential and enhance skills, while also acquiring new knowledge and competencies. They have a clear desire for avenues to apply and expand their abilities and ambitions through high-quality educational programs in a value-centered environment among like-minded people. In response, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy provides a supportive platform tailored to Ukraine's Defenders needs, ensuring they have the resources and guidance needed to thrive.



Participants of two programs of the Leadership Center



Anatolii Kostenko, participant of the "Career Guidance and Career Counselling for War Veterans Adaptation" Course

The synergy between the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center and its partners, along with the institutional trust in Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, has cultivated a vibrant and dynamic veteran community that is now an integral part of the broader Academy community. Although the Center's work has only recently begun, it has already achieved significant milestones in education and established a strong network of like-minded partners.

Looking ahead, there is much more to come: the continuation of the "Leadership and Resilience" program, the expansion of initiatives for veterans' professional navigation, ongoing support for veteran-owned businesses, the development of new human-centered policies across various aspects of civilian life and a robust research and educational agenda. These and other initiatives are united by a common goal: to empower veterans with leadership ambitions, a strong sense of justice, and a commitment to building a resilient, democratic, and strong Ukraine. The motto of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center is "Strengthening the Strong" and we will steadfastly adhere to this, with the support of our partners and allies, while simultaneously valuing the trust of the veterans who join the Leadership Center as students and team members.

Join the initiatives of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center at NaUKMA!



UKRAINIAN DEFENDERS
LEADERSHIP
CENTER

Strengthening the Strong!
Standing with those who stand for Ukraine!

We are open to cooperation!

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