



NATIONAL
UNIVERSITY OF
KYIV-MOHYLA
ACADEMY



UKRAINIAN DEFENDERS
LEADERSHIP
CENTER

Report of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center 2025-2026

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Introduction

From August 2025 to August 2026, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center continued to grow, expand its partnerships, and strengthen its community.

Over the course of the year, 48 veterans graduated from two cohorts of our flagship Executive Education Program, “Leadership & Resilience”.

We also launched a strategic partnership with NJSC Naftogaz of Ukraine [Ukraine’s largest national oil and gas company — ed.] and delivered the “Naftogaz Future Horizons” corporate program. Through the program, 29 veterans working in the oil and gas sector strengthened their project management and leadership competencies. They also developed projects aimed at improving internal processes and introducing new initiatives across Naftogaz.

With support from the International Renaissance Foundation, we partnered with Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University, Zaporizhzhia National University, and Poltava University of Economics and Trade to launch the project “Transformation Experience of Education for the Integration of russo-Ukrainian War Veterans.”

Together with the Aurora multimarket chain, we also held an interdisciplinary conference that brought universities, businesses, and government institutions together to discuss how best to support Ukrainian defenders in their transition to civilian life. Our network of partners and donors grew as well.

Through an initiative led by MTB Bank and Yuriy Kralov, eight new donors joined the Center’s network. Their support enabled 23 veterans in the Spring cohort of the “Leadership & Resilience” program to participate free of charge.

Our alumni network, the Community of Action, also continued to grow and now brings together more than 100 graduates working across government, business, civil society, the Defense Forces, and local government. Throughout the year, alumni took part in international lectures, meetings with government representatives, cultural events, and remembrance visits. These activities offered opportunities to gain new perspectives, connect with people across different sectors, and continue developing their leadership skills.

The report was prepared by Polina Kyriienko, Program Specialist for the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program at the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center (UDLC), Sofiya Doig, Manager of the UDLC Community of Action, and Alla Barsukova, UDLC Assistant.
The report was designed by Karina Haloian.

Executive Summary

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center is a university initiative within the structure of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (NaUKMA). It is the first center in Ukraine focused on strengthening veterans' leadership potential through executive education and community. The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center was founded on August 29, 2024.

Key Achievements

1 “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program

Between August 2025 and August 2026, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center delivered two cohorts of its flagship “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program.

Over the year, 48 veterans successfully completed the course and received certificates from the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.

2 Partnership with Naftogaz of Ukraine

In August 2025, the Center launched a corporate partnership with NJSC Naftogaz of Ukraine. As part of this pioneering initiative, the “Naftogaz Future Horizons” Program brought together 29 veterans working across Naftogaz Group companies for a tailored program focused on management and personal development.

3 Transformative Educational Experience for the Reintegration of Veterans of the russo-Ukrainian War

In early 2026, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center at NaUKMA launched the project “Transformative Educational Experience for the Reintegration of Veterans of the russo-Ukrainian War” as part of the International Renaissance Foundation’s Social Capital program.

The first stage of the partnership included a press conference at which the Center, together with Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University, Zaporizhzhia National University, and Poltava University of Economics and Trade, presented a framework for developing university-based support systems for veterans.

4 Partnership with Aurora Multimarket

In Spring 2026, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center and the Aurora Multimarket chain organized the interdisciplinary research and practice conference “Universities and Business: Research-Informed Strategies for Veterans’ Transition to Civilian Life.” The conference brought together representatives of academia, business, and government to explore how academic research and practical experience can inform sustainable, systemic approaches to supporting veterans in their transition to civilian life.

5 Investing in Veteran Leadership

On March 3, 2026, with the support of MTB Bank and its Chairman of the Management Board, Yuriy Kralov, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center hosted a charity business breakfast that brought together leading entrepreneurs and senior executives committed to supporting Ukrainian defenders in civilian life.

As a result of the initiative, eight new donors joined the Center’s network. All funds raised were directed to the Center’s flagship Leadership & Resilience Executive Education Program, helping provide veterans with access to the program free of charge.

6 Community of Action Alumni Community

One of the Center’s key areas of work is the Community of Action, which brings together graduates of the Center’s programs and creates opportunities for continued learning, professional exchange, and networking. Throughout the year, the Center organized events focused on international leadership, management skills, and cross-sector collaboration. With support from Razom for Ukraine, the Community of Action offered the Ethics and Integrity in the Public Sector Course, workshops on international communication, and a remembrance visit to the Bykivnia Graves National Historical Memorial Preserve.

7 The Strength of Our Community Abroad: Presenting the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center in the United States

The Center’s establishment and continued work have been made possible in part through the strong support of the Kyiv-Mohyla Foundation of America and its community of NaUKMA alumni, friends, and donors across the United States. This year, the Center’s team traveled to the United States to share the results of its work and strengthen international partnerships. Together with program alumnus and russo-Ukrainian War veteran Dmytro Ternovyi, the team took part in a series of events and meetings in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and New York. The visit provided an opportunity to connect with partners, donors, and other key stakeholders, share the Center’s experience, build new relationships, and advocate for Ukraine’s interests.



Yana Chapailo, Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center

About the Center

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center is a university initiative within the structure of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, focused on strengthening the leadership potential of veterans through education and community.

The mission of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center is to support veterans in developing their leadership potential for active participation in building a responsible society.

Our vision is to serve as a driving force for initiatives that support the leadership and expertise of veterans, to be a center that transforms the experience of defense into an experience of impact, builds a community grounded in the values of collective action, and serves as a model for other educational institutions.

The Center's Target Audiences:

- Veterans of the russo-Ukrainian War
- Active service members
- Public sector
- Civil society organizations
- Ukrainian businesses
- Academic community

“

Kyiv-Mohyla Academy is one of the key centers of values in our country. The ‘Leadership & Resilience’ program offers an opportunity to join a veteran community committed to creating positive change in Ukraine. Among veterans, there are many people with a heightened sense of justice and a strong desire to make our country better. I am proud to know these people and to stand alongside them.

”

Maryna Khromykh, veteran and civic activist working in
the field of anti-corruption.
Alumna of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive
Education Program, Spring 2026



Maryna Khromykh, veteran and alumna of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program, Spring 2026

The “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program

The “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program is the flagship educational initiative of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, designed for veterans who are ready to take an active role in shaping Ukraine's future. The program provides participants with knowledge and practical tools in state-building, team management, educational development, and the implementation of their own initiatives. It supports veterans in strengthening their leadership capacity, enabling them to influence societal processes, make strategic decisions, and drive positive change across the public, civil society, and corporate sectors.

Over the program's first two years, the Center has delivered four cohorts

with more than 70 participants

Between August 2025 and August 2026, two cohorts successfully completed their studies.*

* Read more about the events of the Fall semester in our semi-annual report.

Program Structure

- The fourth iteration of the program ran for 13 weeks
- 11 educational modules
- A module dedicated to the development and presentation of final projects
- Two weeks of independent study

Program Modules

The program brings together leading experts, executives, scholars, and practitioners whose work is shaping developments in public administration, education, security, international affairs, and civil society.

Faculty and guest experts include Serhiy Kvit, Oksana Syroid, Volodymyr Dehtyarov, Hennadiy Zubko, Volodymyr Yermolenko, Vakhtang Kebuladze, Liudmyla Kryvoruchka, Taras Liutyi, Volodymyr Venher, Oleksii Tseliev, Yurii Kliuchkovskiy, Maksym Yakovliev, Maksym Yaremenko, Volodymyr Masliychuk, Serhiy Nozdrachov, Natalia Shlikhta, Yevheniia Kucherenko, Roman Veretelnik, Halyna Stefanova, Stepan Berko, Serhii Herasymchuk, and other NaUKMA faculty members and experts.

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center places particular emphasis on involving practitioners in the learning process. This approach allows participants to see how management tools and leadership principles are applied in real-world settings and to learn directly from people who are driving change in their respective fields.

* Read more about the events of the Fall semester in our semi-annual report.

Hennadii Sukharnikov, service member, defender of Mariupol, recipient of the Order for Courage, and graduate of the fourth cohort, highlighted the value of learning from experienced practitioners:



“

Most of our lecturers are practitioners with hands-on experience in the subjects they teach. This is what sets Kyiv-Mohyla Academy apart from many other institutions. Learning from someone who has actually applied these approaches in practice makes the experience much more engaging and valuable. If the classes were taught entirely by theorists, I can hardly imagine staying focused through a six-hour lecture.

Liudmyla Halychyna, service member, Head of the Support Service of the 2nd Corps of the National Guard of Ukraine “Khartiia,” and graduate of the fourth cohort, reflected:



“

The program gave me a strong foundation in the areas I want to develop further. It also introduced me to a wide range of tools that will help me deepen my knowledge in different fields. The more I understand about the world and the forces shaping it, the more confident I can be in the decisions I make as a leader.

Throughout the program, participants developed competencies that enabled them to:

- deepen their understanding of how the state functions, the role of public administration, and the mechanisms behind management and policy decisions;
- develop a comprehensive understanding of contemporary international affairs, global security challenges, and Ukraine's role in world politics;
- gain an understanding of how to engage with national and local government authorities and how public institutions operate;
- develop practical skills in team management, work planning, role distribution, and project implementation;
- gain a deeper understanding of their own leadership potential, identify their strengths, and define an individual development path;
- understand how communities develop, how local government operates, and how citizens can participate in decision-making at the local level.

These areas of study helped participants understand the foundations of state-building, explore the legal framework within which public institutions operate, examine practical approaches to communication, identify their individual strengths, and understand how to apply them in their professional lives.

“

I have always been interested in law, so I particularly enjoyed the legal studies module. I also really appreciated the sessions on local government and decentralization. The history module was especially interesting to me because it was directly connected to my first academic degree.

Mykhailo Onufer, veteran, Chief Veterans Officer at Aurora Multimarket, and graduate of the fourth cohort, shared.

Final Projects

The program concludes with a final module in which participants develop, present, and defend their group projects.

This year, participants formed groups based on their professional interests and worked on the following topics:

State, Security, and Responsible Governance

Developing recommendations for leadership and people management training for junior and mid-level military officers.

Veteran Support in Business and Corporate Settings

Developing recommendations for a Chief Veterans Officer program, including the role's responsibilities, scope of authority, and place within an organizational structure.

Sharing Experience and Building Communities of Influence

Developing approaches to building both external and internal veteran communities, with a focus on the systemic nature and potential of this process.

The final projects are an important part of the program, as they allow both the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center team and program participants to explore different perspectives on issues that matter to Ukrainian society. Participants also had the opportunity to develop new project design tools and receive expert input in the areas they were working on.



Serhii Volosovets, Denys Myhal, Anton Itkin, and Illia Iliashenko, alumni of the "Leadership & Resilience" Executive Education Program, Spring 2026



Nazar Reikin, alumnus of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program, Spring 2025; **Hlib Stryzhko**, alumnus of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program, Fall 2024; **Mykhailo Lavrovskiy**, alumnus of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program, Fall 2025; **Maksym Havrysh**, Head of Veteran Affairs at Naftogaz of Ukraine

The expert committee included alumni of previous cohorts of the “Leadership & Resilience” program — **Hlib Stryzhko, Nazar Reikin, and Mykhailo Lavrovskiy**; Kyiv-Mohyla Academy faculty members and friends of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center — **Liudmyla Kryvoruchka, Serhii Lesniak, and Nataliia Shumkova**; **Maksym Havrysh**, the Center’s partner at Naftogaz of Ukraine and Head of Veteran Affairs; and **Taras Kovalyk**, Head of the Resilience Program at the Mnozhyna Foundation.

The committee brought together practitioners with expertise in relevant fields, who provided participants with professional feedback, recommendations, and practical advice on how to strengthen their projects. The ideas and approaches developed through this process will serve as a foundation for the projects’ further development and implementation.

Independent Study Week

Independent Study Week is an integral part of Kyiv-Mohyla tradition that helps strengthen the university community. As part of the Community of Action, participants of the “Leadership & Resilience” program were invited to join a community visit to Bykivnia [the Bykivnia Graves is one of Ukraine’s largest burial sites for victims of Soviet political repression — ed.].*

The group was joined by Roman Veretelnyk, a literary scholar, critic, director, and lecturer at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, and Halyna Stefanova, a Ukrainian theater and film actress.

Building a strong alumni community is one of the Center’s priorities. Shared experiences like this give alumni an opportunity to get to know each other, build trust, and develop meaningful connections.

* Read more about this in the Community of Action section.



At the Graduation Ceremony

Graduation Ceremony

The graduation ceremony for the fourth cohort of the “Leadership & Resilience” program took place on June 20 at the **St. Sophia of Kyiv National Sanctuary**.

For the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, holding the ceremony at St. Sophia of Kyiv was especially meaningful. As a symbol of Ukrainian statehood, history, and cultural heritage, St. Sophia provided an important setting for the occasion. For the veteran community, completing the program there highlighted the connection between defending Ukraine and shaping its future.

The graduation also provided an opportunity to bring together alumni from all cohorts of the program, creating space for new connections as well as warm reunions among friends, colleagues, and fellow veterans.

During the ceremony, the **Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center coin** was presented to graduates for the first time. In military tradition, a coin is a commemorative symbol representing belonging, respect, camaraderie, and individual achievement. For the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, the coin represents belonging to an alumni community united by the values of responsible leadership and a shared commitment to the continued development of the veteran community.



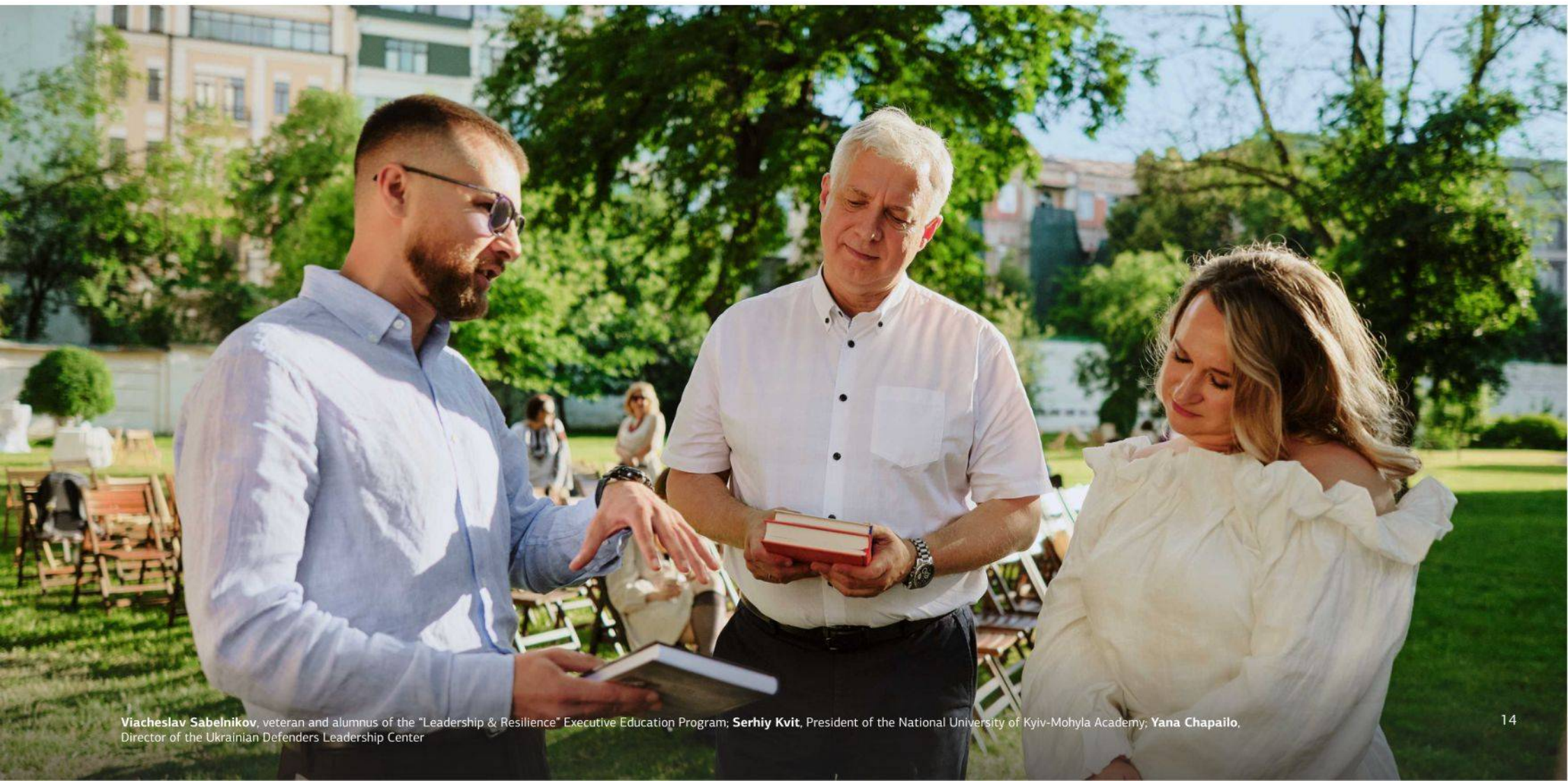
Ukrainian Defenders
Leadership Center Coin

In keeping with tradition, the graduation ceremony was opened by **Serhiy Kvit**, President of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. Guests included members of the NaUKMA Supervisory Board **Olesia Ostrovska-Liuta** and **Taras Lukachuk**, as well as **Hennadiy Zubko**, Chair of the Supervisory Board.

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The ‘Leadership & Resilience’ program is, above all, a space for personal growth, exploring answers to important questions, and bringing one’s own ideas and projects to life.

Serhiy Kvit, President of NaUKMA



Viacheslav Sabelnikov, veteran and alumnus of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program; **Serhiy Kvit**, President of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy; **Yana Chapailo**, Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center

The ceremony was also attended by **Tetyana Berezhna**, Deputy Prime Minister for Humanitarian Policy of Ukraine and Minister of Culture of Ukraine, who had supported the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center from the time when its establishment was still only an idea.

Two years later, addressing the graduates at St. Sophia of Kyiv, she reflected on the role of education:

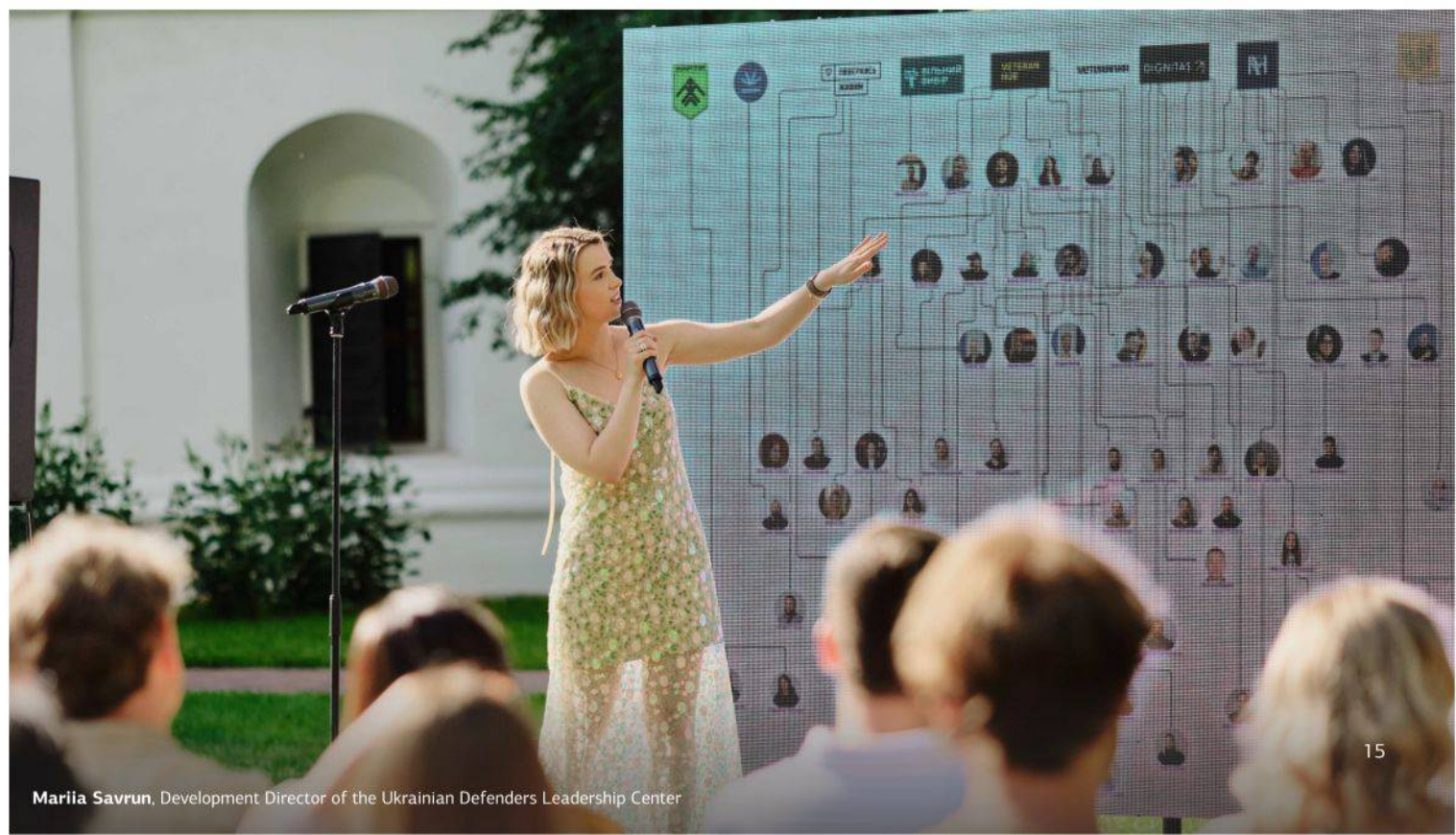
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Education is one of the ways we learn to dream boldly, set goals that may initially seem impossible, and turn them into reality.

At the graduation ceremony, the Center also presented the **Nomination Tree**, a symbol of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center community. The tree shows how alumni have recommended others to join the program, reflecting the connections and trust that bring new participants into the community. With each new cohort, new branches are added, showing how the Center's alumni network continues to grow.



Tetyana Berezhna, Deputy Prime Minister for Humanitarian Policy of Ukraine and Minister of Culture of Ukraine



Mariia Savrun, Development Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center



“To Me, a Leader Is Someone Who Takes Responsibility”

Anton Itkin is a graduate of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center’s “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program, a veteran and former prisoner of war. He is a data analyst and mathematical economist.

— **After returning from captivity, you went back to work and education fairly quickly. Let’s talk about your time at the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, because that’s actually where we first met. How did you hear about the Center and decide to join the program?**

— I saw an Instagram post by one of the Center’s graduates announcing that applications were open. The program description caught my attention. Later, when I took the Gallup Clifton Strengths assessment, I found out that Learner was actually my number-one strength among my top five. So I’ve always been someone who enjoys learning. For me, it was both interesting and a source of energy.

— **Has your understanding of what it means to be a leader changed?**

— Very much. I used to think of leadership as something charismatic – that a leader is someone who has a crowd following them. Now I understand leadership first and foremost as responsibility. To me, a leader is someone who takes responsibility even when there is no crowd behind them. I also really liked something one of our lecturers, Serhii Nozdrachov, said: “Leadership is about love.” Without love, you cannot truly take responsibility or set an example for others.

“Without love, you cannot truly take responsibility or set an example for others.”

— How has that affected your priorities and the way you make decisions?

— While I was studying at the Center, I left the IT sector and moved into the defense sector. I was actually being offered leadership positions at the company where I worked, but I turned them down because there are more important things right now. For me, taking the job that matters most to all of us at this moment was a matter of responsibility.

— What do you think education can give veterans?

—The Center’s program really shapes the way you see the world. It broadens your understanding of how the state and its institutions work. It also gives you tools to drive change and become a leader.

— What was it like teaching in the Naftogaz program? How did that opportunity come about?

— I was invited to teach because, as they told me, I had a wealth of life experience. It was interesting how the pieces of my life seemed to come together. When I was in captivity and thinking about my future, I made a mental note that one day I wanted to speak publicly or teach others something. And then, some time later, I was offered exactly that opportunity.

— Had you taught adults before?

— No, it was my first time. The funny thing is, someone asked me, “How long have you been teaching?” And I said, “this is my first time!”

— Why do you think Ukrainian businesses should take responsibility for supporting veterans?

— Veterans bring valuable soft skills: resilience under pressure and the ability to solve complex problems quickly. In Germany, for example, when veterans enter the job market, companies are eager to hire them because they value the skills people acquire in the military. Unfortunately, in Ukraine there are still stereotypes that veterans are somehow “damaged” or dangerous. When I started a new job, people spent the first month telling me, “We won’t bother you — don’t get stressed.” I kept having to explain that I was fine and perfectly capable of working to deadlines.

— Do you have a personal motto that you live by?

— While I was held captive in the Luhansk region, I read Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*. There was a line that stayed with me: “It is nothing to die; it is frightful not to live.” That became my motto: to live this life despite the war, to love despite the hatred, and to find joy despite everything.

“To live this life despite the war, to love despite the hatred, and to find joy despite everything.”

The interview was conducted by Maryna Lanivska, veteran and Spring 2025 graduate of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program.

Naftogaz Future Horizons Project

A Specialized Program
for War Veterans

Partnership with Naftogaz of Ukraine

“Naftogaz Future Horizons” Program

In summer 2025, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center launched a partnership with Naftogaz, Ukraine’s largest national oil and gas company, creating the **“Naftogaz Future Horizons” Program**, a unique initiative of its kind in Ukraine.

The program’s goal is to help veterans translate their military experience into leadership, management, and project skills, strengthen their connection to the company’s mission, support their transition to a civilian work environment, and create opportunities for them to drive meaningful change within a state-owned company.

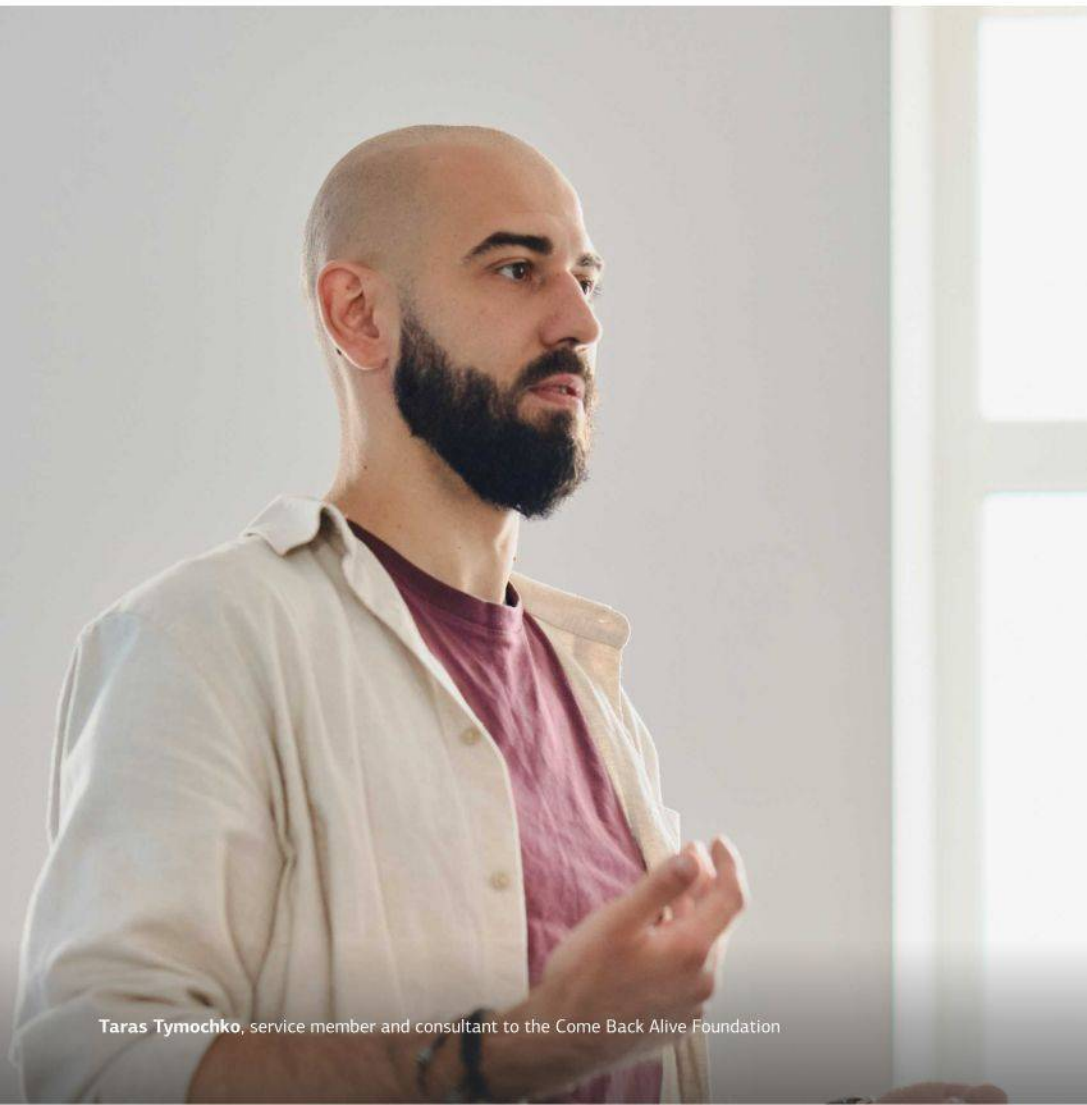
The corporate leadership and management program ran for one year and concluded in August 2026.



Viktor Tonkohlaz, Pavlo Marchak, Yurii Soroka, and Petro Lukianchuk, participants of the “Naftogaz Future Horizons” Program.

Over the course of the program, we:

- Launched the program in Kyiv, where Serhii Koretskyi, then Chairman of the Management Board of Naftogaz of Ukraine and now Prime Minister of Ukraine, joined participants for the opening. In his remarks, Serhii Koretskyi said: “After returning from war, our veterans come into civilian life with unique experience. This is a powerful resource. Our task as a company is to help transform this experience into strength — for our employees, communities, and for the entire country.” These words captured the program’s central purpose — supporting veterans in transforming their experience into new opportunities for the development of both the company and society.



Taras Tymochko, service member and consultant to the Come Back Alive Foundation



Serhii Koretskyi, Prime Minister of Ukraine

- Continued in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, where participants explored the concept of veteran leadership. The module examined the nature of the russo-Ukrainian War and its imperial character, and the role of resources in warfare. Participants also developed practical skills in strategic planning and teamwork, using strategy and facilitation tools to advance their own projects.
- Traveled to Stryi (Lviv Oblast), where Mychailo Wynnyckyj, educator and civic leader, NaUKMA lecturer, and PhD in Economic Sociology, and Taras Tymochko, service member, consultant to the Come Back Alive Foundation, and education expert, led sessions on economics, finance, and efficiency. The module provided participants with practical tools for navigating economic processes and helped them better understand their own role in the sustainable development of both the company and the state. By developing a practical understanding of economic and social processes in the energy sector, participants were able to place their own initiatives in a broader context — as part of the wider development of the company and the country.
- In Lviv, participants worked with Oleksandr Papirovyyi, veteran, Head of the Lessons Learned Unit, Project Manager at the Boryviter Military School NGO, and alumnus of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, to learn the After Action Review method and how to apply it in teamwork.

Oleksandr Papirovyi shared his impressions of working with participants of the “Naftogaz Future Horizons” Program.

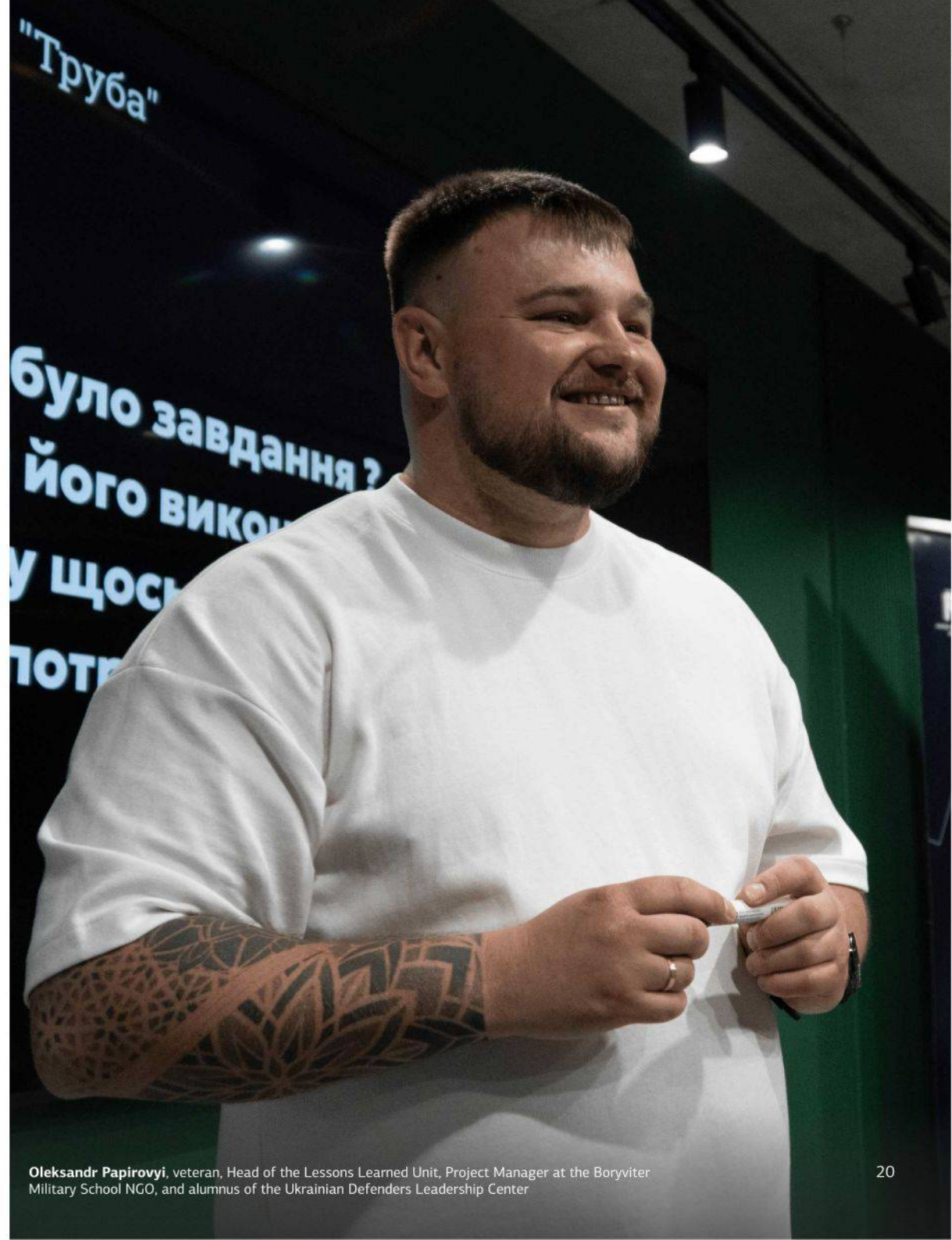
— **What were your overall impressions?**

— Overall, it was a very positive experience. What I appreciated most were the people and the atmosphere. It was clear that participants were genuinely eager to engage in discussions and share their own experiences.

— **What do you see as the main value of the “Naftogaz Future Horizons” Program?**

— The greatest value of the program lies in the people and the community that is forming around it. In large companies, people often work within their own areas and do not always see the bigger picture. Programs like this create opportunities to get to know one another, exchange experiences, understand the challenges faced by other departments, and identify areas for collaboration. I also see particular value in the environment the program creates — one where people can openly discuss challenges, mistakes, and successes, and learn from one another. This is how a culture of development and continuous improvement takes shape.

- Explored 21st-century approaches to thinking and practical tools for presenting ideas effectively. The sessions were led by Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center alumni **Anton Itkin**, a veteran, mathematical economist, and data analytics specialist, and **Mykhailo Lavrovskyi**, Head of the Support Service of the 1st Corps of the National Guard of Ukraine “Azov.”



Oleksandr Papirovyi, veteran, Head of the Lessons Learned Unit, Project Manager at the Boryviter Military School NGO, and alumnus of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center



Ihor Bodnar, participant of the "Naftogaz Future Horizons" Program

Anastasiia Bunych, veteran, Head of the Veteran Hub foundation in Vinnytsia, and a trainer during the program's second module, shared her impressions of the program and its final stage:

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One of the biggest changes I noticed was how much stronger the communication and connections within the group had become between the second module and the final session. You could see how the veterans supported one another and how much they had in common. This could provide a strong foundation for building a vibrant veteran community within Naftogaz — a space for connection and mutual support that continues beyond the program and into their professional lives.

Program Finale

In July 2026, the “Naftogaz Future Horizons” Program concluded with a **final session** outside Kyiv, where participants presented the projects they had developed throughout the year. The projects covered a wide range of areas, from new engineering technologies to services designed to improve internal processes.

Experts from Naftogaz of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center evaluated the final projects based on the quality of the project proposal, the viability and feasibility of the idea, and the leadership potential demonstrated by participants.

The expert committee also included Anastasiia Bunych and Hlib Stryzhko, alumni of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program.



Hlib Stryzhko, veteran, partner at Starlight Media and Veteran Hub Ambassador; Anastasiia Bunych, veteran, Head of Veteran Hub in Vinnytsia and trainer for the second module of the “Naftogaz Future Horizons” Program

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I was very impressed by the thorough work each participant had done. It was truly valuable to hear how each of them was trying to improve the environment they work in. You could see how far they had come. I was particularly impressed that many had conducted their own research or brought additional materials for their presentations. The atmosphere was very warm and welcoming, and you could feel how much everyone supported one another.

Hlib Stryzhko, veteran, partner at Starlight Media, Veteran Hub Ambassador, and member of the expert committee.

Mykhailo Lavrovskyi noted:

“

Being part of the Center and the Kyiv-Mohyla community means having the agency to grow and contribute. Here, you can go from a participant rebuilding your own strength to a lecturer helping shape future leaders.

Feedback from those who have spent years working with Ukraine's veteran community highlights the importance of creating spaces where veterans can deepen their professional knowledge, strengthen their communication skills, and build meaningful connections with one another.

For the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, it is especially valuable to see alumni sharing their knowledge and experience with other veterans. This allows what they have learned through the Center's programs to reach wider communities and contribute to positive change.



Mykhailo Lavrovskyi, Head of the Support Service of the 1st Corps of the National Guard of Ukraine "Azov," alumnus of the "Leadership & Resilience" Executive Education Program, and trainer for the "Naftogaz Future Horizons" Program

Transformative Educational Experience for the Reintegration of Veterans of the russo-Ukrainian War

In early 2026, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center at NaUKMA launched the Transformation Experience of Education for the Integration of the russo-Ukrainian War Veterans project as part of the International Renaissance Foundation's Social Capital Program.

Over the past two years, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center has delivered a range of educational programs for veterans. These programs have also helped build a strong alumni community of graduates who have strengthened their leadership and management skills, gained new knowledge, and are ready to drive positive change in their communities and beyond.

The next step was to share this experience, disseminate proven educational practices, and create new opportunities for veteran leadership.



Yana Chapailo, Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center; **Antonina Tomashevskaya**, Head of the Department of Management and Business Administration at Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University

Together with Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University, Zaporizhzhia National University, and Poltava University of Economics and Trade, we began developing a model for a university-based ecosystem of veteran support.

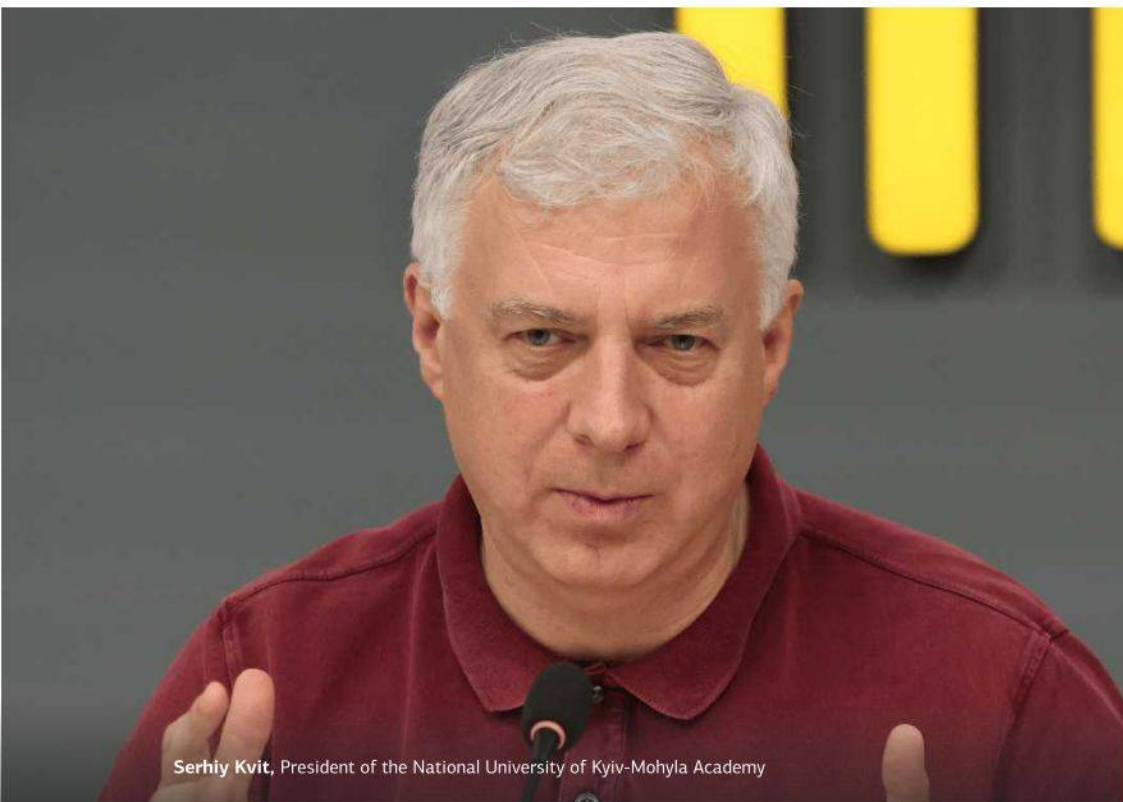


Andrii Omelchenko, Antonina Tomashevskaya, Hryhorii Baran, Serhiy Kvit, Yana Chapailo, and Olena Malovichko

Press Conference

At a press conference in Kyiv on June 10, 2026, participants presented the project's first results and discussed how higher education institutions can support veterans in their transition to civilian life, particularly through university-based initiatives.

Yana Chapailo, Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, highlighted the potential of universities to play a greater role in supporting veterans: “Ukrainian universities have significant potential to become centers of support for the veteran community by bringing together education, expertise, and partnership networks.”



Serhiy Kvit, President of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy

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It is important to develop a systemic approach to creating a welcoming educational environment and to defining the role of universities within their regions.

Serhiy Kvit, President of NaUKMA, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach to building an inclusive educational environment.

Hryhoriy Baran, Director of the Social Capital Program at the International Renaissance Foundation, highlighted the importance of building partnerships across sectors:

“

Without cooperation between universities, businesses, government, and civil society, this work would not be possible.



Hryhoriy Baran, Director of the Social Capital Program at the International Renaissance Foundation

Representatives of the project's partner universities also joined the discussion: Olena Malovichko, Associate Professor at the Department of Philosophy, Public Administration and Social Work at Zaporizhzhia National University; Andrii Omelchenko, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Management at Poltava University of Economics and Trade; and Antonina Tomashevska, Head of the Department of Management and Business Administration at Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University. During the press conference, they shared their experiences and perspectives on developing university programs and discussed the importance of ensuring accessible educational opportunities for veterans.

As a result of the first stage of the project, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center and its partner universities established a network for collaboration, reviewed existing educational practices, and began developing a concept for a university-based ecosystem to support veterans in returning to education and participating in professional and civic life. The results of this work will be presented to a broader group of stakeholders this Fall.



Interdisciplinary Research and Practice Conference “Universities and Business: Research-Informed Strategies for Veterans’ Transition to Civilian Life.”

Partnership with Aurora Multimarket

Interdisciplinary Research and Practice Conference “Universities and Business: Research-Informed Strategies for Veterans’ Transition to Civilian Life”

How can academic research be combined with the practical experience of business and government to develop systemic approaches to supporting veterans in their transition to civilian life?

In Spring 2026, the **Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center**, together with **Aurora Multimarket**, one of Ukraine's largest national retail chains, organized the **interdisciplinary research and practice conference "Universities and Business: Research-Informed Strategies for Veterans' Transition to Civilian Life."** The conference brought together the university community, representatives of the business sector, and public institutions. Its main objective was to explore effective approaches to supporting veterans in their transition to civilian life.

Mykhailo Onufer, Chief Veterans Officer at Aurora, veteran, and alumnus of the "Leadership & Resilience" Executive Education Program, Spring 2026, noted:

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There is no single clear manual for working with veterans. What is needed is flexibility, an understanding of their experiences and needs, and the ability to take these into account in everyday work.



Mykhailo's words reflect one of the key conclusions of the panel discussion: there is no single approach to veterans' transition to civilian life. Each person brings a different experience and has different needs and life circumstances. Meaningful veteran policy within a company starts with seeing the person behind the veteran status, listening to their needs, and responding accordingly.

The conference opened with the **panel discussion "Veterans' Transition to Civilian Careers: Where Business, Government, and Education Meet,"** featuring representatives of Aurora, PrivatBank, the Ministry for Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, Fozzy Group, and NaUKMA.

The conference was also aimed at engaging students to explore best practices for supporting veterans' transition to civilian life and to encourage young researchers to examine veteran-related issues. It is important that approaches developed in Ukraine are evidence-based rather than ad hoc and designed with long-term continuity and sustainability in mind.

Students presented research across four main areas:

- Veteran entrepreneurship and innovation;
- Psychological resilience and educational models for transition;
- Corporate culture and veteran leadership;
- Cooperation between business and government;



The students' research demonstrated the value of engaging young people in the study of veteran-related issues. Their work provided an example of how the academic community can contribute to developing solutions for veteran policy and strengthening cooperation between government, business, and civil society institutions.

Veteran Policies as Part of a Broader Culture of People-Centeredness

During the panel discussion, the conversation went beyond veteran employment to explore broader questions of corporate culture and organizations' ability to respond to the different life experiences of their employees.

This led to an important conclusion: investment in veteran policies extends far beyond veterans themselves. It can become a first step toward building a more people-centered business.

“

Veteran policies are always people-centered policies. We need to see the person at the center of what is happening, rather than focusing solely on their experience.

emphasized **Mariia Savrun**, Development Director at the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center.



Impact Beyond the Conference

The conference may have concluded, but the work continues. The students' research and the findings from the discussions have been taken forward for further development. The conference demonstrated that **business is an essential and meaningful partner** in this process. Sustainable models for veterans' transition to civilian life emerge at the intersection of academic knowledge, lived experience, corporate responsibility, and the development of public policy. For Aurora and other partners, supporting initiatives like this is an **investment in a new generation of researchers**, as well as in practical solutions that can be scaled and applied across companies.



At the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center Business Breakfast

Investing in Veteran Leadership

**Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center Business Breakfast:
Bringing the Business Community Together to Support Veterans**

On March 3, 2026, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center at NaUKMA held a milestone event — a charity business breakfast that brought together leading entrepreneurs and senior executives around a shared goal of providing systemic support for Ukrainian defenders in civilian life.

An initiative by MTB Bank and Yuriy Kralov: an inspiring new format

MTB Bank and Yuriy Kralov, Chairman of the Bank's Management Board, played a key role in creating and successfully launching this new partnership format.

Yuriy Kralov initiated the tradition of business breakfasts at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, laying the foundation for open and trust-based dialogue between the Ukrainian business community and veterans.

Thanks to his vision, the business breakfast became more than a fundraising event. It developed into a platform for social investment, giving business leaders an opportunity to better understand the needs of Ukrainian defenders and contribute to strengthening their leadership potential.



Yuriy Kralov, Chairman of the Management Board of MTB Bank

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We believe that business is an active participant in driving change. Supporting educational programs for veterans is both an expression of gratitude and an investment in the resilience of the country,

said Yuriy Kralov, Chairman of the Management Board of MTB Bank, initiator of the format and its principal donor.

MTB Bank as a model of leadership for the business community

The initiative of MTB Bank and Yuriy Kralov set a strong example for the wider Ukrainian business community. The Bank demonstrated how a commercial institution can go beyond traditional financial partnerships and become an active participant in important societal transformations.

By systematically supporting veteran education through initiatives such as this one, MTB Bank demonstrates that social investment can be an integral part of strategic leadership. This approach encourages other companies to get involved, join forces, and expand their own contribution to Ukraine's recovery and resilience.

The role of philanthropy in developing educational programs for veterans

Philanthropic support is an important driver of the sustainable growth of educational opportunities for veterans. Systemic funding from businesses enables academic institutions to better adapt educational modules to contemporary economic challenges, engage leading practitioners and faculty, develop practical case studies, and provide comprehensive mentoring and psychosocial support.

Donor contributions turn short-term assistance into a long-term investment in social capital, providing veterans with free access to high-quality academic and practical training that can support their successful transition into management and leadership roles.



Oleksii Liutyi, Regional Director at MTB Bank; Oleksandr Yavonenko, Advisor to the Chairman of the Management Board of MTB Bank; Nadiia Maloha, Head of Corporate Client Sales at MTB Bank; Mariia Savrun, Development Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center; Yana Chapailo, Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center; Yuriy Kralov, Chairman of the Management Board of MTB Bank

Supporting the “Leadership & Resilience” Program

One of the key outcomes of the March 3 event was the engagement of **eight new donors**, who officially joined the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center’s network of partners.



The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center and Kyiv-Mohyla Academy are grateful to ESCO-PIVNICH LLC, PROM-TECHNO GROUP LLC, AT ENERGO TRADE LLC, LanTek LLC, GRAWE Ukraine Life Insurance PJSC, Structum LLC, and CS INTEGRA LLC for their support in the successful development and delivery of the flagship “Leadership & Resilience” management development program. Thanks to these charitable contributions, 23 veterans successfully completed the Spring 2026 cohort of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program.

Over 13 weeks of intensive study, a team of more than 20 leading experts provided participants with a strong set of educational tools for management in conditions of uncertainty, driving change, and contributing to Ukraine’s recovery.

The Center was also able to launch the Fall admissions cycle for a new cohort, ensuring the program’s continuity and supporting the continued growth of its community.

Why businesses benefit from supporting management education for veterans
Investing in management education for veterans is more than philanthropy — it is a **strategic investment** for Ukrainian businesses for several reasons:

1. Building a pipeline of unique management talent

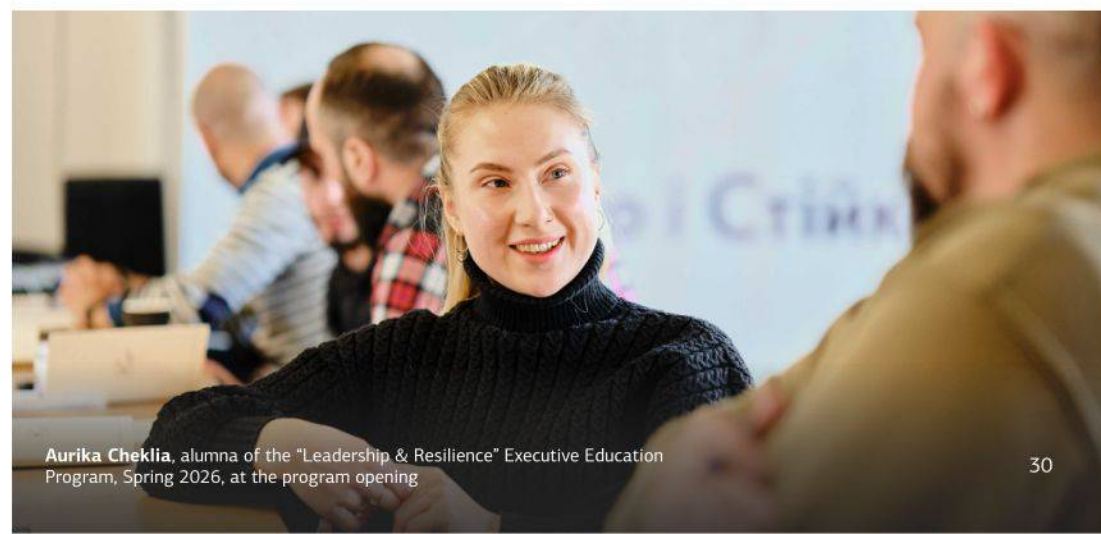
Veterans bring unique experience in decision-making under uncertainty, crisis management, resilience, and taking responsibility in high-stakes environments. Combining this experience with modern management tools helps develop highly valuable leaders for both the business and public sectors.

2. Strengthening corporate culture and values

Systematic support for veteran education programs demonstrates a company’s commitment to social responsibility. It can increase employee engagement and loyalty, strengthen the employer brand, and build trust among customers and international partners.

3. Developing a resilient business ecosystem and economy

Supporting veterans in bringing their leadership and management experience into civilian roles contributes to the development of new business initiatives, job creation, and a stronger economic foundation for the country in which businesses themselves operate and grow.



Aurika Cheklia, alumna of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program, Spring 2026, at the program opening



From the Graduation Ceremony of the "Leadership and Resilience" Executive Education Program

Community of Action

The Community of Action is one of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center's key strategic priorities. While educational programs last only a few months, the community brings graduates together long after they finish their studies, creating opportunities for mutual support, professional growth, new partnerships, and joint initiatives.

As part of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, the Center continues one of its most important traditions — **bringing together people who see education as a tool for societal change**. Since the Center was established, more than 100 graduates have joined the community. Today, they work across the public sector, business, civil society organizations, the Defense Forces, and local government.

The Community of Action extends far beyond alumni gatherings. It is a space for continuous learning, cross-sectoral exchange, the development of international connections, and the collective search for solutions to the challenges facing Ukraine.

Leadership in the International Context

Contemporary leadership requires an understanding of the international context. Veterans are increasingly representing Ukraine abroad, working with international partners, participating in joint projects, and building new professional connections.

For this reason, one of the Community of Action's areas of focus has been a series of meetings with researchers, lecturers, and international relations experts. These sessions were designed to help participants better understand the political, cultural, and historical contexts of different countries, while developing skills for effective international communication and representing Ukraine globally.

Lecture Series on China

In November 2025, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center launched a series of lectures on contemporary China and its role in global politics. The series was led by **Serhii Lesniak**, a friend of the Center, lecturer, and Sinologist.

The series began with a discussion of China, its history, philosophy, and worldview. Participants explored key ideas in Chinese thought and the philosophy of war, examining how centuries-old principles continue to shape China's politics and strategic thinking today.



Serhii Lesniak, Sinologist, lecturer, translator, and executive.

Serhii Lesniak is a Sinologist, lecturer, translator, and executive with many years of professional experience in China. He currently works in IT business development in the Far East and is involved in research projects focused on Asia. He produced the first Ukrainian translation of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* directly from Classical Chinese. He teaches in master's and executive education programs at the UCU Business School and KSE, is involved in training military personnel, and is a NaUKMA alumnus.

The next lecture focused on China's military doctrine. Participants explored the concepts of cognitive warfare and the "Three Warfares," examined the People's Liberation Army's approach to modern conflict, and discussed how information, psychological, and legal influence are used as tools of warfare.



Oleksandr Ostashenko, alumnus of the "Leadership & Resilience" Executive Education Program, Spring 2026

The series concluded with a discussion of the political partnership between China and Russia. Participants examined China's interests in its relations with neighboring states, Chinese support for Russia, including in the area of armaments, and the areas where the two countries' interests converge and diverge in contemporary geopolitics.

Nordic Countries

Continuing the series of meetings focused on international cooperation and engagement with different countries, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center invited Volodymyr Dehtyarov, Media Relations Officer with the 2nd Corps of the National Guard of Ukraine "Khartiia," lecturer, and friend of the Center, to deliver the lecture "Cultural Code: Finding the Key to Engaging with the Nordic Countries."

Volodymyr Dehtyarov is a Media Relations Officer with the 2nd Corps of the National Guard of Ukraine "Khartiia." He is co-founder and partner at Newsfront Communications and a business coach. A combat veteran who served in the Kharkiv region in 2022, he later worked in communications for the Territorial Defense Forces Command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. He also teaches at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and the Kyiv School of Economics.

During the session, participants discussed the cultural characteristics and societal values of Nordic countries and how these differences shape trust, negotiations, and professional communication. Particular attention was given to common mistakes in working with Nordic partners and practical approaches to building effective cooperation and representing Ukraine in an international environment.

The event was made possible with the support of the Razom for Ukraine foundation.



United Kingdom

Oleksandr Kraiev joined the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center community for a discussion on communication in the context of the United Kingdom, titled "Foggy Albion: Dispelling Preconceptions and Misunderstandings."

Oleksandr Kraiev is Director of the North America Program at the Ukrainian Prism Foreign Policy Council and Senior Lecturer at the Department of International Relations at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. He is also a publicist and columnist for a number of Ukrainian and international publications.

During the session, participants discussed the reasons behind the United Kingdom's consistent support for Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion, the historical foundations of this partnership, London's interests in the region, and the particular features of British political thinking. Particular attention was given to how historical experience, including the consequences of the Suez Crisis, has shaped the United Kingdom's contemporary foreign policy and its response to Russian aggression.

Participants also explored common stereotypes about British society, discussed the specifics of communicating with British audiences, and examined the factors that contribute to the development of a long-term Ukrainian-British partnership.



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The British support Ukraine not simply because they like us. Supporting Ukraine is in their national interest, just as building a strong relationship with the UK is in ours.

Oleksandr Kraiev

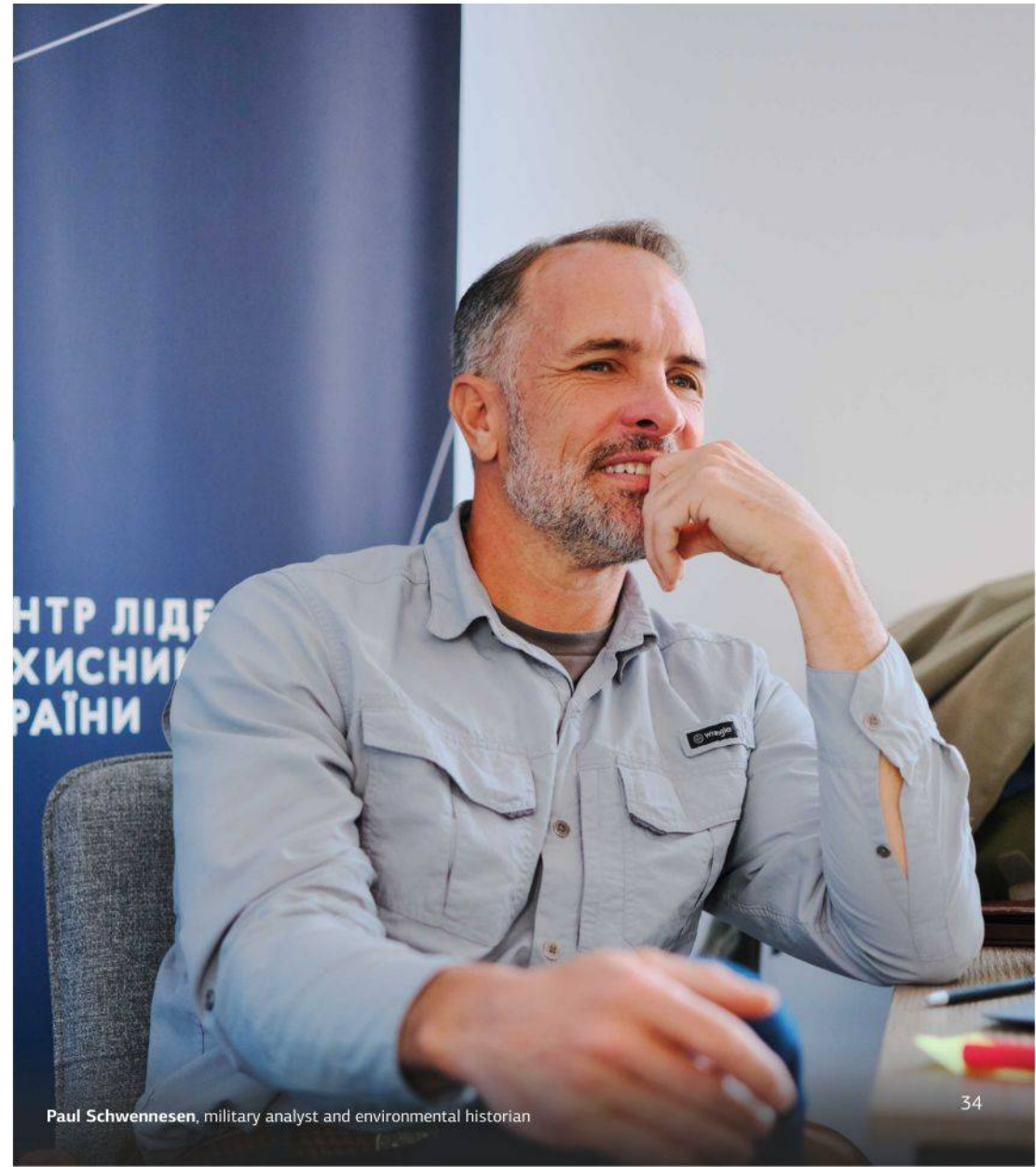
The event was made possible with the support of Razom for Ukraine.

What Does Freedom Really Require of Us? Paul Schwennessen

In January, another event in the international series was an interactive workshop with military analyst and environmental historian Paul Schwennessen, exploring the relationship between freedom, responsibility, and democracy.

Together with the speaker, participants reflected on what freedom truly means and the responsibilities it places on each individual, both in military and civilian life. Particular attention was given to why democracy depends on individual responsibility, how horizontal leadership works, why decentralization is important for societal resilience, and how to balance individual freedom with collective security.

The workshop was held as an open discussion, giving participants an opportunity to learn from the experience of an American expert and explore how these principles apply in the Ukrainian context and shape the development of leadership during wartime.



Paul Schwennessen, military analyst and environmental historian

The Strength of Our Community Abroad: The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center's Visit to the United States

Kyiv-Mohyla Academy has long relied on a strong community of supporters, donors, and friends abroad. The Kyiv-Mohyla foundations in the United States and Canada are strategic partners and advocates for the Academy and its alumni. Since its establishment, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center has also benefited from their strong and consistent support.

The visit aimed to present the results of the Center's work, expand its network of partners, and attract new support for the development of veteran leadership in Ukraine.

An important part of the visit was bringing the voice of a UDLC alumnus directly to American audiences. Dmytro Ternovyi shared his own experience of transitioning from military service to new civilian and civic roles and spoke about the opportunities education can create for veterans after returning from war.

This year, the UDLC team — Center co-founders Yana Chapailo and Mariia Savrun, together with Dmytro Ternovyi, one of the first graduates of the "Leadership & Resilience" Program, a veteran of the russo-Ukrainian war and a Marine — visited the United States as part of the Across the Ocean: United in Support of Ukrainian Veterans tour.



Mariia Savrun, Development Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center; **Motria Melnyk**, Corporate Secretary of the Kyiv-Mohyla Foundation of America; **Dmytro Ternovyi**, alumnus of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center; **Yana Chapailo**, Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center; **Marta Farion**, President of the Kyiv-Mohyla Foundation of America; **Borys Trofimov**, Senior Director at EY-Parthenon and NaUKMA alumnus

Chicago

The visit began in Chicago, home to one of the largest and most active Ukrainian communities in the United States. A charity reception at the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art brought together more than 80 guests from Chicago and the surrounding area. The evening's guest of honor and speaker was Father Volodymyr Kushnir, a medical chaplain and longtime pastor within the Ukrainian community, who has supported Ukrainian service members and newly arrived Ukrainians in the United States for many years. The evening opened symbolically with a ceremonial march by the St. Joseph Band, led by Ivan Strogush.

The reception also provided an opportunity to recognize the individuals and organizations that supported the Center during its first two years. The Kyiv-Mohyla Foundation of America presented certificates of appreciation to donors and partners who have consistently invested in the education and development of Ukrainian veterans.

Washington, D.C.

The next stop was Washington, D.C., where a reception in support of the Center was held at Ukraine House in partnership with the U.S.-Ukraine Business Council. The event was facilitated by Oksana Markarova, former Ambassador of Ukraine to the United States, Director of Ukraine House, and a Kyiv-Mohyla Academy alumna, whose support helped bring together partners and friends of the Center in Washington.

The event's guest of honor was Ambassador William B. Taylor — the sixth U.S. Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Ukraine (2006–2009), Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine in 2019, and an Honorary Professor of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. His participation carried particular significance because Ambassador Taylor is himself a veteran. Before entering the diplomatic service, he served as an infantry officer in the U.S. Army, including in Vietnam, and completed his military service with the rank of captain.

Among those recognized were Selfreliance Federal Credit Union, Heritage Foundation of First Security Federal Savings Bank, President and CEO of the Ukraine-Moldova American Enterprise Fund Jaroslawa Z. Johnson, Dr. Myron Wojtowycz, Halyna Traversa, Dr. Aleksandr and Anna Kosenko, Zirka Voronka, Susanna Stetkevych, George Chopivsky, and the Deychakiwsky family.

Support for veteran education has also extended beyond the United States: a charitable contribution from the Kyiv-Mohyla Foundation of Canada funded a scholarship for one veteran to participate in the Center's educational program.

While in Chicago, the UDLC team also met with the leadership of Selfreliance Federal Credit Union, one of the Center's partners supporting education for Ukrainian veterans, and gave an interview to UA Chicago, the visit's media partner, about the Center's work and the role of veteran leadership in Ukraine's future.

In his remarks, Ambassador Taylor emphasized an idea at the heart of the UDLC mission: "A veteran is not a problem to be solved, nor a burden. A veteran is a source of potential and an asset to the society in which he or she lives." His words underscored the importance of moving beyond seeing veterans primarily as recipients of support and instead recognizing their experience, sense of responsibility, and leadership potential.

Another important part of the Washington program was advocacy work on Capitol Hill. The UDLC team held a series of meetings with the offices of U.S. senators and members of the House of Representatives, discussing the American experience of veteran policy, the transition from military service to civilian life, and opportunities for cooperation with Ukraine.

In particular, the team met with the office of Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, co-founder and co-chair of the Congressional Ukraine Caucus. Her Defense and Foreign Policy Advisor, Doug Klain, shared the U.S. experience of involving active-duty service members in fellowships within government institutions. Such exchanges help service members gain a better understanding of how democratic institutions operate while giving policymakers direct insight into the needs of service members, veterans, and their families.

The meeting with the office of Senator Tammy Duckworth of Illinois was particularly valuable. Senator Duckworth is an Iraq War veteran, former Black Hawk pilot, and retired Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. National Guard. In 2004, she lost both legs as a result of combat injuries. Following rehabilitation, she returned to service and later dedicated a significant part of her political career to veterans' issues. Her office works systematically to improve the transition

from military service to civilian life and expand opportunities for veterans beyond traditional forms of social support. Senator Duckworth has also been a consistent supporter of Ukraine.

The Washington program concluded with a meeting with the office of Senator Dick Durbin, Democrat from Illinois, co-founder and co-chair of the Senate Ukraine Caucus and a longstanding advocate for Ukraine in the U.S. Senate. Senator Durbin has supported military and financial assistance to Ukraine, stronger sanctions against Russia, the non-recognition of occupied Ukrainian territories, and continued bipartisan support for Ukraine in Congress.

While in Washington, the team also visited Arlington National Cemetery and the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation. During a meeting with the Foundation's President, Professor Eric Patterson, the team discussed opportunities to exchange U.S. experience in working with veterans and explore how relevant practices could be applied in the Ukrainian context.



Mariia Klimchak, Executive Director of the Kyiv-Mohyla Foundation of America; **Marta Farion**, President of the Kyiv-Mohyla Foundation of America; **Dmytro Ternovyi**, veteran, Marine, and alumnus of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center; **Daria Haidai**, Adviser at the Embassy of Ukraine in the United States; **Yana Chapailo**, Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center; **Kateryna Smagily**, Adviser at the Embassy of Ukraine in the United States; **Mariia Savrun**, Development Director at the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center; **Mariia Ulianovska**, journalist, NaUKMA alumna, and Communications Officer for the tour

New York

The final reception in support of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center took place in New York at the Ukrainian Institute of America. The evening's guest of honor was Ambassador John Herbst — U.S. Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Ukraine from 2003 to 2006, Senior Director of the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center, and a longstanding advocate for Ukraine in the United States.

In his remarks, Ambassador Herbst spoke about the importance of veteran leadership, democratic resilience, and investment in education for Ukraine's future. His participation was an important expression of support for the UDLC approach: creating opportunities for Ukrainian veterans to transform their military and leadership experience into new roles in communities, the public sector, business, and civil society.

From Support to Long-Term Partnership

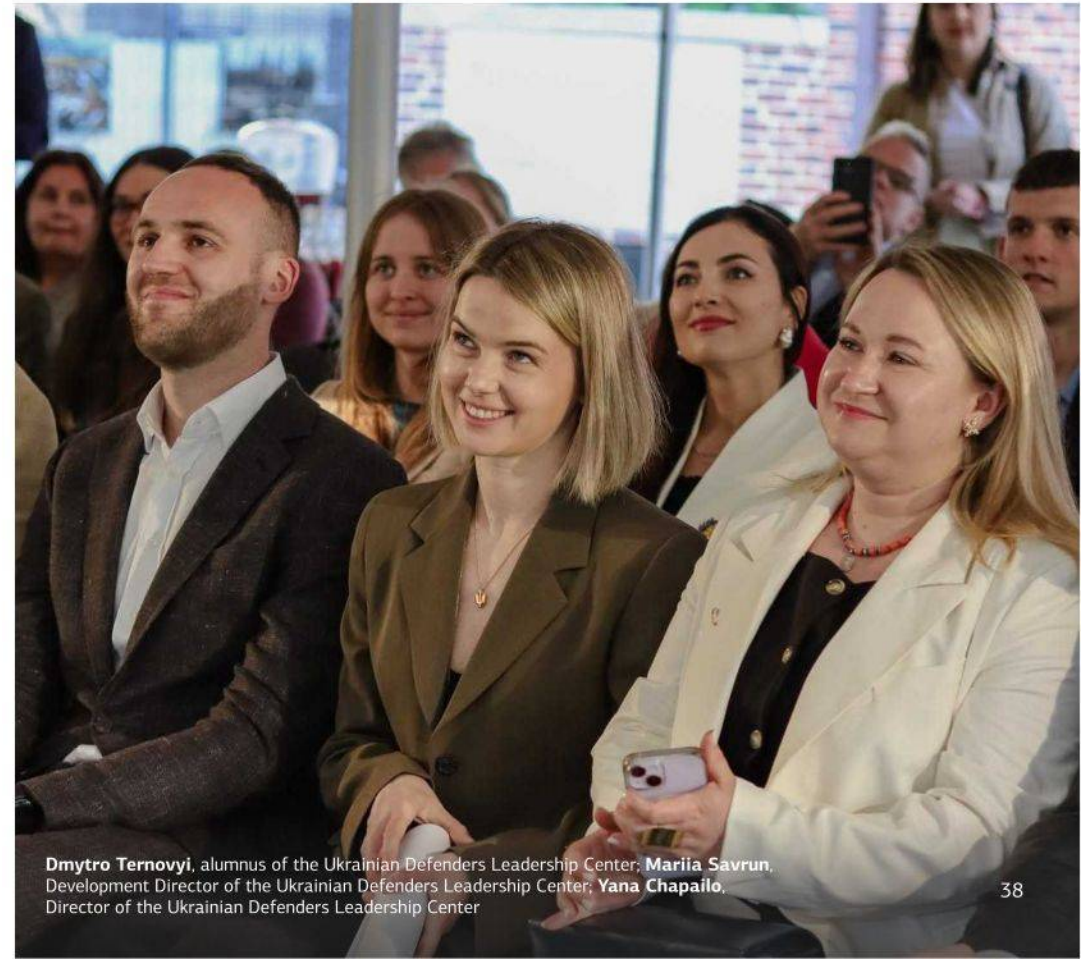
For the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, the U.S. visit was much more than an opportunity to thank those who already support its work. Its key objectives were to present the results of the Center's work and the tangible impact of investing in veteran education, expand its network of partners, and attract new funding for the continued development of its programs.

The three-city visit, which included public events and meetings with donors, business leaders, diplomats, and representatives of U.S. political institutions, helped engage both the Ukrainian diaspora and a broader network of American partners in supporting the Center's mission. Dmytro Ternovyi's participation also made it possible to communicate the impact of the Center's work through more than programs and figures — through the first-hand experience of a veteran and UDLC alumnus.

The visit marked another step toward building long-term international support for veteran leadership — as both an important part of the transition from military service to civilian life and an investment in Ukraine's human capital, recovery, and future.

Guests were also addressed by Ambassador Andrii Melnyk, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, who expressed his support for the Center's mission and emphasized the importance of sustained international support for Ukraine and the development of Ukrainian veterans' potential. Khrystyna Hayovyshyn, Deputy Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, also joined the event.

The New York program also included a visit to United Nations Headquarters, where Khrystyna Hayovyshyn provided the UDLC team with an overview of the role of Ukraine's diplomatic mission in New York and the work of the United Nations.



Dmytro Ternovyi, alumnus of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center; **Mariia Savrun**, Development Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center; **Yana Chapailo**, Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center

Personal and Professional Leadership Development

Developing personal and professional leadership requires an understanding of the processes taking place within the country, a willingness to contribute to societal change, and the ability to engage in meaningful dialogue with representatives of public institutions.

In Fall 2025, the first event of the Community of Action was a meeting with Nataliia Kalmykova, Minister for Veterans Affairs of Ukraine (2024-2026).

The discussion was moderated by Hlib Stryzhko — veteran, alumnus of the “Leadership & Resilience” program, Head of Social Projects at Starlight Media, consultant to robota.ua, and ambassador of Veteran Hub.



Hlib Stryzhko, veteran and alumnus of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program, Fall 2024; **Nataliia Kalmykova**, Minister for Veterans Affairs of Ukraine

Participants discussed changes in Ukraine’s veteran policy, key challenges in supporting veterans, and the role of veteran communities in developing systemic solutions.

Ethics and Integrity in the Public Sector Course

Integrity is one of the core values of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and its community.

In April 2026, with the support of Razom for Ukraine, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center launched the Ethics and Integrity in the Public Sector course for its alumni, developed and taught by Inna Sovsun.

Inna Sovsun is a Member of Parliament of Ukraine and lecturer at the Kyiv School of Economics and the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. She is the founder of the CEDOS think tank, served as First Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine (2014-2016) and Vice President of the Kyiv School of Economics (2016-2018), and is a NaUKMA alumna.

The course focused on the ethical challenges faced by people working in the public sphere. Participants explored the nature of integrity, analyzed real-world ethical dilemmas in politics and governance, learned to develop well-reasoned responses, and strengthened their critical thinking skills.

The course combined theoretical concepts with practical cases from contemporary Ukraine. Seminars, discussions, and collaborative case analysis formed a significant part of the learning process, allowing participants to explore theoretical approaches and reflect on how the principles of ethics and integrity apply in professional life and decision-making.

“

The course taught by Inna was one of the most remarkable experiences I had at the Center. Concepts such as justice and equality, which had once seemed abstract, became clear systems that helped me articulate my own views more precisely. What struck me most was the topic of just war: it completely changed the way I think about international humanitarian law and the rules of war.

Oleksandra Sakharuk, veteran, alumna of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program, Spring 2026.



Inna Sovsun, Member of Parliament of Ukraine and lecturer

“

Teaching defenders is very different from teaching regular students. Service members and veterans respond much more directly — they bring honesty, openness, and a strong sense of reality to the classroom. For me, as someone who teaches ethics in the public sphere, working with defenders is particularly meaningful because they have an extraordinary sense of justice. For them, these discussions are not simply theoretical; they are a way of searching for answers to deeply personal questions.

Inna Sovsun

Workshop: “How to Talk About Yourself So That People Trust You, Listen to You, and Want to Work with You”

Leadership requires the ability to communicate ideas clearly, build trust, and present oneself effectively. For this reason, in April 2026, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center held a practical workshop with Olena Vedmid, CEO and founder of the Postmen communications agency, titled “How to Talk About Yourself So That People Trust You, Listen to You, and Want to Work with You.”

During the session, participants worked on developing a strong self-presentation, communicating their value clearly, and building trust through communication.



Liudmyla Pautets, graduate of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program, Spring 2025, during the workshop

The practical part of the workshop focused on developing and refining participants’ own elevator pitches. Participants prepared their self-presentations, received individual feedback and practical recommendations, and gained tools to present themselves more effectively in professional settings, public speaking, and meetings with potential partners.

Cultural Events and Memory Politics

“My Maidan” Photo Exhibition

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center actively contributes to joint initiatives across the Kyiv-Mohyla community, bringing together students, alumni, partners, and the veteran community around values that are important to the university. Increasingly, the Center’s own alumni are becoming the initiators of such events.

One such initiative was the opening of Oleksandr Synytsia’s “My Maidan” photo exhibition in December. The idea for the exhibition came from Volodymyr Synytsia, a veteran, alumnus of the Leadership & Resilience Program, Fall 2025, and the photographer’s son.



Oleksandr Synytsia, UNIAN photographer and participant in the Revolution of Dignity, at the opening of the “My Maidan” photo exhibition

The exhibition was accompanied by a panel discussion featuring journalist and civic activist Mustafa-Masi Nanyem; service member and Leadership & Resilience alumna Ilona Voloshyna; Member of Parliament of Ukraine and NaUKMA alumnus Yaroslav Yurchyshyn; and Volodymyr Synytsia. The discussion was moderated by Yana Chapailo, Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center.



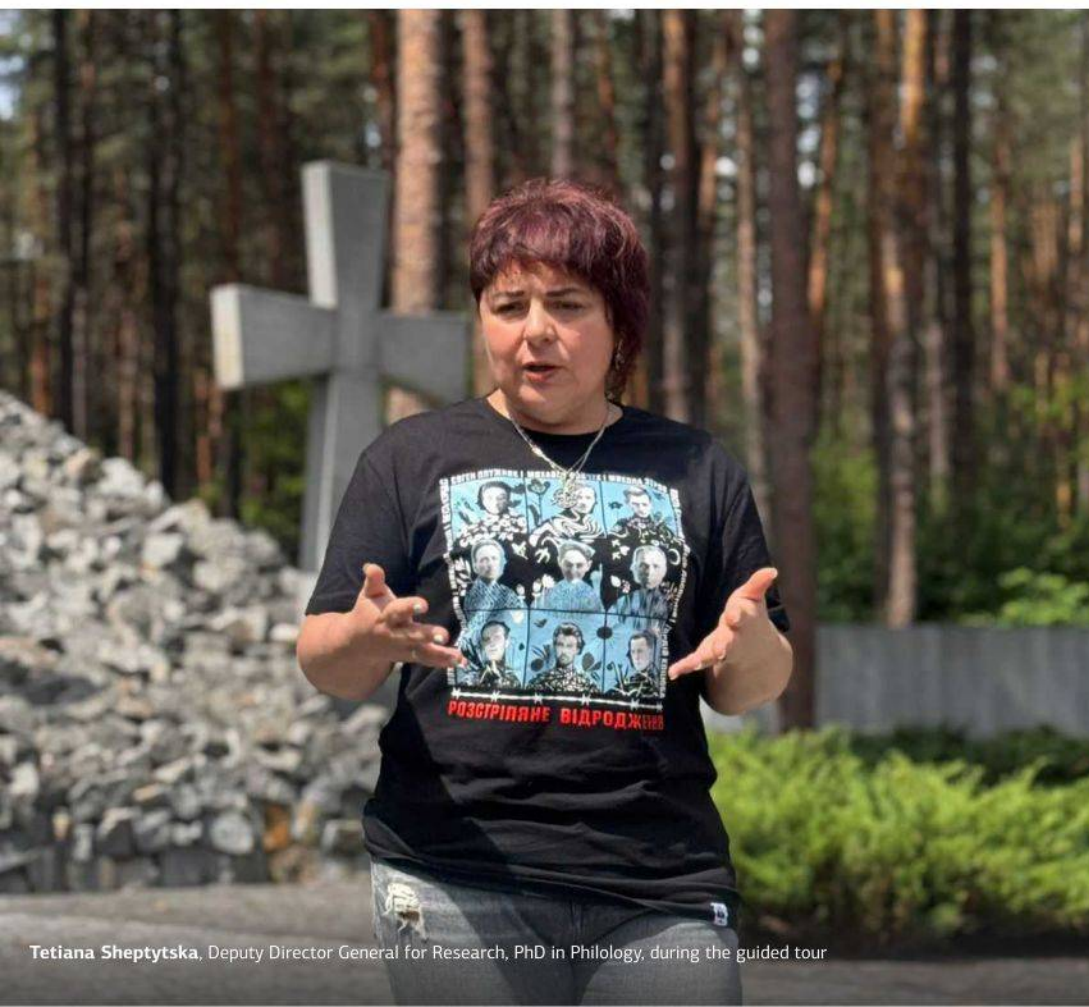
At the opening of the “My Maidan” photo exhibition

Participants reflected on their experiences of the Revolution of Dignity, the role of the Kyiv-Mohyla community in the events of the Maidan, and the ways in which those events continue to shape contemporary Ukraine. The exhibition was organized by the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center in partnership with the student charitable organization KMA Help and KMA Alumni, the NaUKMA Alumni Association. The event concluded with a charity fundraiser in support of KMA Help and the military unit in which Volodymyr Synytsia served.

Visit to the Bykivnia Graves National Historical Memorial Preserve

In May 2026, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center community visited the Bykivnia Graves National Historical Memorial Preserve, the largest burial site in Ukraine for victims of the mass political repressions of 1937-1941.

The tour of the memorial was led by Tetiana Sheptytska, Deputy Director General for Research and PhD in Philology. The visit was also joined by Roman Veretelnyk, Ukrainian literary scholar and Head of the Volodymyr Morenets Department of Literature at NaUKMA, and Halyna Stefanova, Ukrainian theater and film actress and recipient of the Kyiv Pectoral award. At the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, they teach a module on postcolonialism and the role of cultural diplomacy.



Tetiana Sheptytska, Deputy Director General for Research, PhD in Philology, during the guided tour

Following the tour, participants continued the conversation about historical memory, culture, responsibility, and how reflecting on the past can help deepen our understanding of Ukraine's contemporary experience.

The visit was made possible with the support of Razom for Ukraine.

Cross-Sectoral Exchange

Validation Workshop "In Service to Those Who Served"

In November 2025, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center took part in the validation workshop "In Service to Those Who Served," co-organized with Open Space Works Ukraine and Pro Peace Ukraine.

The workshop brought together representatives of the public sector, civil society organizations, veteran communities, and service providers to discuss research findings and develop recommendations for improving the veteran support system. Participants focused on cross-sectoral cooperation, the development of peer-to-peer approaches, accessibility of services, and the role of education in veterans' transition to civilian life.

For the Center, participation in events like this is an important part of cross-sectoral dialogue, bringing together academic expertise, practical experience, and the voices of veteran communities to develop more effective solutions.



Iryna Latysh, Civic Engagement Project Manager at the CHESNO Movement; Viktor Bishchuk, veteran and presenter at Pershyi Zakhidnyi TV and Radio Company.

Networking and Study Visit to Poltava

On November 17, 2025, program participants and the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center team visited Aurora Multimarket's headquarters in Poltava.

During the visit, participants learned about the company's development, business processes, and approaches to organizing its operations, and toured its office and logistics center. Particular attention was given to Aurora's veteran policies and its practices for creating an inclusive workplace, presented by Mykhailo Onufer, Chief Veterans Officer at Aurora.

The visit concluded with a business simulation that gave participants an opportunity to apply their management skills in practice and gain a better understanding of how business decisions are made.

The visit created a space for exchange between the veteran community and Ukrainian business, while giving participants a closer look at contemporary approaches to corporate management, team development, and veteran support in the private sector. During the visit, the Center also met with Kateryna Yamshchikova, Acting Mayor of Poltava, and agreed to pursue further cooperation in developing veteran leadership and expanding educational opportunities for veterans.

The Community of Action continues to grow and now brings together more than 100 graduates of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center's programs. At the same time, the community is increasingly developing well beyond the educational programs themselves: alumni stay connected, launch joint initiatives, share professional opportunities, and return to the Center as partners, speakers, and mentors. These horizontal, peer-to-peer connections are gradually shaping a self-sustaining community capable of creating new opportunities for its members.



During the study visit to Aurora Multimarket's headquarters in Poltava

Plans for 2027

In 2027, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center will continue to expand and deepen its network of partnerships while increasing both the range and scale of educational initiatives for veterans.

1

One of the Center's key priorities will be the launch of the fifth and sixth cohorts of the "Leadership & Resilience" Executive Education Program, as well as the launch of Leadership & Resilience 2.0 for alumni of the core program.

2

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center will continue to develop its partnership with Naftogaz of Ukraine through the "Naftogaz Future Horizons" Program, further strengthening the model of cooperation between business and the university in support of veteran development.

3

The Center will continue its partnership with the International Renaissance Foundation through the Transformative Educational Experience for the Reintegration of Veterans of the russo-Ukrainian War project. As part of this initiative, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center will continue to provide mentoring support to partner universities in developing university-based ecosystems that support veterans in their transition to civilian life.

4

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center will continue to strengthen the Community of Action by organizing educational and cultural events, expanding its alumni and partner networks, and creating new formats for engagement and collaboration.

5

The Center will launch a new educational program as part of the VAction: Veteran Leadership in Recovery project — a pilot course for veterans who have completed their military service and want to contribute to the recovery and development of their communities. The program will focus on people-centered recovery, local self-government, civic participation, and cross-sectoral cooperation. It aims to provide participants with practical knowledge and tools to develop and implement their own initiatives and engage effectively with government, business, civil society, and international partners.

6

As part of the Community of Action, in September 2026, with the support of Razom for Ukraine, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center plans to implement the Veteran Leadership Development project. Six alumni of the Center's programs will develop their own veteran support projects and take part in a professional development visit to the United States to explore international practices in reintegration, civic participation, and veteran leadership development, with the aim of applying the experience gained in Ukraine. The visit will also be supported by the Congressional Office for International Leadership (COIL) and American Councils for International Education.



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