People in Need

Final evaluation of the "COURAGE TO BUSINESS" programme

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 About the Project

At People in Need (PIN), we **developed an integrated and multisectoral project to strengthen their livelihoods and wellbeing of veterans and their families**. Collaborating with the Lviv City Council (LCC) on their programme **"Courage to Business: Grant Support of Entrepreneurship of Veterans and their Families"**, we contributed to the provision of business grants—alongside the City Council—, psychosocial support training (PSS), and comprehensive technical and soft skills training, as well as opportunities for mentoring and best practice exchanges.

The **project's overall objectives** were to enhance the self-reliance and abilities of veterans and their families, to help them return to civilian life, and contribute to more cohesive and resilient communities.

The project provided **financial support and practical tools to enhance the capabilities of veterans-owned businesses.** This included facilitating collaboration between PIN, local authorities, and veterans to improve the economic situation of veterans and their families, easing reintegration into civilian life, and supporting their psychological wellbeing.

Through the project, veterans were provided with **business grants and entrepreneurial training**. Veterans and their family members also took part **in psychosocial training focused on soft skills** (social component and psychosocial tools).

1.2 About this Report

This report presents **the findings of an independent final evaluation of the "Courage to Business" project**. It was commissioned by People in Need and conducted **in March 2026** by an external research team from "Operatyvna Sotsiolohiia". The evaluation was conducted approximately one year after the first cohort of grant recipients launched their businesses. This made it possible to assess the quality of programme implementation and early indications of sustainability.

The evaluation pursued **three interconnected objectives**: to assess the results and effectiveness of the integrated support model across its three components (grant, training, and psychosocial tools); to examine the mechanisms through which change occurred—or failed to occur—for different participant sub-groups; and to identify evidence gaps relevant to the design of similar programmes.

The evaluation was commissioned during the final stage of the project and was not preceded by a dedicated baseline study. This shapes the analytical approach: where pre/post quantitative measurements are unavailable, the report relies on triangulation of qualitative testimony, secondary monitoring data, and paired pre/post training questionnaires.

Conclusions are presented with appropriate epistemic caution, and the boundaries of the available evidence are noted explicitly where relevant.

The intended audiences for this report are veterans and their family members, PIN and our programme partners, in particular LCC; current and future donors supporting veteran-focused programming in Ukraine; and national and local policymakers with responsibility for veteran integration and entrepreneurship support.

1.3 Key Research Findings

This evaluation of the "Courage to Business" project is based on two research approaches: **primary qualitative data collection fieldwork phase,** including a substantial dataset of in-depth and expert interviews, and focus groups. **Secondary analysis of quantitative data collected** included an endline survey of grant recipients, paired pre/post-testing of psychosocial training participants. Triangulation of these datasets enabled the formulation of a series of evidence-based conclusions regarding programme effectiveness and its mechanisms of impact, as well as **the identification of key problem areas and risks to the sustainability** of the changes achieved:

1. The findings demonstrated that **the most effective element was the integrated support format, in which the grant, educational, and psychosocial training components worked in concert not in isolation.** This is confirmed both by quantitative data—where the majority of grant recipients, family members of veterans, and our team members indicated the complementarity of these elements—and by qualitative analysis of the mechanisms of impact.

Financial resources without training did not adequately prepare participants for market conditions; training without accounting for the psycho-emotional state of some participants encountered internal barriers (specifically, difficulties with open interaction in group formats); and psychosocial training without a material foundation was often perceived as practically insufficient. **Ultimately, the programme was effective not so much because of its individual components in themselves, but because of their combination within a unified support model.**

2. A pronounced economic effect of the programme was recorded at the level of individual entrepreneurial activity. At the time of the study, two thirds of grant recipients were already generating income from their businesses, and the vast majority directly attributed this to their participation in the programme and the grant received. This does not imply equal success for all participants, but it provides evidence **of a revival of economic activity for a significant number of the participants.** The programme built the capacity to sustain the intention towards self-employment, and to translate it into actual income-generating activity.

3. The programme's impact was not limited to the level of the individual grant recipient; in many cases it extended to the household as a whole. The findings revealed **increases in family financial stability and positive changes in the employment of family members.** This is significant. In the context of veteran and family audiences, entrepreneurship frequently functions as a form of economic adaptation for the entire family. Accordingly, the programme should be understood as both a form of support for individual businesses, and as an instrument for strengthening the economic resilience of families directly affected by the war.

4. At the same time, the analysis provides grounds to conclude that the **grant did not function as a self-sufficient financial instrument for the full launch or development of a business.** On average, it covered only a portion of actual costs, and therefore most commonly served as an initial stimulus requiring supplementary funding from other sources. This means that while the programme was effective as an activation instrument, it did not fully level the inequality of starting conditions: participants who had personal savings, access to loans, or other resources were objectively better positioned. **The limitations of the grant component are therefore an important structural characteristic of the support model.**

5. A significant constraint on programme effectiveness was the time lag between selection and receipt of funds. The issue lay not only in the duration of the administrative cycle, but under conditions of inflation and market instability this reduced the practical relevance of previously prepared financial calculations, even though the time between selection and receipt of funds was just 1.5 to 2 months. Participants were compelled to revise budgets, update commercial proposals, and effectively renegotiate their business plans. The delay thus had not a formal but a directly economic consequence: it undermined the predictability of launch and increased the burden on participants at the most sensitive stage.

6. Entrepreneurial skills training proved one of the strongest elements of the programme; it facilitated transition from intuitive entrepreneurship to structured and market-oriented approach. Its value lay in both the transfer of knowledge, and a shift in the way participants thought about business: from a general intention or idea towards risk assessment, planning, and practical viability.

At the same time, it was within this component that participation barriers were identified: the intensive in-person format placed excessive burdens on participants with family responsibilities, and for some veterans living with the effects of injuries and related cognitive consequences it was physically and psychologically exhausting. **The educational component should therefore be assessed as effective in terms of content, but not fully adapted in terms of format to the heterogeneity of the audience.**

7. Despite the generally high assessment of the training, the study identified **a number of unmet needs critical to longer-term business sustainability. These relate primarily to practical competencies in digital marketing and preparation for participation in public procurement.** This means that while the core educational component effectively initiated the entrepreneurship process, it did not fully equip participants for subsequent market consolidation, scaling, or access to more stable sales channels. The educational component should accordingly be understood as a sound entry-level foundation, but not as a comprehensive response to all the needs of micro-entrepreneurs post-launch.

8. Research findings provide grounds to regard the **psychosocial training component as an important element of the programme, which generated positive and unintended outcomes for certain participants.**

While individual psychosocial support was offered through the programme, few participants opted for this. Some male veterans, seeking psychological assistance remained stigmatised, and for certain participants with combat experience an additional barrier arose from an inability to openly discuss particular aspects of service with civilian specialists. This may suggest that the mere inclusion of a psychosocial component does not in itself guarantee full accessibility: the form of delivery matters too, as does the degree of its cultural and contextual acceptability for a veteran audience.

9. The data provides grounds to conclude that **at the initial stage of programme implementation the team was not fully prepared to work with acute trauma cases.** The need for additional specialist training that emerged during implementation indicates that when working with veteran audiences, psychosocial competence cannot be treated as a secondary skill. It must be embedded in team preparation prior to commencement. This is particularly important for programmes that combine intensive communication, group formats, and work with people whose experiences are connected to war, loss, or prolonged uncertainty.

10. One of the most significant indirect outcomes of the programme was the formation of peer support networks among participants. This proved to be functionally important: the relationships formed served both as a resource for emotional support and as a practical channel for the exchange of experience, contacts, and business opportunities. For veteran audiences and family members, such social capital is of particular value, as it compensates, somewhat, for isolation, fragmentation of experience, and a deficit of trust in broader market or institutional environments. At the same time, this resource remained largely confined to individual training groups—that is, it was not fully institutionalised at the scale of the programme.

11. Despite the high assessment of the transparency of the PIN–LCC partnership model, the evaluation revealed a number of procedural and regulatory vulnerabilities that affected the experience of participation.

The most critical was uncertainty related to taxes. This created risks of partial loss of grant funds and heightened the vulnerability of participants with Internally Displaced Person(s) (IDP) status.

Separately, perceived contradictions in the selection criteria were identified: on the one hand, respondents perceived an allocation of additional points which may have created a sense of inequity between veterans and family members; on the other, respondents were not aware of the provisions for specific groups.

This may indicate that more transparency and information is required to demonstrate how selection criteria ensure social equity and the logic of vulnerability prioritisation.

12. The most serious risk to the long-term effectiveness of the programme relates to the gap between the programme support and independent business operation. It is precisely after the completion of the grant and training components that participants face the greatest number of practical challenges—from market fluctuations and energy instability to staff shortages exacerbated by mobilisation.

In the absence of post-grant follow-up support, even successfully launched micro-businesses remain vulnerable to external and internal risks. In this sense, the question of the sustainability of results achieved cannot be reduced solely to the individual capacity of participants, but must also be considered a characteristic of the programme design itself. **Accordingly, the need for a second wave—or at minimum a post-grant support format—should be understood not as an optional extension, but as the logical continuation of the already-implemented support model. Based on this finding and ongoing project learning, future projects have incorporated additional, continued support components for grantees, balancing this with the constraints of relatively short-term, 12-month projects.**

13. A further important insight concerns the transformation of participants' motivation over the course of engagement with the programme. At the point of entry, most participants were primarily motivated by obtaining grant funding; entrepreneurial and psychosocial training components were frequently perceived as supplementary or formally obligatory elements of participation. However, over the course of the programme, participants began to reassess the significance of precisely these elements—knowledge, mentoring support, community experience, new contacts, and a sense of being supported. This means that one of the most important changes recorded within the programme lay not only in the creation of a material resource, but in a shift in participants' understanding of what is genuinely valuable for launching and sustaining a business.

14. Addressing evidence gaps. Analysis of 83 business descriptions from the endline survey **identified six main sectors**: services (29%), production and crafts (17%), food industry and HoReCa (16%), beauty and health (13%), medicine and rehabilitation (10%), and agriculture (5%). **Barriers to entrepreneurship operate as a causal chain: psycho-emotional state blocks planning capacity, followed by an information vacuum, capital deficit, regulatory instability, and stigmatisation—with the psycho-emotional barrier being the primary obstacle.**

A cohort of veterans for whom **entrepreneurship is not yet feasible exists within the selected group; for them, relevant support takes the form of psychosocial stabilisation, socialisation spaces, professional retraining, and legal navigation assistance**. Programme **design demonstrated adaptability** (at least five documented in-course corrections) **but lacked proactive differentiated tracks for sub-groups** such as recently demobilised veterans, families of fallen servicemen, and women with high burdens of care. Scaling nationally requires **functioning Business-to-Government (B2G) quotas for veteran businesses**, stabilisation of grant taxation rules, mobilisation deferment for employees of veteran sole traders, and state subventions for smaller municipalities.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The final evaluation of the "Courage to Business" was undertaken to understand the project's impact, relevance, and sustainability, as well as to address additional evidence gaps that can inform similar projects. The evaluation was grounded in a mixed-methods research design, ensuring robust data triangulation. The study sequentially integrates primary qualitative data collection (fieldwork phase) with secondary analysis of existing quantitative monitoring datasets (People in Need MEAL data), allowing quantitative trends to be verified through qualitative insights and ensuring validity of the final findings.

1. Fieldwork phase: primary data collection was conducted in March 2026 using four instruments:

- **Expert Interviews (EI):** 10 semi-structured interviews with key respondents to analyse the project architecture and cross-sectoral interaction.
- **In-Depth Interviews (IDI):** 16 individual interviews, distributed equally between groups (8 with veterans, 8 with family members), to explore individual trajectories and the quality of support received.
- **Focus Group Interview (FG):** 2 discussions (involving 13 veterans) to identify common patterns of experience and barriers.
- **Structured Self-Administered Questionnaire:** completed by 6 project specialists for internal analysis of operational implementation challenges.

A dedicated set of instruments was developed for each data collection method, adapted to the respective group and research objectives. The structure of all instruments followed the key components of the intervention. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in Ukrainian, with mandatory audio recording and full subsequent transcription (see Annexes 1–6).

Qualitative data analysis and processing: analytical induction was applied, with in-depth thematic coding of interview and focus group audio transcripts. A total of 1,280 coded segments were identified: 441 from EIs (8 thematic categories, 75 sub-codes), 215 from IDIs with veterans (7 categories), 152 from IDIs with family members (5 categories), and 472 from FGDs (9 categories). Cross-verification and triangulation of data were conducted across respondents with differing background contexts.

2. Secondary analysis: this involved descriptive analysis and independent verification of PIN's monitoring databases, covering:

- endline survey of grant recipients (N=83, 162 variables);
- endline survey of grant recipients' family members who took part in psychosocial training (N=19);
- paired pre/post-testing of social component (psychosocial tools) training participants (N=84 before, N=70 after);
- focus group report by the Protection Technical Lead (N=10).

Data integration and analytical structure: findings are presented in line with the main programme components, reflecting the integrated nature of the project itself. The analytical logic combines sequential quantitative description with qualitative elaboration, alongside triangulation of stakeholder, participant, and implementer perspectives.

Methodological limitations: the primary limitation is the absence of full baseline measurements for a number of indicators. This constrains before-and-after comparison. The risk of socially desirable responding in the quantitative dataset is acknowledged and mitigated through qualitative triangulation, with particular attention to critical remarks, ambivalent assessments, and accounts of challenging experiences.

The qualitative phase drew on recruitment from the full list of programme participants, whose contact details were provided by People in Need. Selection was based on participant status (veteran / family member), sex, and age. Given that the qualitative dataset covered approximately 35 out of 194 programme participants, the findings can be considered sufficiently reliable and relevant to the broader audience, particularly given the internal variability of sub-groups and triangulation with other data sources.

A distinct methodological challenge arose from the specific characteristics of the target groups—veterans and family members, including wives of active-duty, deceased, or missing servicemen (see 3.7.2 Family members' perspective). Conducting interviews and focus groups required a safe communicative space, with adherence to the principles of voluntary participation, ethical interaction, empathic communication, and conversational flexibility.

2.2 Research Sample

The quantitative dataset draws on four monitoring components. The endline survey of grant recipients (N=83 of 100 total recipients) was central. This was collected between December 2025 and February 2026 through a structured questionnaire. It is complemented by a survey of family members who received psychosocial training only (N=19), pre/post-training questionnaires of social component training participants (N=84/70), and self-administered surveys completed by programme specialists (N=6).

Among the 83 grant recipients surveyed, 47 were women (57%) and 36 men (43%), with a median age of approximately 37 years. The largest concentration was found in the 30–45 age group (approximately 60% of the sample). Disability status was recorded for 16 individuals (19%), and 6 (7%) reported a serious illness without formal disability status.

The gender distribution of participants show a clear pattern of participant status. Women predominate, but this trend reverses at the final selection and funding stage, where men form the majority of direct grant recipients. These findings are corroborated by both the self-administered surveys of programme specialists and qualitative interviews with selection committee members.

The questionnaire format reduces the risk of misunderstanding but substantially increases the risk of socially desirable responses, evident in indicators with near-zero variance: 100% of respondents confirmed that the grant amount matched what had been promised, and 100% reported no difficulties in communicating with the organisation. Such indicators largely reflect the survey context rather than solely actual experience, and should be interpreted accordingly. The absence of baseline data for most indicators is compensated by pre/post-testing data from the social component training and by direct probing in the qualitative phase.

The qualitative dataset encompasses three key target audiences representing different **institutional levels and statuses within the project:**

1. PIN team (4 individuals): a programme officer, the psychologist who developed the psychosocial training programme, an area manager/coordinator, and a programme specialist.

2. Mentors, partners, and LCC representatives (6 individuals): the director of the NGO "Women's Perspectives", a business trainer from the LCC Business Support Centre, a selection committee member from "Budynok Voina", a member of the LCC, an external strategic session facilitator, and a programme specialist. For both the PIN team and partner groups, a self-administered questionnaire (N=6) was used in addition to qualitative interviews. All six respondents were involved in the project at different stages (September 2024–November 2025), and their varied levels of involvement enhances dataset validity, as each answered within their area of expertise.

3. Participants are represented by two distinct sub-groups:

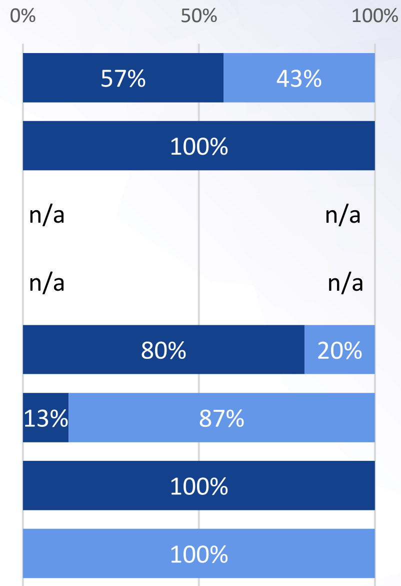
- **The veteran audience** comprises men and women of various ages with three fundamentally different starting positions: revival of a pre-war business, launch in a related or familiar field, and entirely new entrepreneurial endeavours. Two focus groups were conducted with this sub-group, differing substantially in level of analytical reflection: FG1_V (8 participants) is oriented towards pragmatic action and direct personal experience; FG2 (5 participants) is characterised by values-driven reflection and a systemic view of the veteran ecosystem.

- **The family members audience** consists exclusively of women with varied backgrounds: from wives of active-duty servicemen to wives of missing persons and internally displaced individuals.

Grant recipients	PSS family members	Pre/post training	Qualitative interviews	Focus Groups
83	19	84/70	26	2

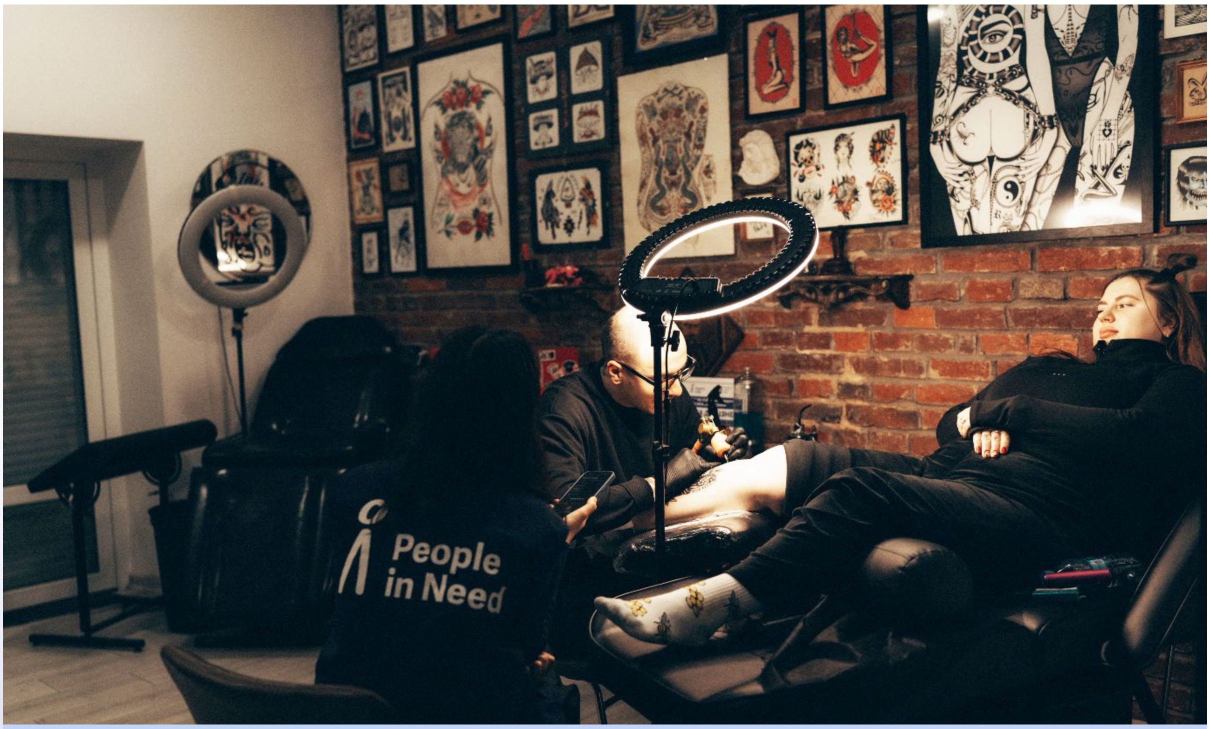
Table 1. Data collection overview

Tool	Respondents	N
Endline survey	Grant recipients	83
Endline survey	Family members (PSS training only)	19
Pre/post questionnaire	Social component training participants	84 / 70
Self-administered questionnaire	Programme specialists	6
Expert Interview (EI)	PIN team, partners, LCC representatives	10
In-Depth Interview (IDI)	Veterans	8
In-Depth Interview (IDI)	Family members	8
Focus Group Interview (FG)	Veterans	13



women
men

Note: *gender breakdown for the self-administered questionnaire, expert interviews, and veteran IDIs/FGDs was not systematically recorded. Family member IDIs and the family member endline survey were exclusively women.*



Roman Halushka, participant of the "Courage to Business" programme, Lviv © People in Need Ukraine

3. Evaluation Findings

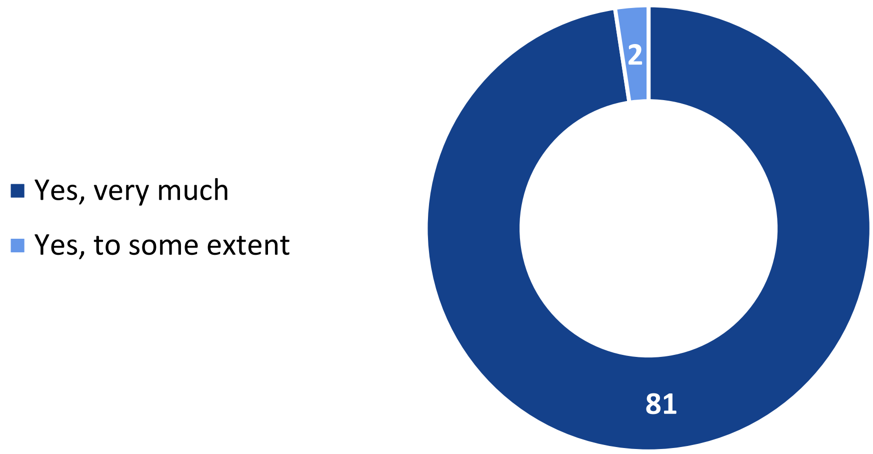
3.1 Economic Dimension of the Programme

Based on testimonies from veterans and their family members, and on the basis of quantitative and qualitative data analysis, the economic dimension of the programme extends beyond the classical understanding of business investment. For participants, **financial support served not only as capital for starting or scaling, but as a fundamental instrument for returning to civilian life.**

3.1.1 The grant as start-up capital

The quantitative data analysis highlights the central role of grant support: **98% of grant recipients (81 out of 83) rated the grant as "very important" for their business**; none considered it insignificant.

How important, in your opinion, was the grant support for your business?
Number of responses



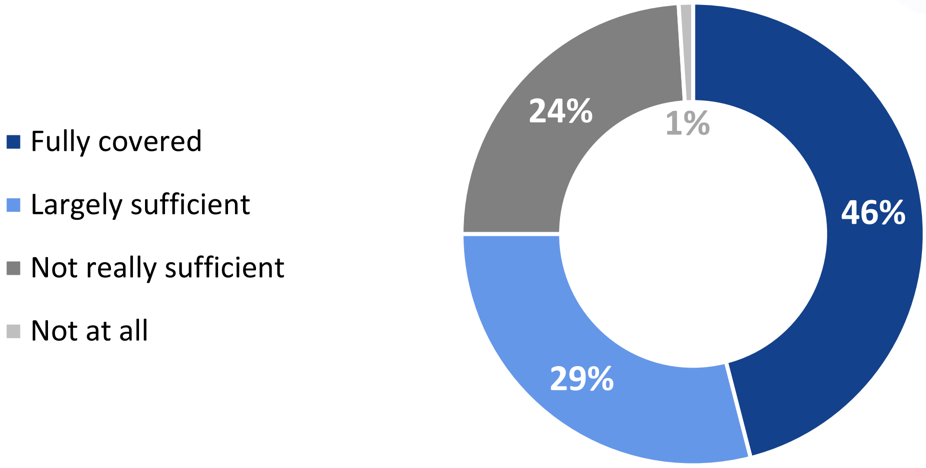
A common theme emerges across responses: **without external financial support, their business ideas would have remained dreams or would have developed much more slowly:**

> *"If the grant hadn't come through, I would have already been learning some other trade" [FG1_V, 641].*
>
> *"If we had started on our own, we probably wouldn't have bought it [equipment] for around five years, because they're not cheap" [IDI4_V, 36–37].*

Most participants, particularly those starting in a field entirely new to them, **lacked sufficient savings for a full business start-up.**

At the same time, data on the adequacy of the grant amount highlights a structural problem—**a partial mismatch between the support provided and actual needs. Only 46% (38 persons)**

reported that the grant fully covered their needs; a further 29% (24 individuals) considered the funding to be "largely sufficient", **while 24% (20 individuals) indicated that the funding fell short. Thus, despite overall satisfaction with the level of funding (75%), one in four participants faced a financial shortfall.** Among the 20 survey respondents who said the funding was "not really" sufficient, the primary reasons were high costs for equipment and rising inflation.



Note: *On average the grant covered ~30% of investment needs for 80% of participants—supplementary funding from savings, loans, or compensation payments was typically required.*

Due to the mismatch between the fixed grant amounts and actual market investment requirements, **the grant covered on average only 30% of investment needs for 80% of participants.** Accordingly, business start-ups were possible only through additional funding sources: the grant was combined with savings, loans, and compensation payments related to military service or injury:

> *"I got back on my feet for two reasons. First, this programme helped me… Second, I invested up to UAH 440,000[1] of my own money—the payments I received for my injury. […] So, for a veteran to develop their business, they have to win a grant **and** sustain an injury that qualifies for compensation. Otherwise, there's no way" [FG2_V, 774–778].*

Quantitative monitoring data does not include a dedicated indicator on loans secured by participants. However, qualitative analysis of testimonies provides a consistent picture: **bank credit is described not as a feasible option but as a structural impossibility for the veteran segment:**

[1] EUR 8,500 – 9,000

> *"A bank loan is a lost cause, it's impossible. Without support for veteran businesses from either the state or donors, it's unreal, it's just a mirage" [FG2_V, 779–781].*

Some participants considered taking loans but **ultimately declined due to anticipated inability to service it:**

> *"We thought about taking a loan, but we knew we wouldn't be able to get out of it" [FG2_V, 1554].*

In the funding-mix description above, "loans" refer in practice to **informal borrowing from family or business partners** rather than to formal bank credit.

Beyond financial costs, participants describe systemic discrimination: **cases of veterans with combat injuries being refused even basic banking services because of physical disabilities** (inability to physically hold a card during identification).

The grant model functioned effectively when participants had access to additional resources. This creates a risk of excluding the most vulnerable participants—those who need the grant most urgently.

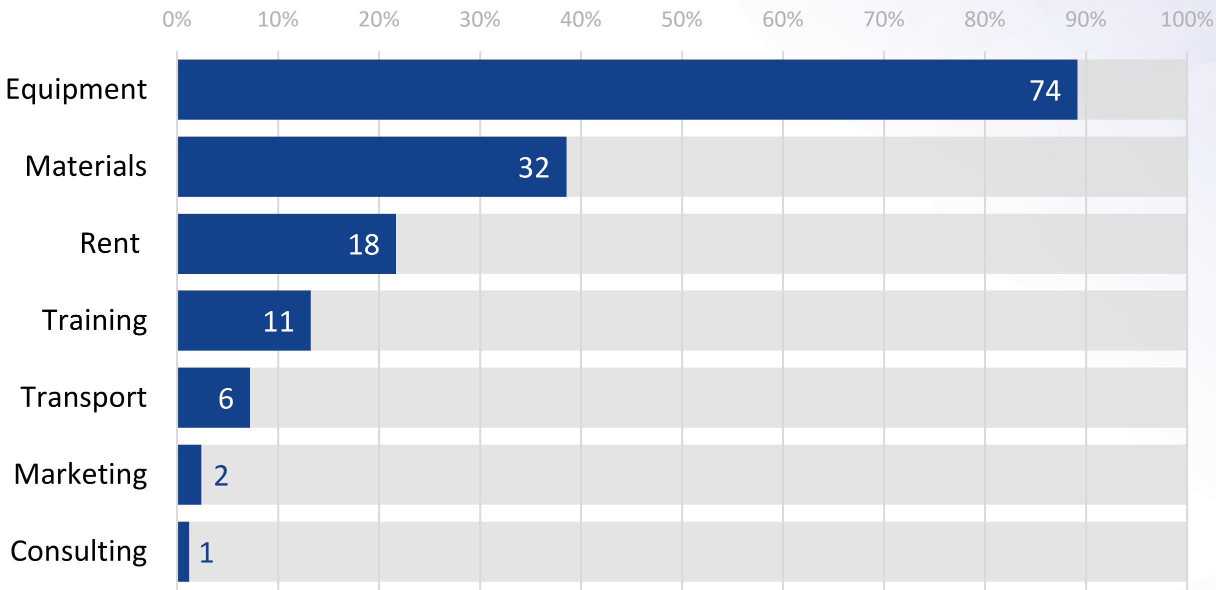
Experts confirm this point, emphasising that **isolated financial support without a post-grant follow-up system is strategically insufficient**, given that approximately 30% of participants openly acknowledge difficulty keeping their business afloat.

The endline survey enables a structural breakdown of the grantee population. Of the 83 grantees surveyed, 61 (73%) received "Grants for restoration and development of business"—that is, those returning to or scaling an existing business—and 22 (27%) received "Grants for business creation" (up to $4,000), targeted at new ventures. The grant programme served **two qualitatively different audiences with different starting positions, financial trajectories, and risk profiles, which the analysis throughout this report addresses where data permits.**

The sectoral distribution of the 83 businesses (classified from open responses on grant expenditure) is concentrated **in six main areas**: services (29%—including cleaning, photography, IT, automated services, childcare); production and crafts (17%—stone processing, laser welding, woodworking, sewing, ceramics); food industry and HoReCa (16%); beauty and health (13%); medicine and rehabilitation (10%); and agriculture (5%). Construction, trade, and transport account for the remaining 10%. A more detailed analysis of sectoral profile and the structural vulnerability of specific niches (such as HoReCa and small retail) is presented in section 3.8.1.

3.1.2 Structure of expenditure

The dominant expenditure category is **purchase of equipment (74 responses)**, followed by materials (32) and rent (18). Notably, **none of the 83 participants surveyed used funds for salaries or debt repayment.** This reflects both grant spending restrictions and the micro-business launch model, which in its initial stages relied entirely on the self-employment of the founders without hiring additional staff.



Productive assets focus

89% **of respondents invested in equipment**

Underfunded area

97% **spent nothing on marketing**

The findings reflect a deliberate strategy articulated by participants themselves as the **principle of "give a fishing rod, not a fish."** Investment in productive assets was perceived as the most reliable use of funds, as **equipment remains a tangible asset** even if the business model changes.

Purchases were diverse: from sewing machines and cosmetology equipment to tractors, ultrasound machines, laser welding equipment, solar panels, and minibuses. This indicates that **the programme did not impose standardised solutions on participants** but adapted to their existing competencies.

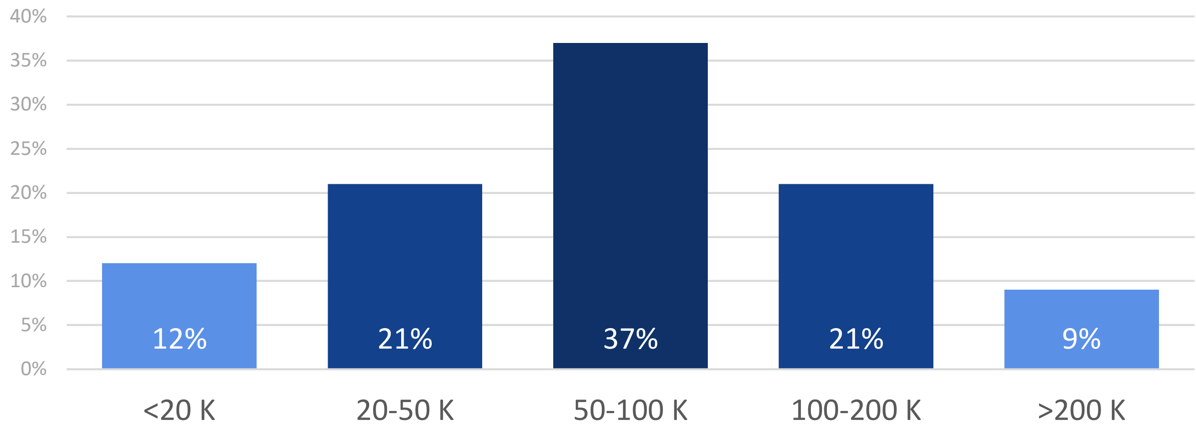
At the same time, this concentration on material and technical equipment—**and the near-total absence of marketing or advertising expenditure in 97% of cases**—may suggest that businesses are well equipped in terms of production capacity but **underfunded in terms of market promotion.**

A clear logic of decision-making is evident in responses: participants understood that the grant would cover only the "core" of the business, and **consciously sacrificed operational costs in favour of productive assets.** Difficulties arose when this "core" suddenly became more expensive due to inflation or market-specific factors.

3.1.3 Income and employment

67% of grant recipients surveyed (56 out of 83) reported an increase in income following programme participation. Of these, **93% directly attributed this to the grant they received.** Of the 56 participants who reported income growth, 43 provided valid numerical figures (13 entries coded as "999" were excluded as missing data). The median monthly income among valid responses was 70,000 UAH, with a mean of approximately 113,000 UAH. The distribution reflects the heterogeneity of programme participants: 12% reported under 20,000 UAH, 21% between 20,000–50,000 UAH, 37% between 50,000–100,000 UAH, 21% between 100,000–200,000 UAH, and 9% above 200,000 UAH (with one outlier of 1,400,000 UAH belonging to a scaled established business). The breadth of this distribution reflects the dual nature of the participant pool—newcomers building from zero versus those scaling pre-existing businesses.

Median monthly income	Mean monthly income
70,000 UAH	**~113,000 UAH**



Note: *N = 43 valid numerical responses (one outlier of 1,400,000 UAH from a scaled established business excluded from chart)*

For new businesses, the first three to four months constituted **a "survival period."** During this time income was minimal, and participants' own contributions often exceed their projections by several times:

> *"The planned own contribution was, say, UAH 15,000, but it came to 80,000. Since this is a new business plus a new location, it's running at a complete loss" [FG2_V, 1462–1464].*

For those reviving an existing business, their trajectory was different: **an existing client base allowed new costs to be covered quickly, and the grant functioned as an accelerator:**

> *"Having both an established track record and an active business, we expanded the premises and immediately achieved full occupancy." [FG2_V, 1548–1549].*

At the level of broader economic impact, **72% of participants surveyed (60 out of 83) recorded positive changes in employment within the household (including job creation and the involvement of family members).** An individual grant often evolved into **a family economic project.** Wives who are building a business jointly as a platform for their husband's future return view entrepreneurship as a bridge to a shared civilian life:

> *"I became the director. I take the lead, and my husband follows… Well, we work together, we think everything through together—what's better to do, where to go… Everything is shared" [IDI4_V, 146–150].*

Overall, 78% of participants reported **improved economic stability in their household,** and **76% reported an improved ability to meet their basic needs:**

> *"I mostly used to order goods and was always in the red, but after Courage to Business… I increased the amount I spent on advertising and started earning more on larger batches… First, I broke even, and then I started turning a profit" [IDI1_FM, 29–35].*

Experts also highlighted the structural dimension of this success: **participants have been registering their activities en masse, establishing sole trader status, and beginning to pay taxes.** Some entrepreneurs have expanded to five retail outlets, generating **a tangible local fiscal effect**—providing compelling evidence for continued municipal co-financing of such programmes.

67%	72%	78%	76%
Income increase	**Employment changes**	**Economic stability**	**Basic needs met**
56 of 83 — 93% attributed to gran	60 of 83 — household-level	65 of 83 reported improvement	63 of 83 — housing, health, education

3.1.4 Operational barriers

Despite only 24% of participants describing the grant as insufficient, a deeper understanding of this emerges from qualitative data. Interview analysis identifies **three key barriers.**

1. The delay between application submission and receipt of funds (1.5–2 months). During this period, commercial proposals became obsolete, equipment prices rose, and suppliers changed. **Financial models carefully constructed during training depreciated:**

> *“The most important thing is to speed up the assessment and disbursement of funds… The prices of goods changes and you then have to re-negotiate everything” [IDI6_V, 257–268].*

> *“You write the application, you calculate everything, you built the entire financial model. But if the price changes, your costs change too… Because the documents we submitted had been prepared a month and a half earlier, by the time the funds arrived they were obsolete” [FG1_V, 339–343].*

2. Rigid operational constraints. Tight implementation timeframes (1–2 months) proved unrealistic for the manufacture of custom equipment. Moreover, **the requirement to spend funds exclusively within Ukraine** sometimes led to direct economic losses:

> *“If you buy from abroad, you can buy twice the amount. But grant funds can only be used within Ukraine” [FG1_V, 388–390].*

Delays often had substantial impact on participants. However, the average 1–2-month period is considered relatively short in comparison to other PIN projects, given the time required for processing applications, due diligence, and grant disbursement.

3. The tax precedent. A change in the tax authority’s guidance on the taxation of international grants (applying 18% personal income tax plus 5% military levy), combined with the automatic cancellation of IDP payments, created **a dual financial burden**:

> *“So, you receive UAH 100,000. The allowance is withdrawn… That’s minus UAH 60,000 a year… And on top of that you pay another UAH 23,000. And the question is, how do you buy equipment?” [EI5, 270–274].*

This issue was resolved through the emergency intervention of PIN and LCC, who covered the tax liability themselves.

Separately, participants mentioned **excessive bureaucracy.** The absence of synchronisation between the requirements for the grant and those of the city council placed a significant administrative burden on participants during the reporting phase:

> *“The only difficulties were with collecting documents… I had to gather 26 or 27 documents; it was so hard” [IDI3_V, 149–150].*

From the expert perspective, the problem **lay in having two separate selection committees** (PIN and LCC), where the city council committee had to wait for the minutes of the PIN committee—a process that, given deputies’ schedules, could take up to a month:

> *“The Lviv City Council’s selection committee always had to wait for the minutes of People in Need’s selection committee. And that wasn’t always quick… sometimes it could stretch to a month” [EI8, 114–121].*

3.1.5 External sustainability risks

Questions about long-term business risks revealed three dominant concerns among participants.

1. Hiring difficulties (34 responses). Veteran entrepreneurs find themselves in a bind: their injury-related physical limitations in performing heavy work are compounded by the **impossibility of hiring men who avoid official employment in the absence of mobilisation deferment**:

> *"Finding someone with the ability to do physical work… in Lviv that's simply unrealistic" [FG2_V, 258–259].*

2. Wartime and macroeconomic context (38 responses). Power outages, inflation, and declining purchasing power place continuous pressure on financial planning:

> *"When the cold weather and the power cuts started, he wrote that he was forced to pause operations… because the generators can't handle it" [EI1, 154–156].*

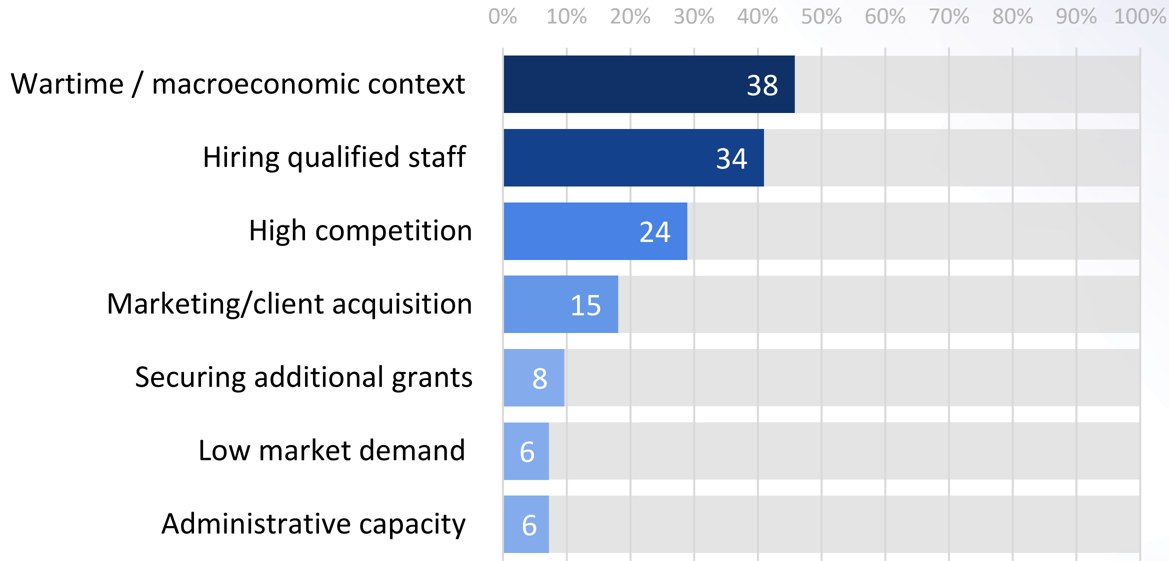
3. Intense competition (24 responses). The competitive environment for micro-businesses is characterised by the overwhelming pressure of mass-market operators and low profit margins. Respondents note that veterans' fairs have symbolic value but objectively cannot serve as a systemic sales channel, despite their potential to serve as advertising platforms for local markets and promoting veteran businesses. both entrepreneurs and experts agree that **the absence of structured assistance with market access remains the primary unmet need**.

Even a successfully launched business therefore **remains strategically vulnerable without post-grant follow-up support.** A developed mentoring system, access to public procurement, and municipal rental preferences constitute the "second wave," **which experts identify as the critically necessary next step** for sustaining veteran-owned businesses in Ukraine:

> *"If the programme had the possibility of offering a second chance to participate…*
> *It was so good I'd want to do it again" [IDI6_V, 234–238].*

Other long-term risks were less frequently selected by the 83 survey respondents. Low market demand was selected six times, as was a lack of capacity to perform administrative tasks (e.g., accounting or filing tax returns). A difficulty securing additional grants, funding or loans was selected eight times.

Multi-select question—totals exceed (N=83)



3.2 The Educational Dimension of the Programme

Training played a critical bridging role between veterans' existing professional competencies and the demands of the contemporary market. The **provision of financial resources without appropriate business preparation does not guarantee the sustainability of micro-enterprises.** The training component was designed to address a dual objective: to structure participants' entrepreneurial thinking and to help them adapt their business models to the changing economic conditions of wartime.[2] The combination of quantitative assessments and in-depth interviews enables an evaluation of how successfully the programme met this challenge.

3.2.1 Overall assessment of the training component

The entrepreneurial skills training received the highest ratings of all programme blocks. Survey data shows that **80% of grant recipients (62 out of 78 who completed training) rated**

[2] Training modules, held over ten days, included: Self-realisation through entrepreneurship; Adapting an idea to local market conditions; Business planning; Personnel, business organisation, management, and environmental protection; Development of a business plan; Grant opportunities for business creation and development; Start-up capital; Legal aspects—business registration; Marketing and sales practical task: creating marketing materials; Business accessibility: the new norm of society; Marketing and sales; Networking; Marketing strategy for your business; Outdoor advertising and display; Strategy for successful business; Business game; Experience exchange, group meeting and visit to a business.

the usefulness of the training at the maximum score of 5 out of 5; a further 18% gave 4 out of 5.

The relevance score was even higher: 90% of respondents scored it at the maximum level. These results are consistent and show no significant variation even among participants with prior entrepreneurial experience.

Training session as part of the "Courage to Business" programme, Lviv © People in Need Ukraine

The trajectory of self-assessed change in competency is positive. 68% **(53 persons) reported significant improvement in business knowledge**, and a further 29% reported partial improvement. Significant improvement in decision-making capacity and risk management was reported by 72% of participants. **The highest figure was recorded for confidence in one's own venture: 82% (64 persons) assessed the increase as substantial.** This indicator is particularly important for veterans, as in the first months following demobilisation as ex-service personnel often feel a decline in confidence in their own abilities. This is frequently cited as one of the factors that complicate veterans' adaptation to civilian life:

> *"Through the knowledge I received and the support—the knowledge helped; it helps.*
> *You can work without knowledge; the main thing is to believe.*
> *Self-esteem too. Knowledge is what I would single out here" [IDI6_V, 190–192].*

3.2.2 Substance of the training

The most in-demand topics, according to the endline survey, were **marketing and sales** (38 responses), **general business planning** (32), and **business plan development** (20). This distribution clearly points to the primary gap the programme was designed to fill: **participants lacked not technical or craft skills—most already had those**—but commercialisation competencies: the ability to turn a product into a profitable enterprise.

Most participants, including those with entrepreneurial experience prior to military service, described their previous approach as intuitive. **Training thus provided them not so much with new information per se, but with a structure for making sense of it:**

> *“Before, I worked more intuitively. After the training I understood how it all… After the project, a structure of understanding appeared” [IDI1_FM, 56–60].*

For veterans returning to business after a prolonged break, **the training re-synchronised participants with new realities:**

> *“I thought I knew everything about markets and sales. No, it doesn’t work that way. The world that existed before 2021 is not coming back” [FG2_V, 247–248].*

The key educational outcome was the anchoring of business ideas in market reality. Participants moved through three typical trajectories: complete abandonment of the initial concept due to its commercial unviability; a change of business model while retaining the product; or deep analytical refinement of the idea through risk modelling. This process was frequently described as difficult but necessary:

> *“I understood perfectly well during the launch that my understanding of market capacity, my wishes and desires did not correspond to market realities. A business must make money” [FG2_V, 212–214].*

> *“I didn’t hear anything new—there was maybe one per cent that was genuinely new—but I simply stress-tested myself through the mentors, ran that hypothesis I had through the process, and corrected it very seriously” [FG2_V, 220–222].*

The shift from an emotionally motivated idea to a market-validated one is the central achievement of the educational component.

Worthy of separate mention is participants’ growing **awareness of the limits of their own competence**, particularly in matters of accounting and legal reporting. Some participants who had planned to manage their accounts independently decided, after the training, to outsource this function:

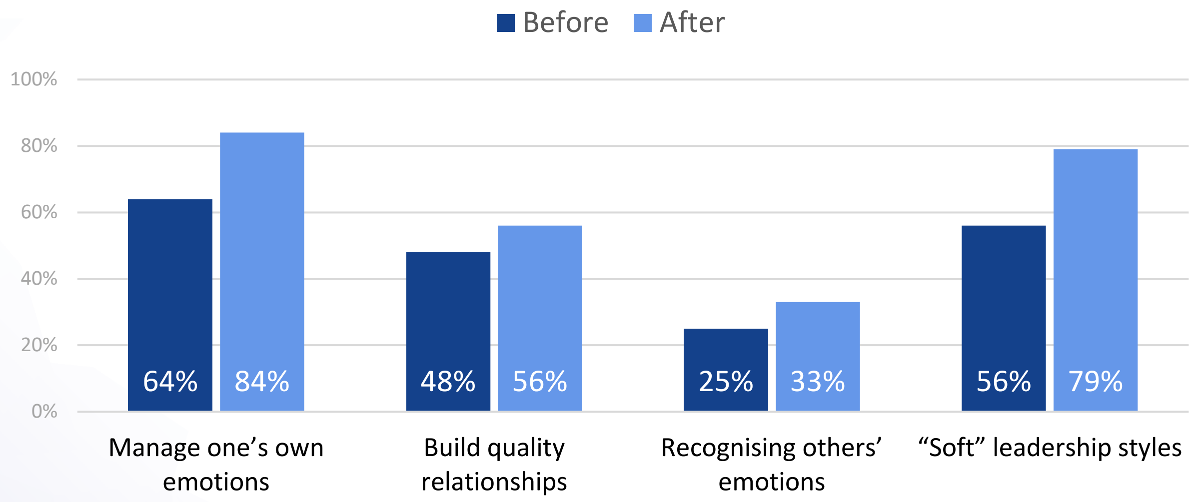
> *“Some of them didn’t even know how to file reports… and he said, I know I need to hire an accountant… during the reporting period… And he says, that solved my problem” [EI1, 172–179].*

The willingness to delegate is an indicator of the maturity of knowledge acquired. A similar effect is visible in the IDI dataset: after training, participants began to differentiate competencies, with a clear understanding of where the boundary between their own knowledge and the need for a specialist lay.

3.2.3 The “Leadership and Self-Actualisation” training: practical and psychological impact

Psychosocial tools training contained a pronounced competency component relating to effective management. Analysis of paired pre/post-training questionnaires (N=84/70) allows verification of real cognitive shifts in participants of the social component (psychosocial tools) training. The results demonstrate changes that vary in magnitude but are consistent in direction.

The most significant positive shifts were recorded in understanding the concept of emotional intelligence (EI). **The proportion of participants associating EI with the ability to manage one’s own emotions increased from 64% to 84% (+20 percentage points).** At the same time, a broader relational understanding of the concept emerged: the association of EI with building quality relationships grew from 48% to 56%, and with recognising others’ emotions from 25% to 33%. This points to a transition from an individual interpretation towards an appreciation of the importance of EI in personnel management and client interaction.



Substantial changes also occurred in perceptions of leadership roles. Before the training, “soft” leadership styles (organiser, diplomat, creator) were selected by 56% of participants; after, they were chosen by 79%. Notably, **the “organiser” type was selected by 100% of respondents after the course.** This reflects not a rejection of other styles but an expansion of the leadership repertoire. The disappearance of “difficult to answer” responses (declining from 6% to 0%) confirm the growth of conceptual clarity.

In the communication block, **the proportion of participants defining communication as "the transmission of information and understanding" rose from 87% to 96%.** In parallel, the percentage of those who viewed communication as "the ability to assert one's position by any means" fell from 14% to 6%. This shift records the internalisation of norms of non-violent and mutually respectful interaction.

The practical dimension of these changes is confirmed by participants' intentions: after the training, **80% planned to apply the knowledge gained in communication with those around them,** 61% for building resilience, and 46% in conflict resolution. Participants began to operate with specific tools (the Eisenhower matrix, SMART, the "wheel of balance," the Pomodoro method). A holistic attitude towards programme outcomes is also formed through the integration of all components:

> *"All aspects are important. The training, the support, and receiving the funding" [IDI8_V, 157].*

3.2.4 The role of mentors in the transition from theory to practice

Alongside the training material, participants across **all groups consistently identified mentoring support as an educational element of equal value** to other aspects of the training**.** The possibility of prompt consultation was described as critically important:

> *"I knew I could phone any of the mentors at any time and ask about this or that. They didn't abandon us at that moment—figure it out yourself… No, they came to meetings, you could phone them" [IDI5_V, 76–79].*

This view is reinforced by the observation from focus groups of the spontaneous queue that formed to speak with the mentor after lectures:

> *"Remember those periods after lectures, when a queue would form to consult the mentor or exchange ideas. It is vital to keep these moments [as part of the training]."*
> *[FG2_V, 1456–1458].*

Mentoring support served several functions simultaneously: **adapting general theory to the specifics of a particular business, assistance with administrative procedures** (completing applications, reporting), **and reducing anxiety about potential mistakes.** For individuals who spent long periods in the strictly hierarchical environment of the military, navigating civilian regulatory requirements independently was often a serious barrier; mentoring support systematically relieved this pressure.

An unconventional but **highly consequential decision was that of integrating a public speaking course** immediately prior to the public defence of business plans. According to the organisers, public speaking was a significant psychological barrier for most participants. Practical classes resolved this:

> *"Many people were afraid of public speaking… they'd say, I didn't think it would be so great. They'd say, I was so scared, and it was so easy… [Now]they say it [the speaking course] made speaking up easier after that" [EI1, 402–410].*

The introduction of this module reflects the programme's responsiveness to identified needs.

3.2.5 Training format: the value of in-person delivery and the need for flexibility

The two-week daily in-person format was simultaneously the most appreciated and the most criticised aspect of the educational component.

On the one hand, participants unanimously acknowledged that the **in-person format was irreplaceable for networking, discussion, and the formation of a sense of community**:

> *"For me, one great aspect of that training was the in-person format. Those ordinary breaks… The 'instruction' from the mentor absolutely has to be in person, because that's where people start discussions and collaborations" [FG2_V, 1445–1448].*

On the other hand, **the intensive schedule (10:00 to 17:00 daily for two weeks) proved a serious logistical challenge.** Participants with business or family responsibilities felt this most acutely:

> *"The barrier is that it's a lot all at once—several days in a row, and I can't do anything else… Taking two weeks off work at my own expense is difficult. And yet I understand that doing it online or in some other format probably wouldn't have worked as well" [IDI2_V, 105–110].*

> *"The first in-person meeting, the defence in person, and a lot of the training in a format like the one we're talking in now. If you missed something—you watched the video, did the homework. The ideal option" [FG2_V, 1434–1437].*

Such a model preserves the value of personal interaction but concentrates it on initial meetings, practical defences, and mentoring sessions only. An additional challenge was **the heterogeneity of training groups in terms of preparedness.** Experienced entrepreneurs found certain foundational blocks too general, while newcomers needed more time to absorb them. This points to a structural tension that is difficult to resolve within a general cohort without prior differentiation of participants by competency level.

3.2.6 Unmet educational needs

Despite the high ratings of the training components, qualitative data analysis records a number of unmet content-related needs.

Unmet needs were articulated depending on participants' starting position. Respondents from FG2 (dominated by participants with prior business experience) more often described **the foundational training blocks as too general, and emphasised that mentor consultations and idea stress-testing were the most valuable elements**. Their unmet needs concentrated in advanced areas: scaling strategy, B2G procurement, and sector-specific mentoring.

By contrast, participants from FG1 and newcomers (those receiving "Grants for business creation", N=22) more frequently reported **needing additional time for material absorption and more direct support during reporting and tax-related procedures**. The endline survey echoes this pattern: in open responses to the question on training usefulness, one experienced respondent explicitly noted:

> *"There were many people who were just starting a business, so it was more useful for them. As someone with experience, some topics were not so relevant to me"[data from the endline survey form]*

The most frequently expressed request was for advanced training in digital marketing. Marketing and sales were the most popular training topic—38 votes out of 83 participants Yet, this is precisely the area where practical uncertainty is most commonly reported after the training. Marketing and client acquisition were identified by 15 participants (among grant recipients) and 5 participants (among family members) as a key long-term business risk—despite the programme having devoted considerable attention to this topic. This indicates an **absence of a practically oriented component:** standard promotional tools are not always effective in the micro-business niche, and the programme did not systematically address the specifics of working with audiences sensitive to the "veteran" context.

The second significant gap, for businesses where digital marketing is relevant, is **preparation for participation in public procurement.** This was directly raised by FG1 participants, who explicitly requested it as part of the curriculum:

> *"There are a lot of tenders, different tenders, different conditions, and it's quite difficult to figure out what's what. It would be cool if they showed this in lectures" [FG1_V, 73–75].*

As local self-government bodies are potentially the most accessible B2G[3] sales market for veteran-owned enterprises, the absence of practical skills in working with public tenders limits participants' opportunities.

Finally, **the consistent demand for continued learning**—through a second programme round, thematic workshops, or sector-specific mentoring—attests to the high quality of the foundational course and is the best indicator of its success:

> *"The training helped enormously—excellent specialists, excellent trainers, excellent mentors. The level of organisation itself, how it was done, how carefully thought through" [FG2_V, 78–79].*

3.3 The Psychosocial Dimension of the Programme and its Impacts on Family Relationships

Structurally, the psychosocial training component was designed **to be embedded within the business course** through modules on emotional intelligence, personnel management, resilience, and communication. Veterans, however, engaged with it in different ways.

3.3.1 Stigmatisation as a structural barrier

While individual psychosocial support was available through the programme, few participants opted for this, and these are not analysed separately due to confidentiality considerations regarding sensitive personal data. The attitudes of veterans towards the psychological component of the programme differ substantially from those of their family members. **A significant proportion of male participants approached psychological support within a business project with wariness—either as a superfluous option or as a potential marker of weakness.** This perspective reoccurs in responses and is explained not by any prejudice against psychology as such, but by the fear of stigmatisation and a mistaken conflation of psychological support exclusively with the treatment of trauma or mental disorders:

> *“Most don’t want to acknowledge weakness in themselves, because they’ve been through the war, and they don’t understand that this can happen and that it can help” [FG2_V, 1676–1678].*

> *“The grant was supportive, but as for what psychosocial support is—it seems to me it’s been tacked on here, stitched on with white thread… it’s better not to attach this topic here” [FG1_V, 698–703].*

Added to this is a structural barrier specific to veterans of combat units: **the impossibility of speaking openly with a civilian psychologist due to classified status requirements.** For some participants, this constraint is not a subjective choice but a legal reality, where a veteran’s sincere readiness for therapy encounters an institutional boundary:

> *“There are things you cannot tell anyone—not even any psychiatrist or psychologist—for the next 3, 5, 50 years… God forbid you go for some kind of check-up: they’ll put you away, they’ll make you a traitor. […] I have no right to tell him, he has no right to listen to me” [FG2_V, 1785–1795].*

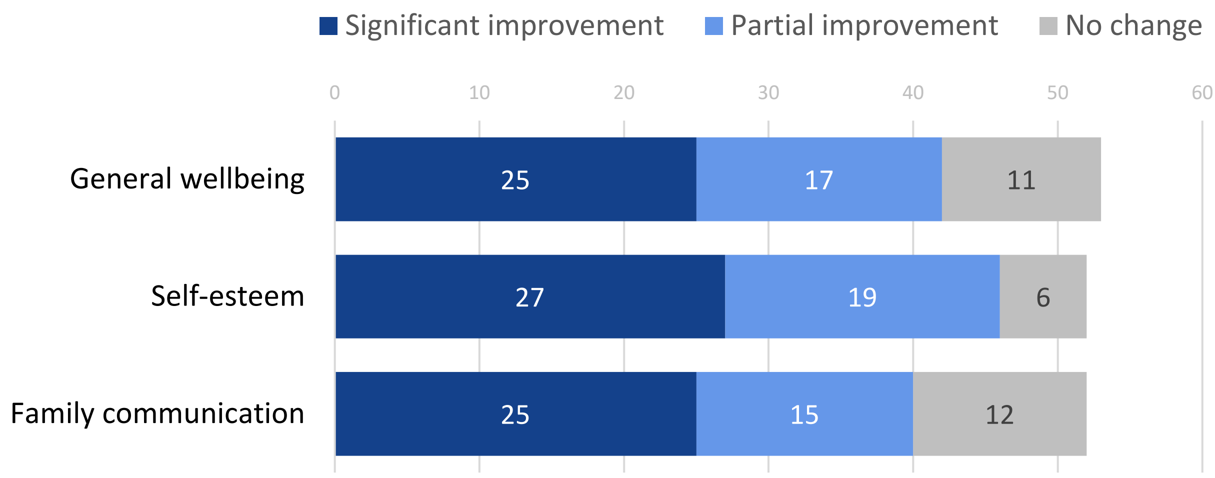
At the same time, experts also recorded the reverse effect: initial scepticism towards psychologists changed in the course of the work.

> *“They were a little prejudiced—veterans, and family members alike, had poor experiences with psychologists, and they spoke openly about, saying they were somewhat sceptical… but their view changed over the two days of our work” [EI2, 52–55].*

This implicit destigmatisation allowed participants to have a genuine psychological experience **without crossing the subjective threshold of "seeking psychological help."**

3.3.2 The quantitative dimension of the psychosocial effect

Analysis of the endline survey data records **a moderate but consistent unintended positive effect of the psychosocial trainings** across three indicators among the 83 grant recipients surveyed. In the category of general wellbeing, 25 persons reported significant improvement, 17 reported partial improvement, and 11 no change (**76% with positive dynamics overall**). Regarding self-esteem: 27 persons noted significant improvement, 19 partial improvement (84% overall), and 6 no change. In the area of family communication: 25 significantly and 15 partially (73% improvement overall), with 12 reporting no change.



Note: *~20% of participants reported no change across these dimensions—qualitative data shows this group is concentrated among the most vulnerable participants (severe losses, prolonged psychological conditions, uncertainty about missing-persons)*

These results suggest that **positive psychosocial dynamics are not solely the direct result of a discrete psychological component, but as a systemic effect of the programme as a whole:** the combination of purposeful activity, learning, financial confidence, and a supportive social environment. This is confirmed by **77% of participants (64 persons) who indicated a link between psychological stability and business outcomes**, describing them as mutually reinforcing factors.

The interpretation of these indicators is complicated by a methodological limitation: data was collected without a baseline measurement in a structured interview format. This increases the probability of socially desirable responses. **Approximately 20% of participants reported no change in any of the aforementioned psychosocial dimensions.** Analysis of the qualitative dataset indicates that this sub-group is concentrated among **the most vulnerable participants:** individuals with severe losses, prolonged psychological conditions, or complex circumstances (husband still serving, uncertainty regarding a missing person) that are

objectively beyond the reach of psychosocial training but rather require an additional, individualised psychosocial support approach.

3.3.3 Psychosocial effect on family members of veterans

The survey of family members (N=19) who only received psychosocial training enables measurement of the net effect of this component separately from the influence of the financial grant. Although the dynamics recorded in this group are lower compared to the main grant recipient sample, the results are instructive. The subjective wellbeing indicator improved for 79% of participants (5 significantly, 10 partially); 4 persons (21%) reported no change.

Positive dynamics in the quality of family communication were also noted by 79% of respondents (6 significantly, 9 partially). The lowest indicator was recorded for self-esteem: only **53% noted changes** (2 significantly, 8 partially), while 47% reported no change. This is a realistic result for a two-day training format: self-esteem is a stable personality characteristic that responds slowly to short-term interventions. One participant's account showed the benefit of this training—" immediately after the training self-esteem definitely improved,"— but, the same participant noted that the effect partially faded later. This illustrates **the limited durability of short-term gains without continued support.**

Viktor Permiakov, participant of the "Courage to Business" programme, Volyn Oblast
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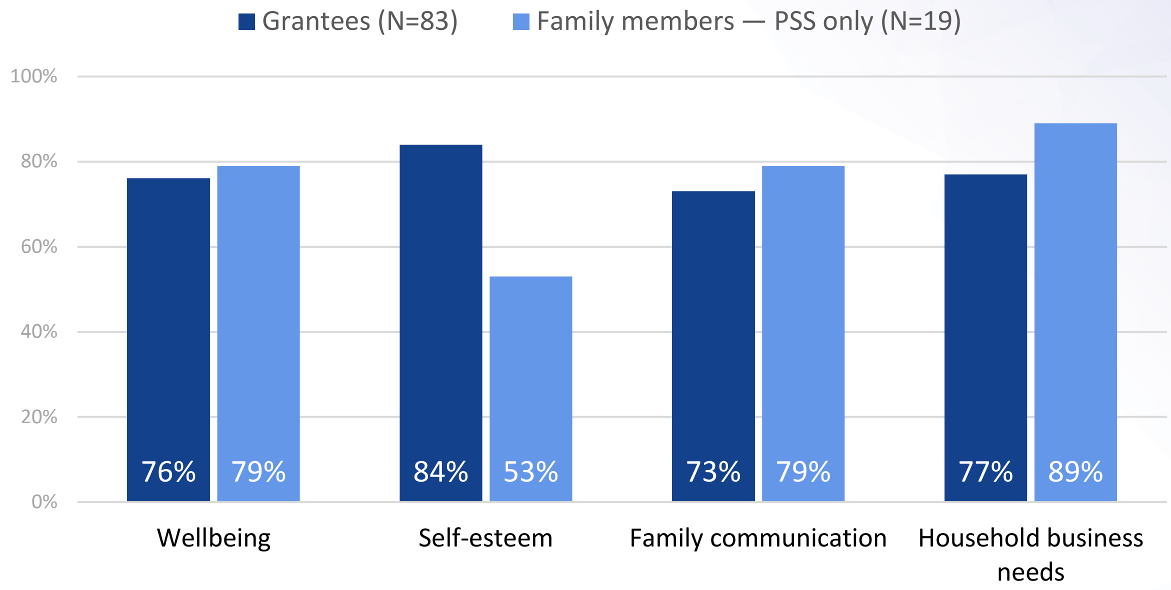
89% of participants in this sample agree the programme met their business needs, and 68% report improved economic stability. In open responses, participants describe chains of indirect effects: **psychological balance supports better communication, which leads to more effective work and attracts new clients:** *"we found new clients thanks to improved communication," "psycho-emotional wellbeing directly affects entrepreneurial activity," "if you face challenges together in a psychologically stable way, the business can progress too."*



Note: *Self-esteem is the only indicator where family members show markedly lower change—a realistic outcome for a two-day training format, where self-esteem (a stable personality trait) responds slowly to short-term interventions.*

3.3.4 Entrepreneurship as an instrument of veterans' return to civilian life

Analysis of the qualitative dataset demonstrates that, for veterans, the psychosocial effect of the programme is realised primarily through **the very act of entrepreneurial activity.** Being occupied with one's own business serves a substitutive **function: it redirects attention from traumatic experience towards a constructive goal and restores a sense of control.** A shared trajectory runs through participants' responses—from apathy, through activity, to recovery:

> *"I came back and needed to somehow start moving. But depression, apathy, PTSD don't really help with that" [IDI2_V, 19–20].*

> *"Right now, I'm totally absorbed in work. I was sitting reading, developing a programme. Once it comes together, life will be much better. Emotionally, it's given me a jolt in a positive direction" [IDI1_V, 114–116].*

In parallel, the programme provided a space for socialisation, which is essential for managing PTSD but is often blocked by the tendency towards isolation:

> *"I realised I'm not the only one who's damaged… when a person has PTSD, they often just sit there doing nothing. That's how I was. And when you sit doing nothing—it starts to rot, doesn't it?" [IDI2_V, 71–77].*

> *"After service I was a bit of a recluse… but this helped me to socialise to the maximum—even better than before the war" [IDI3_V, 50–52].*

The same dynamic is evident at the level of self-esteem. Participants note **growth in confidence in their capacity to make financial and management decisions:**

> *"First of all, it gave me courage. I immediately believed that I would win this project. I boldly made the decision, took on a lease for premises…" [IDI1_V, 51–52].*

> *"My self-esteem has changed a little, I feel a little better mentally. I know, more confidently, what needs to be done—how it needs to be done" [IDI3_V, 98–99].*

A separate dimension that emerges from the analysis of qualitative data—though it was not framed as a primary research question—**concerns the contribution of veteran entrepreneurship to strengthening social cohesion.** While the evaluation tools did not systematically measure community cohesion, expert interviews provide grounds to interpret **entrepreneurial activity as a connector between veterans and their wider local communities**:

> *"This is not just an economic project. It is not just about capacity. It is about community interaction. It is about strengthening social ties in the community" [EI5, 546–547].*

Veteran entrepreneurs become **visible economic actors in their districts**, hire fellow veterans, supply local clients, and, in select cases, use their business premises as informal community spaces. At the family-member level, respondents describe community engagement increasing through the programme:

> *"I met a lot of people and it's very motivating, because all these people, they are, in principle, in the same situation as me, they are starting something new and in very difficult conditions" [IDI3_FM, 143–144].*

These patterns point to a probable cohesion contribution that warrants dedicated investigation in future evaluations of similar programmes.

3.3.5 Women's agency and the dual burden

Of the 100 grant recipients, 56 were women business owners. For wives of active-duty servicemen or veterans, the starting point is a need for prolonged functioning under conditions of chronic uncertainty. Programme participation was, for them, one of the few spaces in which they could focus on their own development.

Successful defence of a business plan, receiving their first income, and the experience of making management decisions **independently contribute to the formation of a new sense of agency for women as independent individuals** capable of action and of shaping their own economic trajectory:

> *"My self-esteem is much higher. I feel freer, more confident… Once, I had a lot of hesitation about whether to do something or not… Now, if I have an idea, I try it… But not that fear, that panic, that uncertainty" [IDI4_V, 90–94].*

At the same time, **the objective burden on women has not diminished.** The distribution of domestic and parenting responsibilities remained:

> *"The way it was when my husband wasn't at home, it still is. What was on me, still is" [IDI2_FM, 67–68].*

The addition of entrepreneurial activity to an already overloaded schedule is **an objective cost of programme participation**—one that women consciously accepted for the sake of future stability.

An important function of these participants was **mutual emotional support**. A pronounced **therapeutic effect of being among people with similar experiences** runs through female respondents' responses:

> *"At first, I went with a little bit of disillusionment about the whole thing. Then, I ended up in a community where everyone had the same problems as me. I understand that everyone goes through such a path… I at least feel that I am not alone" [IDI6_FM, 89–92].*

3.3.6 Impacts on family relationships

Analysis of endline survey data records self-reported improvement in family communication among **73% of participants.** Beyond what they gained directly from psychosocial training, returning to work has also had positive impacts on family relationships:

> *"Things are normal with my wife. She sees, she takes an interest, she worries. That is, everything normalised the way it should have, in due course" [IDI1_V, 127–128].*

> *"When work goes well and you're in a good mood, you come home in a good mood; it completely changes things at home" [IDI7_V, 218–219].*

For family members, veterans' return to work was often a more significant outcome than the first profits from their business:

> *"They were glad that I came back to that job and started rebuilding it. That was probably more important" [IDI8_V, 75–76].*

The practice of spouses attending training together was also noted by the project team:

> *"Most of them even came to the training as a couple. And it was very important for them. Being there together, they supported each other, because it's a family business… many said it was very important even for their family wellbeing" [EI3, 320–327].*

For wives of active-duty servicemen, changes in communication came through a transformation of roles. **Women's financial independence shifted the balance towards equal partnership:**

> *"The children saw in me a potentially capable mother who can achieve something. And my husband trusts me more too. He trusts me with our finances because he knows that I'll manage" [IDI7_FM, 88–90].*

3.3.7 Business as a platform for veterans' return to civilian life

One of the most significant effects of the programme for some families was **the perception of the family business as a preparatory space for the veteran's return to civilian life.** For some family members, entrepreneurship was not an end in itself but rather an instrument for creating a safer, more predictable, and more controlled environment for the return of veterans into family life. This is reflected in joint grant applications where *"the wife applied, but indicated it would be a family business… and it was clear that sometimes this was almost like therapy and care for the veteran" [EI8, 256–258].*

For men who had spent long periods under military hierarchy, the prospect of uncertainty in civilian life is a source of considerable anxiety. **The existence of an established family business substantially reduces this stress:**

> *"He finally has some plans now, because for the past two or three years what probably weighed on him most was just this uncertainty… he now knows for certain that he's not coming back to nothing—there's already a place where he can realise himself" [IDI3_FM, 122–129].*

Beyond the family unit, this preparatory function extends into the local community. Several FG2 participants describe **their businesses functioning as informal nodes of veteran-civilian interaction**—not by design, but as an emergent property of running a visible enterprise post-service:

> *"People just come to me not to play a game; they need a break with someone. We meet in this socially oriented business so that people come to me as a veteran for coffee and a break. They leave here, having bought their product or received it as a gift, and while they are walking down the corridor, they pass at least four psychology and psychiatry rooms. About 40 percent of the veterans who come to me sign up for psychotherapy" [FG2_V, 1109–1115].*

This suggests that **veteran businesses can function as informal recruitment pipelines** for entrepreneurship programmes, not just as endpoints of support.

At the same time, a separate FG2 informant illustrates the limits of this civilian-veteran bridge: a board game designed to help civilians understand military experience found almost no civilian buyers—

> *"A game that's not bloody at all, that looks safe there… they were scared by the theme, oh my God, it's about war" [FG2_V, 199–200].*

This asymmetry—veteran businesses open towards civilians, civilian audiences still largely avoidant—is a **structural feature of the current market environment** that no programme design can resolve unilaterally, but which warrants monitoring in future evaluations.

For demobilised veterans facing the risk of social withdrawal, the business operates as **a livelihood, a structured daily routine, and a re-engagement platform with civilian community life.** The data is sufficient to identify the pattern but not to quantify it; future evaluations would benefit from explicit indicators measuring veterans' integration into local community structures.

3.3.8 Unmet psychosocial support needs

While the majority of respondents reported positive, unintended psychosocial improvements, approximately 20% reported no improvement in general wellbeing, self-esteem, or family communication as a result of the psychosocial training or the project overall **(see 3.3.2).** Qualitative data indicates that this group comprises individuals in the most severe circumstances: complex psychological conditions following injuries, recent losses, or chronic uncertainty regarding missing persons. **In such cases, psychosocial training is just a starting point.** Support “among one’s own” can help one “*not endure grief alone, but to keep moving,”.* However, it is not enough to address the deep consequences of combat trauma [EI5, 138].

It should be noted that participants could request psychosocial support as part of the projects, yet very few did so, and therefore took part just in social component (psychosocial tools) training. Moreover, **the problem of stigmatisation of psychological help was only partially, not fully, resolved.** Some participants did not make use of the individual support option due to institutional constraints or a mismatch between the format and their expectations. There remains a clear demand **for alternative forms of support: informal away events, nature retreats, and “business psychology” without clinical terminology.** This is a clear signal for optimising the design of future programme iterations.

3.4 Social Capital Formation: Networking and Community

One of the most powerful effects of the programme was the creation of horizontal connections among participants. This was reflected across responses from respondents in all qualitative datasets. In the context of veteran entrepreneurship, social capital takes on particular significance: it functions both as a therapeutic instrument for overcoming isolation and as a purely economic resource that reduces transaction costs at the start of a business.

3.4.1 Systemic effects beyond the intended outcomes

Social capital formation was not positioned in the original programme design as an independent objective. Yet it proved a consistently notable outcome across all three qualitative datasets, a finding confirmed by quantitative data. Endline survey analysis shows that **84% of grant recipients (70 out of 83) noted unexpected positive effects** from their participation. Within their open responses, the dominant themes are new connections, a sense of community belonging, and sustained mutual support after the course ended.

The fact that participants describe this effect as “unexpected” reflects **the dominance of purely instrumental expectations at the point of entry into the programme.** At the same time, the intensive in-person format within stable groups naturally created conditions not only for skills acquisition but for **the formation of strong horizontal relationships.** This unexpectedness captures the gap between the initial pragmatic motivation and the value of the social resource acquired:

> *“In reality, everyone went to receive funding… but in addition to the funding, I received knowledge, I gained connections, I established a relationship with the mentors” [IDI7_V, 270–273].*

This gap between initial expectations and the final experience confirms the importance of the social effect.

3.4.2 The mechanism of community formation

The resulting participant community was **not the result of artificially organised networking; it emerged as a natural by-product** of shared time within a relatively closed group of people with similar life experiences.

> *“A circle of like-minded people came together who had each travelled a certain path. Something united us, whether we were women, men in the military, or veterans—we were united by the goal of rebuilding our enterprises” [IDI8_V, 102–104].*

Shared combat experience was a key element that transformed an ordinary training group into a functioning network**. This created a specific level of trust that is extremely difficult to replicate in mixed civilian contexts.** Participants view this trust as a functional resource that simplifies business interaction:

> *“Peer-to-peer interaction was more beneficial than lectures from trainers and mentors.*
> *That is, we were given information to work with, and instead of simply hearing something from one lecturer and retaining 10% of it, we, as proactive people, began to make use of the opportunity that had unexpectedly arisen” [FG2_V, 356–360].*

Breaks between lectures, shared lunches, and informal conversations performed a function no less important than the actual teaching content:

> *“I’ll tell you, I blossomed. I found like-minded people. I learned to discuss my problems—business ones. With people just like me—that helps enormously” [IDI2_V, 68–69].*

> *“The connections, the great atmosphere, those soldiers and veterans—everyone so friendly, an atmosphere of supporting one another, of sharing what you do, exchanging experiences” [IDI2_FM, 79–81].*

An important management decision that reinforced this effect was the project’s **deliberate choice not to divide participants rigidly by status or level of experience.** Mixed groups where experienced entrepreneurs and newcomers, families of serving soldiers, and families of the fallen, studied alongside one another. This created an environment of mutual complementarity:

> *“They were supporting each other from their own position, their own experience. We didn’t separate them, they were comfortable” [EI10, 205–206].*

The social capital formed within the programme operates on two parallel levels, which participants themselves rarely distinguish:

First level—economic.

The veteran network functions as a channel for Business-to-Business (B2B) interaction: mutual service orders, supply of raw materials, joint project delivery.

> *“First and foremost, it was the connections. I use my connections with people I still work with. Wives of servicemen, wives of veterans… I still collaborate with them” [IDI8_V, 54–58].*

This type of interaction addresses a structural problem that sits beyond the reach of any training or grant programme: **the civilian market has not yet adapted to the mass emergence of veteran businesses**, and declared public support rarely translates into actual purchasing decisions. Thus, the veteran B2B network functions as a practical coping mechanism—a parallel market that partially compensates for civilian indifference and reduces micro-businesses' dependence on an open market that is, at best, ambivalent towards them.

The benefits of this compensation are high:

> *"I would have been in a huge deficit if I were a civilian, I would have sold the equipment long ago. Only due to the fact that it is a veteran business, the condominium association went to the meeting... If it was any other business, they would not have let me in, and I would have closed the business" [FG2_V, 1489–1495].*

In other words, the network is—for some—the margin between staying open and closing. Veterans' forums and fairs serve as nodal points for this cooperation: participants exchange contacts, arrange supply, find contractors—all within an environment where trust is built-in by default. The practical effect is a degree of market insulation: by transacting within the network first, veteran micro-businesses can sustain early-stage operations while the broader civilian market gradually adjusts.

The endline survey did not include a direct quantitative indicator on B2B partnerships established through the programme; however, 84% of grant recipients (70 out of 83) reported "unexpected positive effects" from participation, with new connections and ongoing post-programme support among the dominant themes in open responses. Qualitative data identifies several concrete partnership types:

- continuing collaboration between veteran businesses and wives of servicemen working in adjacent sectors;
- supply chain links between veteran producers and HoReCa networks (e.g. a quail farm supplying pizzerias and restaurants);
- joint educational initiatives, such as a programme alumnus being invited to teach at the rehabilitation faculty of a medical university after acquiring VR equipment through the grant.

Without dedicated indicators, the precise share of grantees who established lasting business partnerships through the programme cannot be quantified—this is a measurement gap to be addressed in subsequent evaluations.

Second level—social-emotional.

The network functions as a mutual support system in contexts where standard civilian resources cannot always provide adequate understanding. For wives of active-duty servicemen, the community of like-minded individuals serves an irreplaceable function. For demobilised veterans with PTSD symptoms, this network plays a preventive role, guarding against social isolation.

3.4.3 The institution of reputation as a network regulator

A distinctive feature of the veteran community is **the strict functioning of the informal institution of reputation.** In an environment where people trusted one another under combat conditions, violations of ethical business norms are felt considerably more acutely than in standard commercial relationships:

> *"There is a colossal institution of reputation… A person who has not been in a combat zone does not understand that you cannot let people down, because the institution of reputation within the military is very important. It transfers very well to the business environment" [FG2_V, 318–328].*

This illustrates that the veteran network is capable of effective self-regulation, which enhances the reliability of internal business relationships.

3.4.4 Tools for sustaining the network after the programme ends

Communities do not automatically dissolve after a course concludes. Consequently, the project team worked to maintain its vitality through several instruments. Shared Telegram chats function as platforms for rapid information exchange and coordination among participants from different cohorts. Veterans' fairs and forums create space for regular in-person meetings. Involving graduates of previous rounds as speakers for new cohorts ensures the transmission of experience and horizontal integration between different groups, while working with previous participants under new projects, the project team aimed to establish a peer-to-peer network of veteran businesses. Participants confirm the value of such support:

> *"Even with people after the programme, it's a pleasure. You can simply communicate with people about one question or another" [IDI3_FM, 246–247].*

Analysis of the PIN team's self-questionnaires shows that 3 out of 6 specialists named networking and the Veterans' Forum among the most effective outcomes of the project. At the same time, participants themselves assessed the limits of veterans' fairs with clear eyes: they see them as non-systemic and commercially risky events. Their primary function remains social and network-based, not sales-oriented.

3.4.5 The role of community in compensating for market barriers

The community performs a compensatory economic function in circumstances where participants face market indifference. A common view runs through veterans' responses: society has not yet adapted to the mass emergence of veteran businesses and declared public support rarely materialises as purchasing decisions. In this context, **orders within the network become a strategic resource.** Nevertheless, sometimes this support extends beyond the veteran circle itself:

> *"I haven't been charged rent even once. Utilities are also covered… Solely because this is a veteran business. If it were any other business, I wouldn't have been let in and I'd have closed by now" [FG2_V, 1488–1495].*

3.4.6 Recommendations to further capitalise on the network

The social capital formed through the programme is a real, and functional, asset. However, analysis of the qualitative data identifies three structural gaps between what the network does, and what it could, deliver, and gaps that emerged from the fact that cross-cohort connectivity and market integration were not explicit design objectives. Despite its resilience and functionality, the community created has several opportunities for improvement.

First, reduce fragmentation of the network: this network was formed within specific training cohorts and functions primarily within those groups. Participants note that post-programme gatherings did occur *("By the way, this was the next stage after the programme... we met again in Lviv, and that time it was already with families" [FG2_V, 1583–1587]),* but these were episodic rather than systematic. Connections between different programme rounds are weaker and are largely maintained through occasional events rather than continuously active platforms.

Second, mainstream B2B interaction: B2B interactions arise where the needs of specific participants happen to align, rather than being the result of systematic market exchange. One FG2 participant framed the underlying problem clearly: finding clients and partners currently consumes disproportionate time and resources—"*a lot of resources are spent on searches, and the time spent as a resource is enormous" [FG2_V, 1895–1896]*. This participant proposed marketplace platforms with preferential conditions for veteran businesses as a potential solution. Formalising this process—for example, through a unified catalogue of goods and services or regular B2B exchange events—remains an unmet need.

Third, strengthen the integration of the community into the external market: Internal mutual support is a tremendous asset, but it does not resolve the fundamental problem: **the absence of systemic sales channels for veteran products beyond the bounds of their own "bubble":**

> *"There is a lack of external promotion of veteran business… I'd like people to be more conscious. By supporting a veteran business, they improve the psychological state of that veteran, their financial situation, and raise their motivation to work" [IDI5_V, 153–159].*

The social capital formed is thus a functional asset of the programme and one of its strongest unplanned outcomes. Its potential, however, has been only partially realised: **the network successfully serves the internal needs of participants but has not yet become a full systemic bridge between veteran micro-businesses and the broader consumer market.**

3.5 Institutional Engagement and Accountability

The project's effectiveness was substantially shaped by its architecture: the programme was implemented in a consortium format between People in Need as methodological and grant operator, and the Lviv City Council as municipal partner. The **involvement of a local self-government body n as an equal partner fundamentally distinguishes this case from the classic donor scheme of "NGO–beneficiary."** The uniqueness of this model is acknowledged by participants themselves:

> *"This is the very first project in Ukraine of such comprehensive veteran support, and moreover in partnership with the local government budget and an international donor" [EI3, 368–369].*

3.5.1 Division of roles and coordination challenges

The roles were clearly delineated between partners at the outset: the LCC took responsibility for organising large-scale in-person events (forums, pitching sessions in the council chamber), involving officials in the selection committee, and public communication. PIN provided grant management, training methodology, and psychological support. Organisers on both sides assess this division as highly functional:

> *"We supported each other… we divided our roles somewhat and managed effectively" [EI1, 397–399].*

> *"We had a very strong partnership, of which I am very proud. The Lviv City Council is a very reliable partner. It is primarily thanks to this partnership that we were able to navigate all of these paths successfully" [EI3, 413–415].*

The hallmark of this partnership's maturity was mutual substitutability: in the event of operational disruptions, partners covered for one another without bureaucracy. The transparency of the business plan defence process—pitching sessions in the LCC chamber with online broadcast—was a further dimension of this openness. In parallel, the consortium demonstrated flexibility: participants who were abroad or receiving medical could defend their business plans online.

At the same time, **parallel funding from two sources generated specific administrative challenges. The most significant was the existence of two selection committees.** The LCC committee could only convene after the approval of PIN's internal committee minutes. Due to differences in political and bureaucratic schedules, significant delays arose:

> *"Lviv City Council's selection committee always had to wait for the minutes of People in Need's selection committee. And that wasn't always quick… sometimes it could stretch to a month" [EI8, 114–121].*

> *"Control and accountability must exist, and even if it takes time, it ultimately removes doubt" [EI8, 124].*

A further challenge was **initial desynchronisation of documentation requirements.** However, this issue was identified and promptly resolved:

> *"In the beginning, when we had just launched, there was some confusion, but we resolved it very quickly. Corrected it. The key is to communicate constantly, and when questions arise, to resolve them immediately. And then I think we brought it to near-perfection" [EI10, 499–502].*

3.5.2 Analysis of management and participant selection criteria

The PIN team's self-questionnaire results confirm the high quality of internal processes. The programme's responsiveness to participants' needs and the growth in their confidence were rated by the team at an average of 4.5 out of 5. Clarity of communication with participants received the highest score: 5 out of 6 rated it as "fully clear."

However, qualitative data record a gap between how transparency is perceived from the organisers' side and how it is experienced by participants—particularly with regard to grant selection:

> *"A hundred people were recruited, and only fifty passed the selection… a person invested time, invested hopes, and then they're told no. It seems to me that if you recruit, say, not 100 people but 50, those people should already be confident that they'll be selected" [IDI5_V, 223–233].*

This position illustrates a typical demand for advance communication about the probability of selection and the clarity of assessment criteria prior to the commencement of the training cycle.

The team also confirmed programme synergy: 5 out of 6 specialists noted that the components reinforced one another clearly and systemically.

At the same time, the team's self-analysis highlighted three systemic management gaps.

First, staff unpreparedness for working with trauma: during field visits, specialists encountered emotional breakdowns and sudden mood changes among participants:

> *"The team was somewhat unprepared for how to react, how to behave, what you can say at that moment when a person starts to have a breakdown, starts to cry, then immediately starts laughing" [EI3, 249–250].*

The problem was addressed through an emergency training session with a clinical psychotherapist, but the key lesson is clearly formulated:

> *"You need to train the team before launching the project—and train it properly… not just in communication, but in understanding what may be happening when people have breakdowns" [EI3, 257–259].*

Second, a deficit of post-grant follow-up support. Among the factors contributing to programme success, one expert singled out this element precisely:

> *"Post-grant support and the creation of a veteran cluster must be built in" [EI5, 181–182].*

Team members acknowledge that support drops off sharply after grant disbursement—precisely when participants face the greatest number of practical challenges.

Third, the analysis of responses provides grounds to speak of uneven awareness within the team regarding the psychosocial component of the programme: approximately half of team members were unable to clearly describe how systematically the psychosocial training sessions were conducted. This may indicate insufficient integration between the educational and psychological components of the programme.

Regarding selection, the pitching procedure with online broadcast ensured **a high level of transparency:**

> *"The key objectives are to make the application process transparent for all participants, and to make the selection of participants transparent. That is, everyone must know how they are participating, what the conditions are, and who will be making decisions" [EI3, 28–33].*

At the same time, analysis of team responses points to a perception of **unfair selection criteria.** Some respondents had the impression that gender bonus points could in certain cases give wives of veterans an additional advantage over the veterans themselves. A separate concern was also raised regarding the **absence of specific provision for wives of fallen servicemen.** Such women often find themselves in exceptionally economically vulnerable positions. In reality, complex criteria for selection were applied by both PIN and LCC, who confirmed that a specific provision of wives of fallen servicemen is among these criteria. **These issues point to a need for more transparency and stronger information sharing on how the selection criteria are applied, and how fairness is ensured.**

3.5.3 Accountability and institutional trust

Endline survey analysis reveals uniformity of responses in the accountability block: all **participants surveyed indicated that they had no difficulties in interacting with PIN and had not encountered demands for informal remuneration.** Among the 10 individuals who had submitted complaints or feedback, all reported receiving a satisfactory response. The LCC’s perspective is consistent with this picture:

> *“There were no issues at all… The Business Support Centre helped with grant applications and so on” [EI7, 70–71].*

Mykola Tolochko, participant of the "Courage to Business" programme, Lviv © People in Need Ukraine

The qualitative dimension of accountability was vividly demonstrated **in the team’s culture of crisis response.** When a change in tax authority guidance placed participants’ grants at risk—with the imposition of 23% personal income tax combined with the automatic loss of IDP payments—**PIN and the LCC jointly covered the tax liability themselves, thus protecting participants from a double blow.** This decision was not stipulated in any contract; it was a conscious step that reflected the consortium’s genuine culture of accountability. The team’s availability via messaging apps *“almost around the clock”* and their willingness to visit participants in any situation confirmed that **the team systematically exceeded its formal obligations** [EI1, 49].

One of the most significant intangible outcomes of this institutional engagement is **the strengthening of veterans’ trust in state institutions.** Analysis of responses suggests that a significant proportion of participants entered the programme with pronounced scepticism towards governmental support:

> *"The veterans said that they didn't believe this was possible. Every single one of them said that they didn't believe it… One said: I don't believe the Lviv City Council will give me anything" [EI1, 280–284].*

However, practical experience of engagement within the programme contributed to overcoming this initial scepticism. As one LCC representative notes:

> *"We are forming the idea in people's minds, that government can work effectively, can be helpful, responsible, transparent… I remember how they came and said: we simply couldn't believe something like this was possible. That you could actually come to the city and transparently receive something without any backroom arrangements" [EI7, 237–240].*

Similar transformation of institutional trust is illustrated by direct participant feedback:

> *"The Business Support Centre is probably one of two city council structures where everything is completely the opposite… You don't believe that this is the city council. Like: 'Wait, was this really possible?'" [FG2_V, 808–811].*

Analysis **of responses provides grounds for viewing public pitching sessions, actual disbursement of financial support, and transparent communication as factors that contributed substantially to weakening participants' initial distrust.** In this context, the project came to be perceived as an effective model whose experience attracted interest in wider replication in other communities:

> *"After the project concluded it gained a great reputation—the international organisation DWV approached the Lviv City Council with a request to develop a handbook for other communities in Ukraine" [EI3, 374–376].*

3.6 Barriers, Challenges and Sustainability Risks

The programme's barriers and challenges are best examined at three levels, corresponding to different natures of risk and different actors responsible for addressing them:

1. First level — **operational participation barriers,** arising directly during the training phase and addressable through programme design.
2. Second level — **structural sustainability barriers**, which veterans encounter after receiving the grant.
3. Third level — **systemic risks inherent to the programme itself,** arising primarily from the absence of post-grant follow-up support.

3.6.1 Operational participation barriers

Among participants enduring the effects of concussions and blast injuries, the intensive workload was among the difficulties frequently mentioned during training. Analysis of responses suggests that for some participants, the two-week format with a daily schedule was too intensive:

> *"There was a certain learning curve that is hard to absorb, especially after a concussion… that game, especially when everyone in the room is all talking loudly at the same time, discussing, debating—it's too much… I had to leave the game because the load was excessive" [FG2_V, 1369–1376].*

Analysis of responses also highlighted the **difficulty of combining the in-person training with the everyday commitments of some participants.** For entrepreneurs and parents managing childcare alone, the two-week mandatory in-person presence frequently created difficulties in managing their businesses and fulfilling domestic responsibilities.

Analysis of the PIN team's self-questionnaire data elaborates on this. When asked about significant systemic factors impeding participation, most respondents indicated that no such factors had been identified. At the same time, **a number of factors that in specific cases complicated participation were recorded during implementation. These included: occasionally inconvenient event scheduling, the psychological state of some participants (specifically, difficulties with open interaction in group formats), and limited awareness among some team members of barriers relevant to participants at the initial stage of engagement.**

Among the reasons for participants not completing the programme, the following were cited most frequently (in descending order of frequency):

1. Return to military service.
2. Absence of, or untimely submission of, required documents.
3. Psychological state.
4. Deterioration of health.
5. Incompatibility of the programme schedule with other commitments.

It is important to note that **participant dropout was not connected to dissatisfaction with the content or quality of the programme.** This provides grounds for concluding that the primary causes of non-completion were attributable predominantly to external or individual circumstances rather than to shortcomings in the programme itself.

It is worth separately emphasising that return to military service as a reason for leaving the programme is a specific contextual risk arising from wartime conditions. Programme organisers have no influence on this matter.

In response to this need, a clinical psychotherapist was additionally engaged to conduct a relevant training session during programme implementation.

> *"The team was somewhat unprepared—how to react, how to behave, what you can say at that moment when a person starts to have a breakdown" [EI3, 249–250].*

3.6.2 Macroeconomic and security challenges

A broad spectrum of macro-level risks lies beyond programme control:

1. **The energy crisis** became a significant external factor destabilising the operational implementation of the programme:

> *"The situation with power outages [is crucial], because all my machines run on electricity. They consume vast quantities of power—ordinary generators can't handle them. And buying a large generator isn't economically viable, and there's no money for it anyway" [IDI7_V, 108–110].*

> *"Power outages, mobilisation of employees, inflation… if you work in food products, the risks are very high, because goods spoil and people incur losses" [EI10, 515–521].*

2. Regulatory instability is recorded as a separate disruptive factor. Sudden changes in tax authority guidance, or alterations to tax conditions mid-reporting year, undermine entrepreneurs' overall planning capacity:

> *"With the current volume of changes to the tax code that need to be tracked—it's actually quite difficult to keep up" [FG1_V, 218–219].*

3. A separate external risk relates to **social stigmatisation of veterans.** Entrepreneurs who position their business as veteran-owned or connected to the veteran community may face wariness or distance from some civilian clients who consciously avoid engaging with the veteran context:

> *"Civilians don't want to adapt to reality. It's not veterans who need to adapt—it's civilians… They're frightened by it: "oh God, it's about the war" [FG2_V, 229–230; 553].*

This is a structural constraint for certain business models that is not compensated by declared, but infrequently formal, public support.

3.6.3 Staff shortages as a specific risk for veteran businesses

In the context of veteran entrepreneurship, **the shortage of qualified labour is particularly acute.** This stems from the combination of two circumstances: **the physical limitations of some veteran entrepreneurs reduces their capacity to perform heavy work themselves, while hiring employees is complicated by many men's reluctance to take up official employment in the absence of a mobilisation deferment.** For micro-enterprises with a limited workforce, this means that the loss of even one employee can significantly disruptive or suspend operations:

> *"Men are generally afraid to go work because they don't have a deferment. Sole traders can't provide them with one, so they simply don't come to work. Some come*

> *for a day or two and then stop, and others are taken by the military recruitment office" [EI10, 517–519].*

In parallel, **the problem of "invisible" mental injuries**—in both potential employees and entrepreneurs themselves—is recorded:

> *"It's like that iceberg: physically there's nothing visibly wrong with him, but under the surface it's 90% problems with memory, emotions, and relationships. Very serious problems that need to be resolved" [FG2_V, 1653–1655].*

> *"[in addition to] PTSD, changes in the weather, like geomagnetic storms—put out of action for days or weeks as well. I simply can't leave the house. And that's also one of the key factors" [FG1_V, 237–238].*

Current state employment support programmes are oriented primarily towards adapting workplaces to physical limitations, while **the cognitive and psycho-emotional consequences of PTSD and blast injuries remain largely outside the scope of such support.** Consequently, entrepreneurs who are prepared to employ fellow veterans with mental injuries often lack access to adequate systemic support for such integration.

3.6.4 Institutional sustainability risks

The key structural barrier of the programme is **the absence of post-grant follow-up support precisely at the moment when its practical need is highest:**

> *You've been given grant support, you've set up your business, and from that point you're completely on your own to fight it out… Very often, you encounter problems that are difficult or sometimes even impossible to resolve alone—or without support" [FG2_V, 1019–1022].*

> *"My brothers-in-arms who were on that programme before me, in many cases, they have unfortunately already closed their business because they had no further support. They burned out… Having some kind of mentoring support, or additional funding for scaling, or business support, would have been made a difference" [FG2_V, 1024–1029].*

These observations align with the project team's own perspective. Responses indicate: "it is important to ensure mentoring support at the stage of implementing business ideas, since it is precisely during this period that participants face the greatest number of challenges" [R5].

Analysis of responses allows for the identification of **a more systemic demand for strengthened support, articulated through specific activities**. Participants and experts named the following examples:

- **Sector-specific mentoring in cohorts grouped by business type** (e.g. food production, services, manufacturing), with successful alumni becoming mentors*;*

- **Booster grants** for participants who have completed the first year of operation, enabling scaling rather than launch;
- **Public procurement workshops** with practical preparation for ProZorro[4] tenders and B2G contracting;
- **Veteran business incubators or clusters** offering subsidised premises and shared services;
- **Preferential municipal rent for businesses** operated by programme alumni;
- **Informal networking formats**—outdoor retreats, sector-themed forums, B2B exchange events with a unified catalogue of veteran goods and services;
- **Targeted legal and tax accompaniment** to address the regulatory volatility flagged by participants throughout this report.

Respondents in self-completed questionnaires point to the need to broaden support beyond funding to include facilitation of access to sales markets, partnership networks, and professional communities [R4].

A further limitation visible in the responses is **the absence within the programme of a re-entry mechanism for participants who have already completed the foundational phase and need further support in scaling their enterprise.** In its current form, the programme is perceived more as a single-stage intervention than as an instrument for longer-term business development accompaniment.

Analysis of responses regarding selection criteria also reveals low awareness of how PIN and LCC criteria were applied. Respondents drew attention to what they perceived as the role of gender and age in the scoring system [R5], as well as cases where family members of veterans—specifically daughters or wives—scored higher than the veterans themselves [R1]. This points to unresolved tensions in the logic of prioritisation across different participant categories. While the complex selection criteria were designed to be fair and inclusive, there is a clear need for even more transparency and information-sharing on how exactly these are applied—both among the project team and with participants.

A separate concern raised was the insufficient consideration of the situation of wives of fallen servicemen—specifically, the loss of the family's sole provider [R6]. In responses, people in this situation emerge as one of the most economically vulnerable groups. In the view of some participants, the needs of this group, should be more clearly reflected in assessment and selection approaches.

[4] ProZorro is an electronic public procurement system, available as an online platform, where state and municipal customers announce tenders that service providers can apply for

A derivative of the post-grant gap is **the risk of the community formed beginning to dissolve—a "fading effect":**

> *"After a year, if there is no communication, teams fall apart…*
> *The warmth in hearts fades when you don't see each other. Only memory lives on" [EI5, 532–535].*

The network that emerged during training needs support to remain functional. The dissolution of the community deprives veterans of B2B contacts and of a critically important environment for mutual psychological support. As the same expert aptly formulates it:

> *"This is not simply an economic project. It is not simply about capacity. It is about community interaction. It is about strengthening social bonds within a community" [EI5, 546–547].*

3.7 Prospects for Scaling the Programme Model

The programme was implemented in Lviv as a partnership project with a clearly defined geographical focus. However, throughout the fieldwork phase, requests that extend well beyond a single city emerged consistently from all stakeholder groups. The question "what should be done next?"—in the responses of veterans, family members, and experts—invariably moved into the territory of **how this local experience might be transformed into a broader practice.** This section consolidates the perspectives on the programme's development prospects expressed by representatives of the various groups, and identifies the emphases they share.

3.7.1 Veterans' perspective

Analysis of veterans' responses identifies several key requests for the further development of the programme, formed on the basis of the first years' experience following grant receipt.

1. Their central argument is **the need to transition from a one-off funding model to a system of modular accompaniment.** As a response to this gap, veterans propose introducing a second round—provision of booster grants to support initiatives that have already demonstrated their viability:

> *"Why look for someone new to give a second grant to, when you can pick people from our team so that someone receives a repeat grant and [further] develops the same business—so that People in Need can see that their help has doubled, tripled" [FG1_V, 737–740].*

> *"If the programme offered a second chance to participate… It was so good I'd want to do it again" [IDI6_V, 234–239].*

Oksana Dubyk, participant of the "Courage to Business" programme, Porshna village, Lviv Oblast

2. The second fundamental request is for **structural access to sales markets.** The legislative quota of 5–6% for veteran businesses in public procurement is considered a good instrument, but one not yet functioning in practice. What veterans need is not so much new grants as guaranteed orders:

"This is better than money. Give us something to earn from, give us work so we can receive orders for production directly from the state" [FG1_V, 823–825].

3. At the level of programme design, veterans identified **three specific directions for improvement:**

- Sector-specific mentoring: *"If you could gather mentors across several categories… one bakes and sells bread and another makes and sells pasta… find someone who has already been through the programme, who has a similar business… it's easier for newcomers" [IDI2_V, 121–129].*
- Differentiation of grants: increasing amounts for those starting from scratch.
- Testing of business ideas before the training begins, to assess the viability of a concept in advance.

4. Veterans' responses reflect a demand **for psychosocial support formats that are embedded in the interaction environments familiar to them and do not require a separate approach to psychological services.**

> *"What if instead of two days of training you did an offsite event… in nature, in a camping format? Where there's some structured activity, but there's also the opportunity to talk informally. People would sign up for something like that more readily than for going to see a psychologist… Don't do it the way civilians have written it up, but do it the way it automatically works for veterans" [FG2_V, 1730–1745].*

3.7.2 Family members' perspective

All family members interviewed were women, and therefore view the prospects for programme development through the specific lens of their experience—the combination of entrepreneurship, parenthood, and waiting for a husband to return from the front.

1. Flexible participation conditions and a hybrid format. This is the key request from this audience. The PIN team's responses are consonant with this: it is noted that the programme should "provide for flexible conditions of participation, taking into account varying levels of experience, psychological state, and participants' schedules."

2. Integration into the market. This stage is described by women as the primary post-programme challenge:

> *"Expert support is always needed… getting to know people, or those in the same field as me who received a grant, opened their business, or are continuing" [IDI8_FM, 222–227].*

3. Tax and legal certainty. Responses also reflect a demand for clearer information at the start of the programme, particularly regarding tax obligations associated with grant support, to avoid unexpected financial burdens after winning the competition:

> *"I would want the contract to be clearer, so that an accountant could somehow protect us entrepreneurs in dealings with the tax authorities" [IDI3_FM, 225–227].*

3.7.3 Expert and team perspective

External experts and the PIN team approached scaling in structural terms. Their consensus on the conditions for replicating the model rests on four essential components.

- First, **functional political will on the part of local government:** "*If a local self-government body doesn't want to do it, then we shouldn't help those who don't want it… we'll throw money away, and it will end immediately and simply disappear" [EI5, 491–493].*
- Second, **co-financing from the local budget** as an unequivocal indicator of community interest.
- Third, **a dedicated institutional resource**—a centre or department for which veteran support is a priority.
- Fourth, **an empathic and prepared team:** *"A veteran cannot be treated like a machine… Be careful with the staff… Humanity above all" [EI1, 362–368].*

Key barriers to project scaling (as assessed by experts):

1. **Limited financial capacity of smaller communities:** absence of resources for co-financing grants without dedicated state subventions.

2. **Information and motivational crisis:** veteran apathy is greatest in smaller towns with weak information infrastructure (difficulties with motivation and awareness of opportunities are substantially greater there than in a city like Lviv).

3. **Risk of imitation:** formal replication of the model in other regions without genuine institutional commitment.

Expert proposals for the architecture of a second programme wave:

1. **Introduction of preferential municipal rent for businesses** of programme participants.

2. **Creation of veteran business incubators** *("I would create incubators that would give people the opportunity to use various services on preferential terms" [EI4, 376–377]).*

3. **Genuine quota** allocation for veteran enterprises in the municipal public procurement system.

4. **Institutionalisation of mentoring,** where veterans with successful entrepreneurial experience take on the role of mentors and guides.

The PIN team sees **engagement of Business Support Centres in cities of up to 100,000 people** as the optimal path for scaling up**:**

> *"We take the experience of the Lviv community [as an example], allocate a grant, so that they [Business Support Centres] train communities in smaller towns… smaller places receive a polished, refined programme that would have been difficult for them to implement on their own" [EI5, 466–470].*

For scaling purposes, it is also worth conducting *"an analysis of the successes and failures of those cases we have supported, so as to possibly adjust certain business directions" [EI9, 160–161].*

According to PIN team responses, strategic priorities for future programme iterations are detailed across the following directions:

- **Geographic and institutional expansion:** dissemination of successful experience to other regions and advocacy for the involvement of government bodies at various levels.
- **Model scaling:** scaling up of the project for other cities with mentoring support from the LCC Business Support Centre.
- **Promotion and networking:** creation of shared platforms or catalogues of veteran businesses and their promotion through fairs and festivals.

- **Information support:** coverage of veterans' success stories in the media.
- **Educational focus:** investment in training participants in marketing, branding, and sales.

3.7.4 Points of convergence among key stakeholders

Triangulation of the positions of all three groups reveals a zone of consensus; this constitutes the most reliable compass for future decisions.

Representatives of all groups articulate **the need for more sustained support that is not limited to one-off grant provision.** Analysis of responses provides grounds for concluding that the absence of post-grant follow-up support is perceived as a limitation of the current model, particularly given the need for more durable consolidation of results.

Stakeholder response analysis identifies two main directions for possible programme scaling:

- The first relates to **deepening support for those who have already completed the programme,** through booster grants, development of opportunities for additional interaction between participants, and mentoring accompaniment.
- The second concerns **expanding implementation of this model in new cities and communities.**

The first direction emerges in responses as more urgent and less resource-intensive, while the second is viewed as strategically more significant but considerably more dependent on the institutional capacity of the communities in which such a model is to be deployed. The need for broader programme reach is clearly articulated:

> *"More projects like this are needed. Other regions need to be brought in, because veterans exist everywhere" [EI1, 433–434].*

In summary, analysis of responses from all groups speaks of a systemic gap between the training and grant phase and participants' subsequent entry into the market. In a situation where the sales of veteran products depend largely on personal connections, chance opportunities, or situational solidarity-based support rather than on institutionalised mechanisms—including in the B2G sphere—the potential of such programmes is inevitably narrowed. Accordingly, **scaling this model is connected not only to expanding financial support, but to creating a more enabling economic environment for the systemic integration of veteran entrepreneurs.**

3.8 Addressing Evidence Gaps

3.8.1 Typology of business ideas and sectors proposed by participants

Classification of 83 business descriptions drawn from open-ended responses in the endline survey enables construction of a quantitative sectoral profile of the programme:

1. **The largest share comprises diverse uncategorised services** — approximately 29% of participants (24 businesses): cleaning, photography, event services, IT support, automated services (water dispensers, dry-cleaning machines), child development, and others.

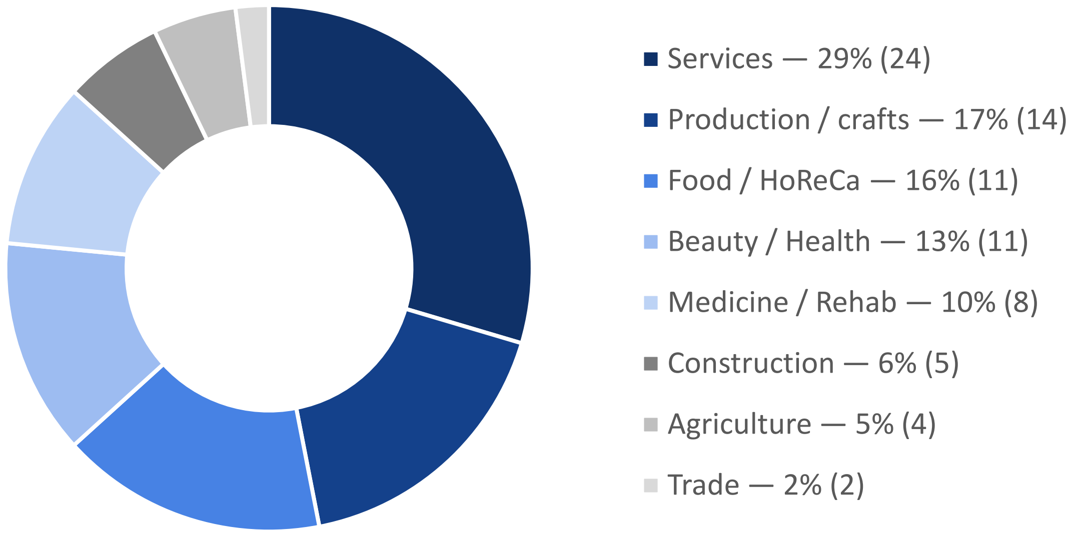
2. The second largest group is **production and crafts**: 17% (14 businesses), including stone processing, laser welding, woodworking, garment production, ceramics, and jewellery.

3. **Food industry and HoReCa** accounts for 16% (13 businesses): ranging from coffee roasting and bakeries to chocolatiers and cheese production.

4. **Beauty and health** — 13% (11 businesses): cosmetology, permanent makeup, podology, hairdressing, and pressotherapy.

5. **Medicine and rehabilitation** — 10% (8 businesses): from dental microscopes and ultrasound equipment to rehabilitation centres with VR technology.

6. **Construction and repair** — 6% (5 businesses), agriculture — 5% (4 businesses: tractors, farm, apiaries, specialised equipment for pond cleaning), trade — 2% (2 businesses), and transport — 2% (2 businesses).



Analysis of endline survey data on participants' motivations for sector selection corroborates this structure: **58 of 83 participants indicated "personal interest in this topic or field" as a factor in their choice, and 57 indicated "already had the necessary skills or experience." Only 7 respondents indicated they had chosen their field due to low start-up costs, and 17 due to high demand in their region.** This indicates that the dominant strategy is monetisation of existing competencies rather than identification of the most advantageous market niches.

The **evolution of business ideas during the training period was a characteristic trend**:

> *"Participants came to the training—this applies to startups—with one idea, and then after completing the training and communicating with those in the group who already had a business, shifted their ideas somewhat, they replanned things." [EI3, 219–222].*

One participant **described their experience**:

> *"If at the beginning I had thought more carefully—there was this hype, a trend around self-service coffee machines. But as I was studying, going through the training, I realised that wasn't the right fit, and the idea of water dispensers emerged instead" [FGD2_V, 158–160].*

Regarding **the duration of business operation** by sector: qualitative data analysis records **heightened vulnerability within certain niches**:

> *"Among the businesses that are closing, I was curious which ones specifically. Predominantly it's HoReCa businesses and spaces—coworking, hairdressers, small cafés. They won't be able to compete for very long" [FGD2_V, 1088–1091].*

> *"Why would civilians go to a veteran-run business in large numbers? Well, let's think about it—why would people go to a tiny craft clothing shop when right next door there's Aviatsiia Halychyny, Rezerv, Sinsay, and cheap Chinese imports? The veteran's prices will be higher" [FGD2_V, 1118–1122].*

A distinct cluster comprises **socially oriented businesses**—veteran spaces combining rehabilitation, psychological support, and networking. **Their business model differs fundamentally from the rest: it integrates commercial and social components, and sustainability depends on municipal compensation schemes:**

> *"The city does reimburse us quite significant amounts, and quite a few veterans use these services" [FGD2_V, 139–141], while acknowledging: "this is too small a footfall for a business to sustain itself with such clientele" [FGD2_V, 1117–1118].*

The specific risk to this cluster lies in its **complete dependence on the political will of the city council to maintain compensation payments**. Should priorities shift or budgets be reduced, **these businesses lose their primary revenue source**.

3.8.2 Key barriers to entry into entrepreneurship

Triangulation of data identifies **five systemic barriers preventing veterans and their family members from initiating entrepreneurial activity**. The barriers are presented in their causal sequence: the first constitutes a precondition for the emergence of the remainder.

It should be noted that these barriers are described from the perspective of those who already participated in the programme—that is, people who overcame them. The study does not include interviews with potential participants who applied but were not selected, or who did not apply at all. The actual landscape of barriers may be broader and may include factors that proved insurmountable for those who remained outside the programme.

1. Psycho-emotional state as the primary barrier.
PTSD, apathy, and post-demobilisation depression radically reduce the capacity for proactive planning. Participants describe **extended periods of inactivity** during which any decision felt overwhelming. **For women—wives of active-duty servicemen—the barrier takes the form of chronic uncertainty and emotional exhaustion** that leaves minimal resources for new undertakings.

2. Deficit of start-up capital.
According to participants, **the grant covers on average less than half of actual needs, while access to bank lending for veterans and internally displaced persons remains severely constrained.** Veterans without combat pay or personal savings are effectively excluded from the programme.

3. Information vacuum and motivational crisis.
Experts note that **in smaller towns a substantial proportion of veterans are unaware of available support programmes**, and the motivational barrier is considerably higher than in Lviv. **Some potential participants did not apply due to a conviction that state assistance is inaccessible without prior informal arrangements**.

4. Regulatory uncertainty.
Instability in tax legislation, the risk of losing IDP status upon receiving a grant, and the absence of mobilisation deferment for employees of sole trader enterprises **create a zone of legal risk that deters prospective entrepreneurs.**

5. Stigmatisation and cultural barriers.
For male veterans, **seeking any form of assistance**—including business support—**may be interpreted as an admission of weakness.** Civil society is also not always prepared for interaction: some clients consciously avoid veteran-branded contexts.

At the same time, stigmatisation as a barrier requires differentiation: data analysis indicates that **it constitutes a genuine obstacle at the point of entry, but is partially overcome in the course of participation:**

> *" They were a little prejudiced—veterans, and family members alike, had poor experiences with psychologists, and they spoke openly about, saying they were somewhat sceptical… but their view changed over the two days of our work". And afterwards they would come for individual sessions as well" [EI2, 52–57].*

Stigmatisation is a barrier primarily for initial engagement rather than for retention of participants, and programme design should focus on soft-entry strategies.

3.8.3 Relevant forms of support for individuals not planning to start a business

By design, Courage to Business is oriented towards those who are ready for entrepreneurial activity. At the same time, qualitative data analysis records that **a portion of veterans and family members are at a stage where entrepreneurship is not a priority or realistic scenario.** This cohort can only be approximately delineated using available data: of the more than 150 individuals who completed the training, 100 received grant support; the subsequent trajectories of the remaining 50+ participants who completed the training component without receiving a grant are not tracked in the monitoring dataset. Furthermore, it is **unknown how many veterans who learned of the programme did not apply due to an unreadiness for entrepreneurship.**

The study identified a need for **four types of support for individuals for whom entrepreneurship irrelevant.**

1. Psychological stabilisation as a prerequisite for any form of employment.

Experts emphasise that **veterans with severe combat trauma require medical and psychotherapeutic assistance first, and only thereafter become capable of planning economic activity**. One expert who had studied post-war experience in Bosnia Herzegovina made direct reference to this precedent:

> *"Thirty years of experience showed that Bosnia made a serious mistake when the conflict ended. They provided veterans with high pensions but did not give them socialisation programmes. As a result, rates of drug use, suicide, and alcoholism sharply increased, because people had been cast out of society" [EI4, 100–103].*

This experience constitutes an argument in favour of **employment and socialisation programmes that precede or accompany financial support rather than substitute it.**

2. Socialisation and community.

Veteran spaces, informal gatherings, and outdoor events perform a critically important function in overcoming isolation. Such soft points of entry are more effective than direct referral to a psychologist.

3. Professional retraining and employment facilitation.

Not all veterans have entrepreneurial potential or inclination. For this group, **relevant forms of support include upgrading skills, certification, and employment assistance that considers cognitive and physical limitations.**

4. Legal and administrative navigation assistance.

Navigating entitlements, medical commissions, and Medical And Social Expert Commission (MSEC) documentation **procedures constitute a distinct barrier that requires a dedicated service—a one-stop-shop for veterans.**

It must be acknowledged that the **institutional capacity to deliver these four types of support in Ukraine at the time of the study is limited.** Employment centres and rehabilitation facilities are overstretched; one-stop-shop systems for veterans exist only in select communities; and coordination between different service providers is fragmented. **Accordingly, a referral mechanism capable of directing participants towards alternative services requires programmatic intent and a prior mapping of genuinely operational services within a given community.** Without such mapping, referral risks becoming an irrelevant redirection.

3.8.4 Adaptability of programme design to the needs of different sub-groups

Assessment of the adaptability of programme design to the evolving needs of different sub-groups reveals both strengths and structural limitations.

Regarding adaptation practices: **training groups were formed on the basis of chronological order of registration, without prior differentiation by participant status or level of experience**:

> *"The groups were formed according to who had registered for those dates—we did not separate them into startups and existing businesses. Why not? As recommended by the Business Support Centre... because participants find the networking and experience exchange very valuable" [EI3, 210–214].*

Group heterogeneity was therefore not so much a planned methodological decision as a consciously accepted compromise that proved advantageous over the course of implementation. The modular approach to psychosocial support—embedding psychological components within a business context—made it possible to circumvent stigmatisation. The programme demonstrated operational flexibility. A total of at least **five documented adaptation decisions were made by the team during implementation:**

1. The removal of an overly stress-inducing group game following feedback from veterans with concussions: *"This game—especially when everyone in the room is talking loudly at the same time, discussing, debating—is too much... this game was removed for subsequent cohorts. I have to give credit where it's due—all adjustments are incorporated into the learning process as they arise." [FGD2_V, 1372–1378].*

2. The addition of a public speaking module, which had been absent from the first iteration, prior to business plan presentations: *"In the first iteration, public speaking was not included in the curriculum. There is a pitching component, and many veterans were not prepared for it, so this was added to the training component" [EI8, 87–89].*

3. The organisation of application assistance consultation points after it became apparent that participants were unclear on how to complete the documentation: *"When we realised this, we organised sessions at the location where they were undergoing training... by request, our programme specialists were there at specific times and helped them" [EI3, 196–199].*

4. Emergency training of the team in trauma-informed practice after specialists encountered acute emotional reactions among participants: *"The team was somewhat unprepared in how to react and behave, and what can be said in that moment when a person starts to break down" [EI3, 249–250].*

5. Flexible attendance arrangements for participants undergoing rehabilitation: *"If we know that a person was in rehabilitation, they could attend for half a day and then ask to leave for their session. We hadn't anticipated this, but it happened" [EI1, 141–143].*

At the same time, as noted in expert self-administered survey responses, **no questionnaire contained a reference to a structured log of adjustments. The programme displays characteristics of adaptive management, but without a formalised mechanism for recording changes.**

Regarding the limits of adaptability:

First, **the programme design did not provide for differentiation based on the severity of participants' conditions**. Veterans with blast injuries and concussions received the same intensive two-week format as other participants, despite the fact that sensory overload represented a critical barrier for this group.

Second, **women with significant care burdens had no flexible alternatives to the rigid in-person schedule.**

Third, **recently demobilised veterans who are still in the process of psychological stabilisation require a different pace of programme entry** than those who demobilised a year or more ago.

Overall, **the programme demonstrated considerable adaptability**—rapid adjustment based on feedback—**but limited proactive adaptability, given the absence of differentiated tracks for distinct sub-groups at the design stage**.

3.8.5 The role of state policy and national financial mechanisms in scaling the model

Analysis of the positions of experts, LCC representatives, and the PIN team **identifies several priority directions through which state policy can support the scaling of integrated veteran entrepreneurship support models.**

First — targeted state subventions for smaller communities.

The primary barrier to scaling is that the majority of communities lack the financial capacity to provide grant co-financing. **Without state transfers, the model will remain the exclusive domain of large cities with developed fiscal bases.**

Second — functional implementation of veteran business quotas in public procurement.

The legislatively established **quota of 5–6% for veteran businesses in public procurement was non-operational at the time of the study**. Participants and experts consistently identified **access to the B2G market as a more effective instrument than repeat grant funding**.

According to participants, the quota's non-functionality has two causes.

- On the one hand, **veteran micro-enterprises frequently lack the administrative capacity to participate in formal tendering procedures**—no experience with ProZorro, insufficient skills in preparing tender documentation.
- On the other hand, **local-level procurers are not always aware of the quota's existence or have no incentives to comply with it**.

Practical steps to activating the quota would include incorporating a module on tendering documentation into the programme's training component, and establishing communication channels between programme graduates and city council procurement departments.

Third — mobilisation deferment for employees of veteran-owned sole trader enterprises.

The absence of such a mechanism **paralyzes recruitment; it represents the most immediate threat to micro-business survival**. Legislative resolution of this issue is a **prerequisite for the growth of veteran enterprises.**

Fourth — stabilisation of the regulatory environment.

The precedent involving the taxation of grants—18% personal income tax, 5% military levy, and loss of IDP payments—demonstrated how **a sudden shift in tax interpretations can nullify the effect of an entire programme. A clear legal framework, that would preclude retroactive taxation of international grants received by veterans, is needed.**

Fifth — institutionalisation of the model through the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs.

Experts note that the **Ministry of Veterans' Affairs does not fulfil a systemic function in supporting veteran entrepreneurship.** Development of a national framework model based on the Lviv experience—with provision for local adaptation—could enable scaling without the risk of formal imitation**.** At the same time, **top-down imposition of the model without genuine institutional will at the local level would result in its distortion.** The study unambiguously records that success requires the convergence of three conditions: political will on the part of local authorities, genuine co-financing, and a prepared implementation team.

It should be acknowledged that **the policy recommendations in this section are formulated on the basis of positions expressed by local-level stakeholders**—veterans, LCC representatives, and the PIN team—and are not supported by analysis of the current status of relevant legislative drafts or budgetary mechanisms. They should be understood not as a ready-made advocacy plan, but as an evidence-grounded framework of priorities that requires further elaboration.

Certificate ceremony for winners of the "Courage to Business" programme, Lviv © People in Need Ukraine

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions by Programme Dimensions

4.1.1 Economic dimensions

The economic component of the programme demonstrates the most thoroughly documented results. **Financial transparency was confirmed by 100% of grantees surveyed:** none of the 83 participants recorded discrepancies between the promised and disbursed amounts, and none reported corruption-related indications or informal demands. For a veteran audience that often came with deep scepticism toward institutional authority, this outcome represented a genuine disruption of expectations and a step toward rebuilding trust.

Quantitative indicators reflect tangible economic activity: **67% of participants generated revenue in the month preceding the survey, and 93% of those directly attributed that income to the grant received.** These figures should be interpreted in context: some businesses were at startup stage where revenue is still being established. Among those who reported no income in the previous month, 12 participants confidently anticipated revenue in the current one—adjusting the overall picture toward an even higher level of actual activity.

The broader economic effect of the programme extends well beyond the success of individual entrepreneurs. **78% of participants reported improved household economic stability, and 72% noted positive changes in family employment** (job creation, involvement of relatives in the business). Qualitative data confirms this multiplier effect: wives build businesses as platforms for the future return of their veteran husbands to civilian life; veterans hire fellow servicemembers; the enterprise becomes a family project. Consequently, the effect of a single grant is considerably broader than direct-beneficiary statistics suggest.

At the same time, **the most significant vulnerability of the economic dimension remains structural underfunding.** According to qualitative data, **on average, the grant covered approximately 30% of actual startup costs,** functioning as a catalyst rather than a self-sufficient resource. 24% of participants indicated that their needs were not fully met—though the primary cause was most often macroeconomic factors rather than grant size. **The time gap between application submission and disbursement was 1.5–2 months:** over this period, inflation and equipment price fluctuations significantly eroded participants' original financial projections.

4.1.2 Educational dimensions

The educational components received the highest ratings of all project activities. Here, changes are verified not solely through subjective self-assessment (N=78) but also through paired pre/post-test questionnaires of social component (psychosocial tools) training participants (N=84/70), making this analytically the most robust.

80% of entrepreneurial training participants (62 out of 78) rated the training's usefulness at the maximum score, and 90% rated the relevance of the content highly. Confidence in their own business grew significantly among 82% of respondents. This indicator is critically important for the selected audience. For people who had long operated within the strictly regulated military environment, returning to the role of an independent market actor requires overcoming deep internal uncertainty.

Paired questionnaires document concrete cognitive shifts among social component training participants. Understanding of emotional intelligence—measured through the ability to "control one's own emotions"—increased from 64% to 84%. After the training, "difficult to answer" responses regarding the nature of conflict disappeared entirely, with participants confidently identifying it as a "conflict of interest" (rising from 76% to 94%). The expansion of the leadership repertoire toward "soft" management styles (from 56% to 79%) represents a behavioural shift, not merely a rhetorical one. Following the training, **participants fluently applied practical tools,** demonstrating that the material was absorbed at the level of applied competence rather than declarative knowledge alone.

The central educational outcome—independently documented across all qualitative data sets—**was the transition from intuitive to structured business practice.** Participants describe this as gaining a "framework for understanding": they were given not just new information, but an analytical lens for systematically interpreting their own activity. A parallel effect was **the rigorous grounding of business ideas in market reality:** based on the training, some participants adjusted their initial plans, replacing emotionally driven aspirations with market-tested models. This shift from illusion to realism is one of the educational component's most significant achievements.

That said, **one unmet need remains:** in-depth marketing. This topic was simultaneously the most popular (38 votes) and the area where participants, in their open-ended responses, most frequently requested continuation and deeper training.

4.1.3 Psychosocial dimensions

Among the 83 grantees surveyed, **76% reported improved overall well-being, 84% reported improved self-esteem, and 73% noted positive changes in intra-family communication. This points to a positive unintended consequence of the psychosocial training and the project overall.**

Comparison with the responses of veterans' family members (N=19), who participated exclusively in psychosocial training with no grant or business training component was a particularly important reference point for evaluating this dimension. In this group, 79% reported improvements in well-being and 79% in family communication. Strikingly, **89% of participants in this group believe the programme addressed the business needs of their household.** This figure is the most compelling evidence of the psychosocial training component's standalone value: through the chain of "psychological stability → better communication → greater productivity → new clients," the training generates real economic effects even without direct financial intervention.

The stigmatisation of psychological support within the veteran community is a persistent barrier. The project team worked around this by "repackaging" social/psychosocial training in a business context (leadership, personnel management, stress resilience). An additional obstacle for some participants from combat units was an intractable structural constraint: **classified status legally prevents open communication with civilian psychologists.** No grant programme design can resolve this issue within the existing legal framework. This may explain, in part, why very few of the project participants requested the individual psychosocial support that was available through the project.

4.1.3 Evidence gaps

The analysis of evidence gaps allows us to formulate **three key conclusions and two limitations**.

1. The sectoral profile of businesses is diverse but structurally uneven: a quarter of participants work in the services sector, one in six in manufacturing, and one in six in the food industry. **The choice of sectors is mainly driven by existing competencies (57 out of 83) and personal interest (58 out of 83), rather than market demand. This means that training should focus not on generating ideas, but on market validation of existing ones.** Although the programme already, partially, does this, it could be done more systematically.

2. There are cause-and-effect barriers to individual entry into entrepreneurship: **psycho-emotional states block the ability to plan, information vacuums prevent learning about opportunities, lack of capital makes it impossible to start, regulatory instability undermines calculations, stigmatisation makes it difficult to seek help**. This sequence has direct implications for the design of the programme: the psychosocial component logically conveys, rather than accompanies, business training.

3. The programme demonstrated **significant adaptability, but did proactively differentiate tracks for vulnerable subgroups**. This is not an assessment of quality—for the first iteration of the programme, a reactive approach is normal. However, for subsequent iterations, the accumulated experience allows us to move to proactive planning.

Remaining gaps:

1. Regarding support for individuals who do not plan a business: the study describes the types of support needed, but cannot assess their feasibility, since institutional mapping of existing services for veterans in Ukraine is beyond the scope of this assessment.

2. Regarding the role of public policy: the study captures stakeholder preferences but does not include an analysis of the current state of relevant legislative initiatives or budgetary mechanisms.

4.2 General Conclusions

Conclusion 1. **The findings provide grounds to regard the integrated support model as a key condition for programme effectiveness.**

Synergy among the grant, educational, and psychosocial components was independently noted by three groups of respondents: 77% of grantees, 79% of veterans' family members, and 5 of 6 PIN team representatives. **This is significant not only as a quantitative indicator of alignment, but as evidence that groups with different positions and experiences interpret the program's logic in a similar way.** The qualitative phase shows that participants did not perceive these components as isolated services. Instead, they described them as an interconnected system in which each element's effectiveness was amplified by the presence of the others. Financial support without training did not provide sufficient market readiness; training without attention to the psycho-emotional state of some participants encountered internal barriers; and psychosocial training without material resources was often perceived as insufficiently practical. Thus, it was integration—not mere coexistence of components—that was one of the primary preconditions for programme effectiveness.

Conclusion 2. **The programme served an economic function but also as a factor facilitating return to civilian life.**

Qualitative data analysis provides grounds to conclude that for a significant portion of veterans, participation in the programme carried meaning that extended far beyond generating income or launching a business. Entrepreneurship emerges in responses as a form of recovering agency, regaining a sense of control over one's own life, and overcoming the disorientation that follows demobilisation. In this sense, the programme partially bridged the gap between the end of military service and genuine return to civilian life. Importantly, this effect was not reducible to any single component—it was produced by the combination of material resources, new competencies, a supportive environment, and inclusion in a network of relationships. The programme's significance should therefore be understood not only in terms of entrepreneurship support, but within the broader context of veterans' social and psychological return to civilian life.

Conclusion 3. **The programme's impact extended beyond its direct participants, producing effects at the family, community, and local environment levels.**

The findings provide grounds to speak of second-order effects that are not always captured by standard indicators, yet are materially significant for assessing actual impact. These include: **positive changes in family members' employment; improved intra-family interaction; formation of horizontal peer networks among participants; emergence of B2B interaction within the veteran community; and the use of entrepreneurial activity as a preparatory space for the return to civilian life of those still on active duty.** Additional effects include the legalisation of entrepreneurial activity and, in select cases, the incorporation of newly established businesses into the local taxbase. Notably, 84% of participants reported unexpected positive outcomes including new acquaintances, a sense of belonging, and ongoing support after the programme's conclusion. This suggests that the programme's actual impact was broader than the sum of its directly planned outcomes.

Conclusion 4. **The programme's high operational quality is a crucial precondition for effectiveness, but does not guarantee the sustainability of results.**

Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data indicates that the programme was implemented at a high operational level. Indicators of accountability, payment transparency, the absence of corruption, and minimal access difficulties point to a well-organised implementation process and a high level of participant trust. At the same time, these characteristics primarily describe the quality of programme management and do not automatically ensure the long-term sustainability of outcomes. The research shows that in the post-programme phase, participants face risks that cannot be overcome through quality administration alone: macroeconomic instability, regulatory uncertainty, staffing shortages, difficulties entering markets, and the absence of structured sales channels. This provides grounds to conclude that the further development of the support model should focus not on refining baseline implementation, but on building a post-grant support environment that continues to function after the core programme ends.

Conclusion 5. **The programme model has potential for replication in other communities, but its transfer requires attention to local preconditions.**

The data provides grounds to regard the Lviv experience a case of the successful implementation of an integrated veteran entrepreneurship support model. At the same time, findings indicate that this success was shaped by both the programme's internal logic, and a combination of important contextual conditions: a strategic partnership with a local government authority, genuine co-financing, a team prepared and sensitive to the audience, and an already-existing veteran community capable of interaction and self-organisation. The model should therefore be treated as one that can be reproduced—but not mechanically copied. Its transfer to other communities requires both the formal replication of tools, and the creation, or strengthening, of the institutional and social conditions under which this model can function effectively. In this sense, the Lviv experience is valuable not as a template for direct replication, but as an illustration of which preconditions are critically important for the successful adaptation of the programme to other contexts.

4.3 Recommendations for Future Programmes

The recommendations below are based on a combination of quantitative survey results and qualitative data obtained from participants, external experts, and PIN team members. Triangulation across these sources provides grounds to treat them as well-founded directions for further development of the programme model.

1. Strengthen the systemic integration of the psychosocial component throughout the full programme cycle.

The data indicates that psychosocial support should not remain an episodic or secondary element of interventions. Approximately 20% of grantees reported no change in three psychosocial indicators as a result of the psychosocial training, and the qualitative phase primarily links this to the high concentration individuals with severe trauma and loss experiences in this subgroup. In this context, the psychosocial component should be treated as a through-line element of the programme—from entry to completion—with clearly defined support touchpoints and the option to transition from a group format to individualised accompaniment for the most vulnerable participants.

2. Introduce structured post-grant mentorship support lasting at least 3–6 months.

The research findings provide grounds to view grant receipt not as the end of the process, but as the beginning of the highest-risk phase for a newly launched or restored business. Half of the PIN team members identified the lack of post-disbursement support as one of the key operational gaps. Quantitative data confirms that the main long-term risks—staffing difficulties, competition, and a shortage of clients—cannot be overcome through equipment purchases alone. Accordingly, a dedicated post-grant support phase should be established, focused on mentorship, market adaptation, and rapid-response support during the initial period of business operation.

3. Formation of peer-to-peer veteran business networks as a sustainable exit strategy following PIN support.

One promising approach is the institutionalisation of a peer-to-peer model that engages successful alumni from previous cohorts as paid mentors for new participants. Additionally, the creation of peer-to-peer support networks for veteran entrepreneurs will facilitate experience exchange, mentoring, and collaboration between veteran entrepreneurs and their families. Such a network can combine regular meetings to promote knowledge-sharing, market access and joint problem-solving. Over time, this could transition into a self-governing model that ensures long-term sustainability and the integration of new members.

4. Mandatory trauma-informed training for the entire team should be conducted before programme launch.

Qualitative data indicates that insufficient staff preparation for working with veterans and family members who have experienced traumatic events was one of the more visible challenges during implementation. Unpreparedness for acute emotional reactions from participants had to be compensated through emergency in-service training. This provides grounds to treat the trauma-informed approach not as a specialised competency for select staff, but as a baseline requirement for the entire project team. Completion of specialised trauma-informed interaction training before any contact with the audience should be mandatory.

5. More transparency is required regarding competitive selection criteria, how these are applied, and how they are sensitive to different types of vulnerability.

A need was identified for more detailed and transparent explanation of the application evaluation system. According to jury members, the perception of additional points for women created the view that male veterans were at a disadvantage relative to civilian female family members of veterans. Simultaneously, respondents were unaware that the system separately accounted for the situation of wives of fallen servicemembers. Accordingly, the principle of inclusivity should be retained, but the weight of points and the logic of support for different subgroups should be shared openly. If necessary, the scoring system should be revisited to ensure balance and fairness.

6. The time gap between application submission and receipt of funds must be reduced.

The data shows that the 1.5–2-month interval between business plan preparation and grant disbursement was one of the most challenging aspects for participants. Under conditions of inflation and price instability, this led to the obsolescence of initial financial projections and reduced the practical relevance of business plans by the time funds arrived. PIN team members also identified shortening this interval as one of the most important operational recommendations. Accordingly, the approval procedure between the two selection committees should be optimised, and the partial digitisation of document verification explored, to minimise time losses and preserve the relevance of financial planning. Alternatively, strict mechanisms can be incorporated into project implementation, by which adjustments to the grant amount are made if excessive time lapses occur.

7. The marketing component should be developed as a fully standalone, practically oriented module.

Although marketing and sales was the most popular topic among participants, it was precisely where the greatest demand for additional knowledge and practical skills persisted after the core course. The data suggests that the standard scope of the marketing training did not fully meet the needs of veteran micro-businesses, particularly regarding digital promotion and adaptation to specific sales channels. **Accordingly, this area should be strengthened and structured around at least two interconnected parts: a strategic component covering market analysis, positioning, and audience identification; and a tactical component covering digital marketing practice, low-budget SMM tools, and introductory preparation for engaging with public procurement platforms.**

8. A second programme tier should be developed as a modular support system following completion of the first cycle.

The one-time grant and foundational training enabled veterans to launch, but did not guarantee passage through the most challenging phase of business development in the first years of operation. Representatives of all groups indicated, in different ways, that without continued accompaniment, a significant share of launched businesses risk remaining highly vulnerable. A **second programme tier should therefore be viewed not as an optional add-on, but as a sequential continuation of the base support model.** Such a tier might include clear entry criteria—for example, completion of the first year of operation and transparent reporting—and offer instruments targeted at stabilisation and growth: subsidised municipal rental, business incubators or clusters, integration into local procurement mechanisms, and booster grants for scaling.

This support can extend to facilitating market links between grantees and available resources in the private or public sphere. These include business loans or grants, or identification and facilitating business partnerships between grantees and other businesses.

9. A monitoring system should be designed and digitised to capture synergies between programme components at the individual level, and post-grant follow up studies should be incorporated to assess the impact of the grants or remaining gaps for grantees.

Although the majority of PIN team members indicated the complementarity of programme components in their responses, this interaction was not fully operationalised using a monitoring system.

In the absence of tools capable of systemically tracking the connections between grant, educational, and psychosocial components at the level of the individual participant, synergy among them remains largely at the level of analytical observation and qualitative testimony. This in turn limits the capacity for more systematic evidence-based justification of the model's effectiveness to donors and partners.

A digital individual tracking tool should be introduced to enable monitoring of participation dynamics and progress across key dimensions at defined checkpoints: at programme entry, upon completion of training, upon grant receipt, and at 3 and 6 months after business launch. This would provide a basis for more systematic documentation of results, and the timely identification of gaps within individual support components and more targeted responses to them.

10. An initial diagnosis of participants' readiness should be introduced as a mandatory element of the registration procedure.

The study records that a single programme format does not provide an equal effect for all categories of participants: about 20% did not experience any tangible psychosocial changes, and veterans with acubarotrauma reported sensory overload from the intensive schedule. This suggests that the problem arises not as individual components, but in most of the differentiations at the outset because of a variety of participants with fundamentally different states of readiness support being offered an identical support format.

In addition, it is advisable to introduce a short initial diagnosis at the registration stage. This will determine the level of readiness of the participant and direct them to the appropriate track. Such tracks may include an intensive format for participants with a sufficient level of psycho-emotional stability, a modular one for those who need a flexible schedule, and a preparatory one with a preliminary course of psychological stabilisation for participants who are not yet ready for an entrepreneurial workload. Without such differentiation, the programme systematically underserves the most vulnerable subgroups, even if overall performance is high.

11. The two-week daily in-person training format should be transformed into a hybrid model while maintaining mandatory face-to-face sessions.

The intensive offline format is a major logistical barrier for women with children, participants with existing businesses, and veterans with physical disabilities. At the same time, qualitative data clearly captures the value of live communication: it is in the face-to-face format that networking occurs, trust is formed, and skills are practiced. These observations do not mention one thing, but rather indicate the need for a structural distinction between types of learning activities.

It is advisable to preserve the mandatory offline points—meeting points, mentoring sessions and business plan protection—as indispensable elements of the programme, while at the same time transferring lecture and information blocks to a hybrid format with the possibility of asynchronous passage. This could reduce barriers to participation without losing those components that generate the greatest social and educational effect.

12. A referral mechanism for participants for whom entrepreneurship is not a relevant scenario should be integrated into the entry diagnostic procedure—but only if the services that are actually available are previously reflected.

Qualitative data analysis records that some veterans, at the time of contact with the programme, enter a stage where self-employment is premature or unrealistic. Other forms of support are relevant for this cohort: psychological stabilisation, retraining and employment programmes, legal support in the benefits system. To ensure such support is effective, referrals must be to distinct specialists or service providers in specific communities.

Accordingly, before launching each new iteration of the programme, it is advisable to map functioning veteran services in the relevant community and integrate its results into the entry diagnostic procedure. This would allow the programme team to correctly direct participants, and to set realistic expectations regarding available alternatives even before the initial programmes.

13. Scaling models beyond Lviv requires targeted advocacy at the national level in four priority areas.

The success of programmes in Lviv is largely due to the convergence of local conditions: a developed budget base of the city, institutional readiness of the Municipal Executive Office, and the presence of a trained team. Reproducing this model in other communities without corresponding systemic changes at the national level is structurally impossible.

1It is advisable for the teams of implementers, together with local partners, to develop an advocacy strategy based on the data from this study, addressed to the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Social Policy and the Ministry of Veterans Affairs. The strategy should cover four interrelated areas: the implementation of the B2G quota for veteran enterprises—including a module on preparing tender documentation; stabilisation of grant taxation by excluding international grants for veterans from the personal income tax base; introduction of a reservation mechanism from the mobilisation of employees of veteran FOPs; and targeted subventions for small communities to co-finance grant programmes. Each of these areas is a necessary condition for a supported integrated model to function between the borders of large cities with a developed institutional base.

Participants of the "Courage to Business" programme, Lviv © People in Need Ukraine

Appendices

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full form
B2B	Business-to-Business
B2G	Business-to-Government (public procurement)
EI	Expert Interview
EI	Emotional Intelligence *(context-dependent; clear from usage)*
FG	Focus Group Interview
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IDI	In-Depth Interview
LCC	Lviv City Council
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PIN	People in Need
PSS	Psychosocial Support
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound *(goal-setting framework)*
SMM	Social Media Marketing
UAH	Ukrainian Hryvnia