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Social and Occupational Reintegration of Veterans After the End of the Military Career. Case study

part I

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Abstract

The end of the military career marks one of the most significant transitions in a military person's professional career, and the social and professional reintegration of veterans represents a priority area of military social work. The study analyzes this issue: on one hand, the Romanian legal framework, which regulates veteran's rights (in particular Law no.168/2020 regarding the recognition of the merits of personnel participating in missions, Law no 223/2015 regarding the state of the military pensions, along with the status of military personnel enshrined in Law no 80/1995 and Law no 384/2006, and on the other hand international academic papers regarding the transition from military to civilian life. Methodologically, the research combines documentary analysis of normative acts with a synthesis of specialized literature. The result highlights the fact that reintegration is simultaneously both a process and an outcome, being conditioned by individual, family, community and systematic factors. In conclusion, although the

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Romanian legal framework enshrines consistent rights of recognition and protection, it remains predominantly oriented toward compensations and less towards the transition process.
Keywords: military career, military-civilian transition, military social work, professional reconversion, social reintegration, veterans.

1. Introduction

The transition to reserve or retirement represents, for military personnel, much more than a change in administrative status – it represents a biographical rupture that simultaneously affects identity, the social relationship network, the daily structure of life, and the source of income. Unlike retirement from the civilian environment, the conclusion of a military career entails exiting a totalitarian institution, with its own deeply internalized culture, and re-entering a society whose codes seem foreign to someone who has spent years in uniform.

The scale of the phenomenon justifies the attention given to it by both public policies and academic research. International data show that annually, hundreds of thousands of service members leave active duty, and the first three years following retirement represent the critical period for reintegration into the civilian environment. Recent research documents that approximately a quarter of veterans report difficulties in readjusting to civilian life, a percentage that varies considerably depending on individual circumstances (exposure/participation in combat-conflicts and operational activities; marital status, education level, as well as the quality of support received).

In Romania, the issue of veterans gained increased normative visibility after the armed forces participated in international missions, especially in theaters of operations (TO) in Afghanistan and Iraq. The adoption of Law no. 168 of August 7, 2020, on recognizing the merits of personnel participating in military actions, missions, and operations on or outside the territory of the Romanian state and granting certain rights to them, their families, and the descendants of the deceased marked a moment of consolidating the framework for the recognition and protection of veterans from theaters of operations. However, the question remains open: to what extent does

this framework, alongside the military pension regime and statutory provisions, respond to the complex needs of social and professional reintegration beyond the compensatory dimension?

This study aims to examine this question by relating the Romanian legal framework to the academic framework regarding the transition from the military to the civilian environment. For the military social worker, the relevance of the topic is twofold: on the one hand, the veteran constitutes a beneficiary with special needs, irreducible to those of the general population of retirees or job seekers (their needs derive from the intersection of a strongly institutionalized professional identity, potential exposure to operational trauma, and an abrupt transition to an environment with different rules and habits). On the other hand, the way a state treats its veterans represents an indicator of the maturity of its social policies and respect for those who assumed the supreme risk in the service of the community.

Military social work thus finds itself in the position of mediating between the recognition due to service members / veterans and the effective support provided.

2. Conceptual Landmarks: The Veteran and Reintegration

The notion of veteran does not have a universal content, but varies according to the national normative framework. In Romanian law, Law no. 168/2020 confers the status of "veteran from theaters of operations" to personnel who have participated for at least 120 days, uninterrupted or accumulated, in military actions, missions, and operations in theaters of operations or mission areas, as well as to the wounded and those who have acquired physical or psychological conditions (regardless of the duration of participation). This definition links veteran status to participation in missions in theaters of operations, rather than simply the conclusion of a career, which circumscribes a subset of the former military population.

Reintegration, in turn, is a concept with a dual nature. Specialized research conceptualizes it simultaneously as a process unfolding during rehabilitation and as an outcome of the degree of social functioning achieved at the end of this journey. Reintegration comprises at least three interdependent dimensions: the social one (restoration of relationship networks and the sense of

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belonging), the professional one (conversion and labor market reintegration), and the identity one (renegotiation of the self after the conclusion of the military role).

In this context, Honcu (2026) emphasize "the need for periodic evaluation of policies and programs dedicated to veterans," stressing that these cannot remain static, as they must be adapted according to age, health status, or the socio-economic context of the beneficiaries.

A central theoretical landmark is the notion of loss of military identity. The meta-analytic synthesis conducted by Sayer et al. (2014) shows that enculturation (the transition from military to civilian culture) generates an identity loss insufficiently addressed by existing interventions, which are predominantly focused on treating physical or psychological disorders. This observation shifts the focus from the medical model of reintegration to a cultural and social model.

The distinction between the two models has important practical consequences. A strictly medical model conceives reintegration as a succession of therapeutic interventions aimed at correcting deficits (PTSD, depression, addiction). In contrast, a cultural and social model understands transition as a process of learning and renegotiating belonging, in which the veteran must reconstruct their relationship networks, re-translate their skills, and redefine their sense of self in the absence of the institutional framework that previously structured their existence. The two models are not mutually exclusive but complementary; successful reintegration entails both treating potential health consequences and providing support in enculturation.

3. Methodological Considerations

The research adopts a qualitative methodology, combining documentary analysis of primary legal sources with a narrative synthesis of specialized literature. Legal sources include: Law no. 168 of August 7, 2020, on recognizing the merits of personnel participating in military actions, missions, and operations on or outside the territory of the Romanian state and granting certain rights to them, their families, and the descendants of the deceased, along with its implementation norms approved by the order of the Minister of National Defense; Law no. 223 of July 24, 2015, on state military pensions; Law no. 80 of July 11, 1995, regarding the status of military cadres; and Law no. 384 of October 10, 2006, regarding the status of professional soldiers and corporals. Academic sources

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consist of empirical studies and syntheses published in peer-reviewed international journals, as well as reports from defense policy research institutes.

The analytical approach follows two axes: the first, descriptive-empirical, synthesizes the factors conditioning reintegration as documented by research. The second, legal and evaluative, examines to what extent the Romanian normative framework addresses these factors, making the distinction between recognition and compensation measures on the one hand, and procedural transition support mechanisms on the other hand.

A methodological limitation must be assumed from the beginning. A significant part of specialized literature comes from the North American and British spaces, whose military veteran social assistance systems differ substantially from the Romanian one, both in terms of scale and degree of institutionalization. The transfer of conclusions to the national context requires caution; it is carried out not to import models, but to identify the dimensions of reintegration validated by research that any normative framework should address.

4. Dimensions of Reintegration: What Research Shows

4.1 Transition Seen as a Critical Process

Research converges on the idea that reintegration is not a punctual event, but a multi-year process. Longitudinal studies indicate that difficulties do not necessarily concentrate in the immediate aftermath of transfer to the reserve, but can accumulate in the second and third years, as initial support systems fade and the veteran faces persistent obstacles in securing stable employment, managing finances, and maintaining social connections.

A study on the behavioral consequences of transition draws attention to the psychological mechanisms involved. The authors emphasize that the effects of unmet needs upon discharge and the loss of military identity are mediated, to a large extent, by depression and resentment toward civilians (Kintzle and Castro, 2018). This finding highlights that professional and social reintegration cannot be separated from mental health, these dimensions being closely correlated.

The factors shaping the difficulty of transition are, in turn, well documented. Exposure to operational stress and combat experience are associated with a significantly higher probability of

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difficult readaptation compared to service without combat experience. Marital status during missions, education level, and rank held also influence reintegration: officers and higher education graduates report, on average, fewer difficulties compared to military personnel in execution functions. These findings have a direct implication for the military social worker: they allow the identification of high-risk veteran categories toward whom support must be prioritized. Far from being a uniform process, reintegration follows differentiated trajectories, and an effective policy must be sensitive to this heterogeneity.

4.2 The Professional Dimension: Conversion and the Labor Market

Reinsertion into the labor market constitutes the most visible dimension of reintegration and, at the same time, the one toward which most support programs are oriented. The paradox documented by specialized literature is the following: although veterans possess competencies valued by employers (leadership skills, work ethic, intercultural experience, integrity), many encounter difficulties in translating these competencies into the language of the civilian labor market.

A mapping conducted by the RAND Corporation of American federal transition programs identifies a problem of coordination and evaluation. The report (KleyKamp et al., 2024) recommends that transition support be re-centered on employment, through investment in programs that help service members and veterans make a rapid transition, especially those offering personalized support. The conclusion is relevant beyond the American context, suggesting that the effectiveness of professional support depends less on the number of programs and more on their personalization and coordination.

Specialized literature also identifies the role of stereotypes in obstructing professional reinsertion. The meta-analytic synthesis of cultural transition experiences shows that translating military skills into the civilian sphere, countering veterans' negative preconceptions about the civilian environment, and combating stereotypes related to veterans can significantly improve re-employment possibilities and overall reintegration quality.

4.3 The Social and Identity Dimension

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Beyond employment, research highlights the importance of the social and identity dimension. Studies conducted in the Anglo-American space emphasize that support focused almost exclusively on employment leads to the neglect of numerous essential transitional experiences, and that the central role in successful transition is played by the renegotiation of the self and the restoration of a sense of belonging. Community spaces, not necessarily specific to veterans, are identified as important resources for improving social relations and well-being.

This perspective has direct implications for military social work, suggesting that intervention should not be limited to facilitating access to benefits, but should include components of identity support (counseling, mentoring, mediation between military and civilian culture) and the reconstruction of social networks. Ropan (2026) highlight that "States' responsibility to guarantee the rights of veterans in theaters of operations represents a fundamental obligation, based on law, ethics, and the social contract between governments and their citizens."

Initiatives based on certified sponsors or veteran-to-veteran mentoring, tested through randomized controlled trials, illustrate the direction in which international practice is heading.

In this context, special attention is paid to the role played by veterans' families. Research shows that transition affects not only the veteran but their entire family, which must also readjust after years of mobility, prolonged absences, and the subordination of private life to the demands of military service. Reconnecting with family, friends, and the civilian environment constitutes, according to specialized literature, one of the recurring themes of the transition experience. Effective support for reintegration therefore includes a family component: partner orientation, preparing children for the change in lifestyle, and mediating tensions generated by the redistribution of household roles.

5. The Romanian Legal Framework for Veteran Reintegration

5.1 Recognition and Rights Granted to Veterans

The central normative act on this subject is Law no. 168 of August 7, 2020, on recognizing the merits of personnel participating in military actions, missions, and operations on or outside the territory of the Romanian state and granting certain rights to them, their families, and the

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descendants of the deceased, with implementation norms approved by the order of the Minister of National Defense no. M 7 of 2021, entering into force on February 4, 2021. The law establishes the status of "veteran from theaters of operations" and a set of correlative rights. Regarding symbolic recognition, Article 12 provides that the veteran who is not disabled or wounded benefits, inter alia, from "the right to wear the military uniform after transfer to reserve or retirement." Beyond symbolic value, the law regulates material rights, among which are a non-taxable monthly allowance granted after transfer to reserve or retirement, according to Art. 12, para. (1), lit. c), as well as facilities regarding medical assistance, recovery, and access to certain services, according to Art. 8 and Art. 11. The law also establishes the Day of Veterans from Theaters of Operations, marked annually on November 11, according to Art. 6.

The implementation norms detail the procedure conferring the status of veteran from theaters of operations, making the distinction between personnel still in service relations with the Ministry of National Defense (MoND), for whom condition verification falls to the unit's human resources structure, and personnel who have ceased these relations, in which case verification is performed by the military center within whose radius the veteran resides. This procedural architecture ensures access to rights even after leaving the system, an essential element for a population by definition outside the active structure.

5.2 State Military Pensions

The economic security of the veteran after the conclusion of the military career is ensured, primarily, through the state military pensions system, regulated by Law no. 223 of July 24, 2015, on state military pensions. The law guarantees the right to pension for military personnel, police officers, and public servants with special status, regulating service pension for age limit, disability pension, and survivor pension.

Particularly relevant to the theme of reintegration are the provisions concerning disability pension. The law distinguishes between disability occurring as a result of accidents or illnesses incurred "during and due to the performance of military service / service" according to Art. 32, para. a), and disability that "has no connection with the performance of military service / service"

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according to Art. 32, para. b) (in this situation, granting the pension is conditioned upon achieving a length of service, according to Art. 39). For personnel wounded in external missions, the law provides a more favorable calculation regime, reflecting the recognition of the specific risk assumed in the theater of operations. These provisions ensure an economic safety net, but approach reintegration predominantly through the prism of compensating for lost working capacity rather than active reinsertion.

The distinction between compensation and reinsertion deserves further elaboration, as it structures the entire architecture of support. The age-limit service pension and disability pension respond to the veteran's need for economic security, recognizing either the completion of a full military career or the loss of working capacity. This response is necessary but insufficient. A young veteran, transferred to reserve after a short military career or following restructuring, often possesses unused working capacity and a long active life expectancy. For them, simple economic compensation does not solve the problem of professional reinsertion and finding a social role. Precisely for this category, procedural support (conversion, counseling, and mediation) becomes essential, and the pension regime cannot replace it.

5.3 The Statutory Framework

The legal framework for recognizing the status of military cadre, as well as that related to granting a state military pension, rests on the statutory foundation enshrined by Law no. 80 of July 11, 1995, regarding the status of military cadres, and Law no. 384 of October 10, 2006, regarding the status of professional soldiers and corporals. These acts regulate the conditions for transfer to reserve and retirement, the social rights of personnel in these situations, and certain support measures upon the cessation of service relations.

Law no. 384 of 2006 contains provisions concerning the situation of professional soldiers and corporals whose contracts cease, instituting facilities meant to support transition to civilian life, including in terms of professional conversion and preferential access to certain positions. These provisions represent the closest expression in domestic law of a logic supporting the

transition process, although they remain fragmentary and subordinate in application to subsequent regulations addressed through orders of the Minister of National Defense.

5.4 Overall Features of the Romanian Legal Framework

The synthesis of the analyzed provisions highlights that in Romania, the legislative framework is founded on the logic of recognition and rewarding. The status of veteran from theaters of operations, allowances, pensions, and material facilities form a coherent system of protection for those who served the homeland, especially those who participated in missions in theaters of operations or were wounded (physically or psychologically). This system is, in terms of consecrated rights, comparable to international standards.

The Romanian legislative framework, however, poorly addresses the dimension of professional reintegration. Military social work, as a distinct profession with a role in facilitating transition, remains insufficiently institutionalized, and reintegration services are punctual rather than articulated within a unitary structural framework.

6. Conclusions

The social and professional reintegration of veterans after the conclusion of their military career represents a complex, multidimensional, and time-extended process, conditioned by individual, familial, community, and systemic factors. Specialized research highlights that the success of this process depends on the simultaneous addressing of the professional, social, and identity dimensions, as well as on personalized and prolonged support, especially during the first years of retirement.

The Romanian legal framework offers a solid system of recognition and rewarding comparable to international standards in terms of consecrated rights, but addresses transition predominantly through compensation and less through a structured transition process.

Merit recognition and material rewarding, no matter how important, express a retributive type of relationship (a reward for a service rendered). The transition-structured process expresses

a restitutive type of relationship (the community's effort to resettle the veteran in a position from which they can continue their civilian life with dignity).

The core stake of any reform of the system of social and professional reintegration of veterans represents the shift from a predominantly retributive logic to one that also integrates the restitutive dimension. Military social work, through its vocation of mediating between the institution and the individual, will play a central role in this paradigm.

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