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Mission Second Career: Czech Soldiers' Perspectives on Support for the Military-to-Civilian Transition

Mise Druhá kariéra: Pohled českých vojáků na podporu přechodu do civilního života

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Abstract:

The preparation of soldiers for future employment in the civilian labor market is a critical issue that requires attention. This research aimed to identify soldiers' preferences regarding their transition to civilian employment after their military service. A questionnaire survey was conducted with 128 active-duty soldiers from two units of the Czech Armed Forces. The majority of respondents prefer a second career in the private sector, and most would like to start preparing several months before their service ends. Many respondents expressed interest in expanding their skills to improve employability, with retraining courses being the most preferred option. Overall, interest in the offered support tools for career transition was significant, with the job portal being the most favored. Many respondents believe soldiers face difficulties in securing civilian employment after their service and assess the current system for preparing soldiers for a second career as underdeveloped.

Abstrakt:

Příprava vojáků na budoucí uplatnění na civilním trhu práce představuje klíčovou oblast, která vyžaduje pozornost. Cílem tohoto výzkumu bylo identifikovat preference vojáků týkající se jejich přechodu do civilního zaměstnání po ukončení vojenské služby. Dotazníkové šetření bylo realizováno mezi 128 příslušníky dvou útvarů Armády České republiky. Většina respondentů preferuje druhou kariéru v soukromém sektoru a většina by si přála začít s přípravou několik měsíců před ukončením služby. Mnozí respondenti vyjádřili zájem o rozšíření svých dovedností za účelem zvýšení zaměstnatelnosti, přičemž nejčastěji preferovanou formou byla rekvalifikace. Celkově byl o nabízené nástroje podpory přechodu velký zájem, přičemž nejvíce byla ceněna pracovní portál. Řada respondentů se domnívá, že vojáci po skončení služby čelí obtížím při hledání civilního

zaměstnání a hodnotí současný systém přípravy na druhou kariéru jako nedostatečný.

Keywords: Armed Forces; Military-to-Civilian Transition; Second Career; Soldier.

Klíčová slova: ozbrojené síly; přechod z vojenského do civilního sektoru; druhá kariéra; voják z povolání.

INTRODUCTION

Each year, a number of soldiers leave military service due to retirement or the end of their service commitments. Many of these individuals are still relatively young, far from the official retirement age. This means they still have a long working life ahead. After leaving the military, they aim to build a new career in civilian life that will allow them to maintain financial stability, support their families, and enjoy a good quality of life, since having a stable and fulfilling job is strongly linked with better mental health, lower stress, and a stronger sense of purpose (Chopade and Gupta, 2020; Ahern et al., 2015; Zoli et al., 2015; Keeling et al., 2018).

The transition from military to civilian life is a significant life change that brings personal and professional challenges (Zoli et al., 2015; Chopade & Gupta, 2020; Geraci et al., 2020). While most former soldiers eventually find employment, many continue to face difficulties even years after discharge (Kintzle et al., 2016; Keeling, 2018; Cooper et al., 2018; Aronson et al., 2019; Gonzalez & Simpson, 2021). Some accept jobs below their qualifications or unrelated to their skills and interests (Alonso et al., 2021), while others struggle with job retention or satisfaction (Keeling et al., 2018).

While individual effort and informal support from family, friends, or former colleagues can be valuable during the transition (Wilson, 2015; James, 2017), formal, structured support systems play a key role in ensuring a successful shift to civilian life. Access to professional services – such as career counseling, training, and education – significantly improves soldiers' ability to adapt, build new skills, and find meaningful employment (Alonso et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2020). Unlike informal help, these programs offer targeted and consistent support essential for long-term reintegration.

Supporting former soldiers in this process should not be seen as only a personal responsibility. It is also a shared responsibility of society. Former military personnel bring valuable skills, discipline, and experience to the civilian workforce. Helping them return to work is not only beneficial for them and their families – it is also a way for society to make use of a capable and motivated group of people (Chopade and Gupta, 2020; Elnit-sky et al., 2017).

1 OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Reintegration into civilian life can be challenging for former soldiers, largely due to strong military identities shaped by years of hierarchical structure and a command-based culture (Grimell, 2016a; Zarecky, 2014; Keeling et al., 2018). Transitioning from a highly structured environment to a civilian setting that demands greater personal autonomy often brings both personal and professional difficulties. Leaving behind the routine, culture, and close camaraderie of military life can add to the complexity of this adjustment.

Although most former soldiers do not leave the military with physical injuries or mental health conditions, many still encounter difficulties in everyday functioning that make the transition more complicated (Roy et al., 2020). One of the main barriers to successful reintegration is that military training and experience do not always align with civilian job requirements. Former soldiers may also lack formal education or certifications that are recognized in the civilian labor market (Pease et al., 2016; Gordon et al., 2020; Gaither, 2014).

Despite various challenges, former soldiers offer valuable qualities to civilian employers, such as discipline, loyalty, teamwork, strong work ethics, and decision-making under pressure (Minnis, 2017; Stern, 2017; Pollak et al., 2019). However, many employers struggle to translate military experience into civilian qualifications due to limited understanding of military roles and training (Stern, 2017; Roy et al., 2020). This gap is deepened by a general lack of awareness about military life, often leading to stereotypes and bias in hiring (Hines et al., 2015; Liebert & Golby, 2017; Shepherd et al., 2019; Stone & Stone, 2015).

Military literature highlights a range of strategies to support soldiers during their transition to civilian life. A key factor in successful reintegration is achieving educational goals, which often underpin meaningful post-military employment (Ainspan et al., 2018). In response, some organizations provide training and certification programs to help service members prepare for civilian careers (Owings et al., 2015).

There is evidence that participation in employment-related programs can lead to positive outcomes, including lower unemployment rates among veterans who have engaged in such initiatives (Curry Hall et al., 2014; Perkins et al., 2019). These findings highlight the importance of proactive career planning well before service members leave the military (Wilson-Smith and Corr, 2019).

Several researchers emphasize the importance of early preparation for civilian life. Keeling et al. (2018), Roy et al. (2020), and Ahern et al. (2015) recommend starting transition planning at least a year before discharge, as it significantly eases the process. Keeling et al. (2019) add that more preparation time improves civilian labor market outcomes. Access to career information before leaving the military was found to reduce unemployment and ease adjustment for both employed and unemployed veterans.

To support this process, scholars advocate for the development and implementation of structured transition programs. These programs, particularly when supported by strong and visible leadership at high levels of government, can help service members feel more confident, supported, and less isolated during this significant life change (Batka and Hall, 2016; Perkins et al., 2019; Roy et al., 2020).

A variety of government and private initiatives have been developed to support military personnel in finding employment and reintegrating into the civilian workforce (Chopade and Gupta, 2020). In many countries, systems have been established specifically to assist ex-servicemen in their transition to the labor market. These systems often involve collaboration between governmental agencies, ministries of defense, and various support organizations.

Current programs provide a variety of employment-related services, including job portals, job fairs, training, and networking opportunities (Aronson et al., 2019). Soldiers can also access career counseling, coaching, and mentoring to help translate military experience into civilian terms (Delbourg-Delphis, 2014). These services further support goal setting, realistic salary expectations, and identifying personal strengths and development needs (Buzzetta et al., 2017).

Support systems for transitioning service members exist in many countries. In the United States, programs such as the *Transition Assistance Program* and *Army Career and Alumni Program*, along with various education and employment initiatives, assist veterans in entering civilian life. European countries offer similar services – for instance, France runs the *Defence Mobility Agency (Défense Mobilité)*, the UK offers the *Career Transition Partnership*, Germany provides support through the *Career Support Service of the Bundeswehr (Berufsförderungsdienst der Bundeswehr)* and the *Bundeswehr Technical School (Bundeswehrfachschule)*, and Poland operates the *Professional Activation Center (Ośrodek Aktywizacji Zawodowej)*.

2 STATE OF THE ART IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC (CZE)

There are not many studies focused on the employability of soldiers of the Czech Armed Forces (CAF) after the end of their service, and many of those that do exist are available only in the form of final theses. Some of them are listed below.

Based on in-depth interviews with five former soldiers, Kašuba (2023) identified key internal and external factors influencing second career development. Internal factors included motivation, speed of job acquisition, alignment with previous experience or education, personal fulfillment, and job satisfaction. External factors involved family support, job security, stability, and job location. Motivation to seek employment was driven by the desire to gain new qualifications, a clear vision of future work, and specific career goals.

During the 2007–2013 programming period, seven projects within the Human Resources and Employment Operational Programme focused on employing war veterans using European Social Fund resources. Beran Gecová (2016) evaluated one of them – *Integration of War Veterans into Civilian Life* – based on a sample of 153 participants. Most respondents reported that the project helped them find employment, with re-training courses having the greatest impact, followed by individual counseling and wage cost reimbursements for employers. However, the main drawbacks of these projects were their short-term nature and their exclusive focus on war veterans, which prevented

soldiers without prior participation in military missions from accessing the offered activities (Binková and Bednář, 2017).

Some departmental companies offer employment opportunities to soldiers transitioning out of active service. However, this benefit is also primarily targeted at war veterans (Binková and Bednář, 2017).

Meca's (2011) research involving 155 war veterans highlighted that unemployment is a significant issue for this group, with some respondents remaining jobless for over a year. This concern is further confirmed by Binková (2019), who found that, on average, 18% of former soldiers of the CAF of working age remained unemployed for up to eight months after leaving the service – a figure more than three times higher than the general unemployment rate in the CR during the same period (5.7%).

Research conducted among 313 former soldiers revealed that nearly three-quarters of respondents did not consider the system for preparing soldiers for a second career to be well developed. An equal proportion stated that the Ministry of Defence did not prepare them for the transition to civilian life nor supported their integration into the labor market. Furthermore, 91% reported that the issue of second career preparation was not addressed during their service, and over half indicated they had not received any support related to the transition prior to discharge (Binková, 2019).

Findings by Ďuriš and Hodný (2020), based on research involving 80 war veterans whose service ended in 2018, highlight recurring problems with communication and the transmission of information to soldiers approaching the end of their service. The study also points to insufficient awareness of the support and care options available to veterans through the Ministry of Defence.

Skýpalová and Binková (2022) found that the vast majority of 460 respondents – 176 military students and 284 active-duty soldiers – expressed a desire to improve their skills to enhance their labor market prospects, with nearly half favoring retraining courses.

The Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic (MoD CR) offers retraining courses to soldiers who have served at least five years, aiming to prepare them for the civilian labor market. However, the three-month limit is often too short for acquiring new qualifications, especially for highly specialized professionals. Most courses provide only basic training, which often falls short of labor market demands (Binková, 2018a).

These shortcomings are also reflected in the findings of Meca (2011), whose research showed that most eligible applicants did not participate in retraining courses, mainly due to a lack of timely information. Other barriers included limited course options or restrictions from superiors. While attendees were generally satisfied with course quality and the ability to choose, the overall course selection was viewed critically. About half found the training practically useful, while many did not.

Furthermore, according to Binková (2018b), over three-fifths of 313 former soldiers did not apply for a retraining course. The most common reason (mentioned by a quarter) was lack of time, often due to late discharge notification, workload, or delays from superiors. One-fifth considered retraining unnecessary, believing their qualifications were sufficient. Others pointed to the limited range or low quality of courses. Of those who did apply, nearly one-third did not complete the course – mainly due to lack of time or employer support.

Similarly, Soukopová (2021), in a study of 28 former soldiers, found that while retraining is viewed as the main form of preparation for civilian life, it is often seen as inaccessible, overly bureaucratic, and too narrowly focused – particularly unsuitable for highly educated soldiers. Šafandová (2024), based on interviews with 10 former soldiers, also noted limited practical benefits, as none of the respondents worked in the fields for which they were retrained. In contrast, Drahokoupilová (2021) reported more positive outcomes in her study of 60 former soldiers, with those who completed CAF-funded retraining finding employment more quickly than those who did not.

The Statistical Yearbook of the Personnel Agency of the CAF provides an overview of the number of outgoing soldiers and completed retraining courses between 2018 and 2023 – see Table 1 below.

Table 1: Overview of soldiers leaving the CAF and retraining implementation

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of outgoing soldiers	994	1186	813	890	1337	1256
Number of eligible applicants for retraining	445	558	531	424	611	531
Number of submitted applications for retraining	241	346	178	237	386	325
Number of requests fulfilled	171	310	135	192	293	283
Percentage of requests fulfilled	71%	90%	76%	81%	76%	87%

Source: based on Statistical yearbooks of the Personnel Agency of the CAF from the years 2018 - 2023

Other forms of support include full-day seminars for soldiers leaving the CAF, organized since 2019 by the Personnel Agency in cooperation with the Czech Labour Office. These seminars cover key topics related to service termination, including legal obligations, retraining, active reserves, employment services, retirement, healthcare, and support from the Ministry of Defence's Department for War Veterans. The number of seminars and participants is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Overview of Seminars for Soldiers Approaching the End of Service in the CAF

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Number of seminars	4	8	1	4	6	6	4	33
Number of participants	253	124	72	183	280	455	312	1679

Source: based on information from the Ministry of Defense; status as of 25. 4. 2025

Soldiers are also legally entitled to take leave for job searching before discharge (Laštovková & Kmoníček, 2024). Additionally, they receive retirement benefits based on length of service and reason for termination, which help ease the transition and

compensate for income loss after leaving the military (Act No. 221/1999 Coll.). However, current legislation allows service termination decisions to be issued as late as four months before discharge (Act No. 221/1999 Coll.; Minister of Defence Order No. 63/2015), which is often insufficient for selecting a suitable retraining course, exploring available options, and completing the necessary administration.

3 METHODS

The aim of the research is to explore the preferences of soldiers regarding their preparation for employment in the civilian labor market after leaving military service. To address this aim, the following research questions were formulated:

- **RQ1:** *What are the preferences of soldiers from two selected military units regarding employment opportunities in the civilian labor market after leaving military service?*
- **RQ2:** *What are the preferences of soldiers from two selected military units concerning the process of preparing for a second career?*

In relation to RQ2, the authors formulated and tested the following working hypotheses:

- **WH1:** *Soldiers' interest in an individual approach to preparing for further career opportunities varies by their age, rank, and remaining length of service.*
- **WH2:** *Soldiers' interest in group seminars varies by their age, rank, and remaining length of service.*
- **WH3:** *Soldiers' interest in consultations about starting a business varies by their age, rank, and remaining length of service.*
- **WH4:** *Soldiers' interest in job fairs varies by their age, rank, and remaining length of service.*
- **WH5:** *Soldiers' interest in job portal services varies by their age, rank, and remaining length of service.*
- **WH6:** *Soldiers' interest in internships with civilian employers varies by their age, rank, and remaining length of service.*
- **RQ3:** *How do soldiers from two selected military units perceive the key challenges and opportunities associated with transitioning to a second career?*

The source of data for hypothesis testing and answering the research questions was a questionnaire survey. This survey followed up on research conducted by Binková (2018a), and therefore the same questionnaire was used, allowing for a comparison of results over the years. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: an introduction, sociodemographic data, and a set of questions. In the introduction, respondents were informed about the research purpose, invited to participate, and assured of anonymity.

The research sample consisted of 128 active-duty soldiers within two units – the 102nd Reconnaissance Battalion and the 53rd Reconnaissance and Electronic Warfare Regiment. The 102nd Reconnaissance Battalion is based in Prostějov and falls under the 53rd Reconnaissance and Electronic Warfare Regiment, which is headquartered in

Opava. Collecting the questionnaires within a relatively small location, representing only one organizational unit, may in the future serve as a basis for comparing opinions and perceptions on this issue with other garrisons within the CAF.

The questionnaire survey was conducted in January 2025 using printed forms. The interviewer distributed and collected the questionnaires in person, while also checking compliance with sampling criteria and ensuring the clarity and consistency of responses. The data were then exported to Microsoft Excel for basic descriptive analysis.

The hypothesis of possible dependence between categorical variables was examined using two statistical tests – Fisher's exact test and the chi-squared (χ^2) test for independence. See for example Ande (2007), Agresti (2002), Clarson et al. (1993). Fisher's test is particularly suitable for small sample sizes or when expected cell counts are low, as it calculates the exact probability of observing the given data under the null hypothesis.

4 RESULTS

A total of 128 soldiers (12 women and 116 men) participated in the questionnaire survey. Respondents' ages ranged from 21 to over 46 years: 13 were aged 21–25, 26 aged 26–30, 37 aged 31–35, 27 aged 36–40, 16 aged 41–45, and 8 were 46 or older; one respondent did not state their age. By rank, the sample included 34 Troops and Non-Commissioned Officers, 71 Warrant Officers, and 23 Officers. In terms of education, 54 participants held a university degree and 74 had completed secondary education. Regarding total length of service, 26 soldiers had served 0–5 years, 40 had served 6–10 years, 24 served 11–15 years, 22 served 16–20 years, and 16 had served 21–25 years. With respect to remaining service obligation, 31 respondents had 1–2 years left, 30 had 3–4 years, 38 had 5–6 years, and 27 had 7 years or more.

RQ1: *What are the preferences of soldiers from two selected military units regarding employment opportunities in the civilian labor market after leaving military service?*

To answer the RQ1, the data were graphically presented in Figure 1. The figure shows that the majority of respondents prefer a second career in the private sector, followed by the public sector. Less than one-fifth of respondents have not yet decided.

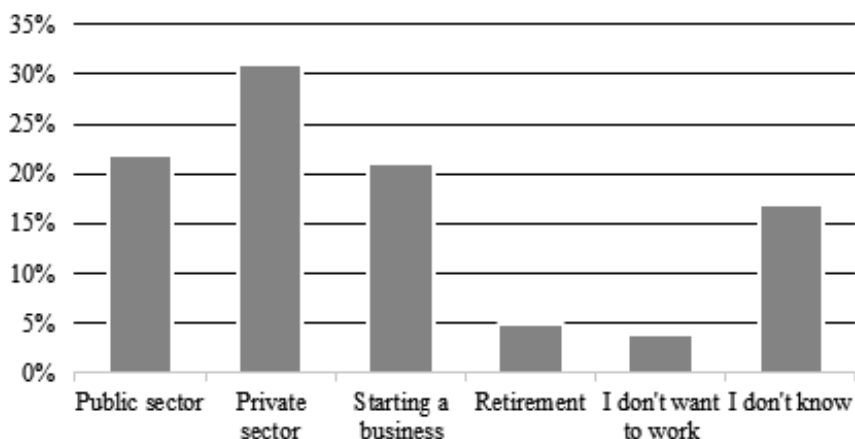


Figure 1: Post-military employment preferences

Respondents were asked whether they would consider employment within the Ministry of Defence in a civilian position or in the security forces after their military service. A total of 53.2% were not interested in a civilian role within the Ministry, 32.2% were undecided, and only 15.6% expressed interest – most often in positions such as HR specialist, driver course instructor, trainer/instructor, or equipment technician. Regarding employment in the security forces, 22.6% of respondents expressed interest, 50% were not interested, and 26.6% were undecided. Among those interested, the most preferred option was the Fire Rescue Service, followed by the Police of the CR.

RQ2: *What are the preferences of soldiers from two selected military units concerning the process of preparing for a second career?*

In seeking to answer RQ2, the authors focused on the preferred timing for starting second career preparation before military service ends (see Figure 2). Most respondents preferred to begin 7–12 months in advance, followed by 13–18 months. The least preferred options were 1–3 months before discharge or more than 25 months in advance. Notably, every seventh respondent wished to prepare continuously throughout their entire military service.

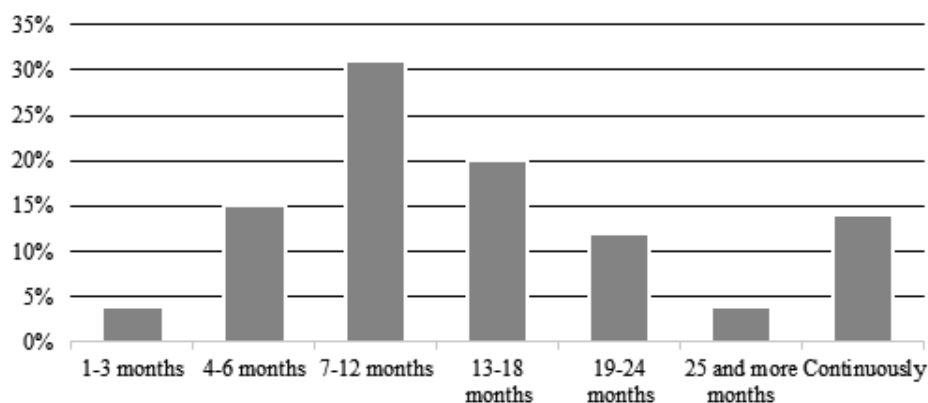


Figure 2: Preferred start of preparation before leaving military service

The authors also examined whether respondents wished to expand their knowledge and skills during service to improve their post-military employability through education or retraining. A total of 89.8% answered positively, while 10.2% responded “No” or “I don’t know.” Among those interested (see Figure 3), the most preferred option was a retraining course leading to a certificate (64.3%).

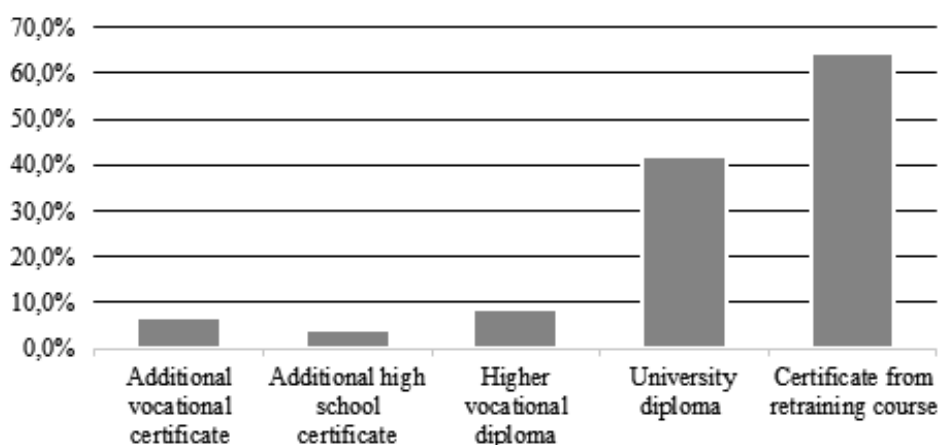


Figure 3: Soldiers' preference for formal education or retraining

As part of examining responses to the RQ2, the respondents' opinions were also surveyed regarding individual support tools for preparation for a second career after the end of their service (such as the form of individual approach, the content of group

seminars, consultations on starting a business, job fairs, the functions of a job portal, and professional internships). The results of the respondents' answers are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Interest in Individual Support Tools for Preparing for a Second Career

Support Tools	Yes	No	I don't know
Individual approach to preparing for further career opportunities	67.2%	11.7%	21.1%
Organization of group seminars	64.1%	19.5%	16.4%
Organization of consultations on starting a business	82.0%	11.7%	6.3%
Job fairs	81.3%	8.6%	10.1%
Job portal for establishing contact with potential employers	84.4%	4.7%	10.9%
Professional internship during service with a civilian employer	80.5%	10.1%	9.4%

Based on the data presented in Table 1, it can be stated that for all the offered support tools for preparation for a second career, the respondents' interest significantly outweighed their lack of interest. The highest level of interest was shown in the job portal, while the lowest was in the organization of group seminars.

Respondents who answered "Yes" to using the individual approach, group seminars, and the job portal had the opportunity to assess the degree of usefulness and benefit of each measure on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = least beneficial, 5 = most beneficial). The frequency of responses for each scale value and the average rating are provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Evaluation of the usefulness of individual approach options, group seminar's themes, and the job portal functions

Individual Approach						
Options	Career counseling		Coaching		Psychological testing and personality assessments	
Average rating	3.67		3.88		2.47	
Group seminars						
Topics	Writing CVs and cover letters	Self-presentation techniques	Preparation for job interviews	Understanding labor market specifics and job search methods	Labor law issues	Preparation for admission processes for further studies
Average rating	2.93	3.52	3.60	3.61	3.31	3.25
Job Portal Functions						
Functions	Regular posting of job offers from employers		Option to create a user profile with a CV available for employers to view		Online career transition guide providing instructions	
Average rating	4.20		3.82		3.26	

Among the individual support options, respondents rated coaching as the most valuable, followed by consultations with a career counselor or HR specialist. In terms of group seminar topics, the most useful were preparation for job interviews and understanding the labor market and job search methods. Regarding job portal features, respondents most appreciated regularly updated job postings, which were viewed as the most useful support measure overall.

The following section presents the working hypotheses, the verification approach, and the results, indicating whether each hypothesis was confirmed or rejected. Age categories were 21–25, 26–30, 31–35, 36–40, 41–45, and 46 and older. Rank categories included OR-1 to OR-4 (Troops and Non-Commissioned Officers), OR-5 to OR-9 (Warrant Officers), and OF-1 to OF-3 (Officers). Remaining length of service was grouped into 1–2, 3–4, 5–6, and 7 years or more.

WH1: *Soldiers' interest in an individual approach to preparing for further career opportunities varies by their age, rank, and remaining length of service.*

Due to low expected frequencies in some contingency tables, certain rows or columns were merged to meet the assumptions of the χ^2 test, ensuring at least 80% of expected frequencies exceeded 5. At the 0.05 significance level, neither Fisher's nor the χ^2 test showed a significant association between interest in group seminars and any examined category. For age, the p-values were 0.652 (Fisher) and 0.441 (χ^2); for rank, 0.087 (Fisher) and 0.067 (χ^2); and for remaining length of service, 0.064 (Fisher) and 0.173 (χ^2).

WH2: *Soldiers' interest in group seminars varies by their age, rank, and remaining length of service.*

At the 0.05 significance level, Fisher's test showed a significant difference in interest in group seminars by age ($p = 0.027$), though this was not confirmed by the χ^2 test ($p = 0.150$); see Figure 4. All respondents aged 46 and older expressed interest in attending. Interest did not vary significantly by rank ($p = 0.082$ for both tests), but Fisher's test indicated a significant association with remaining length of service ($p = 0.044$), while the χ^2 test showed only a weaker link ($p = 0.093$).

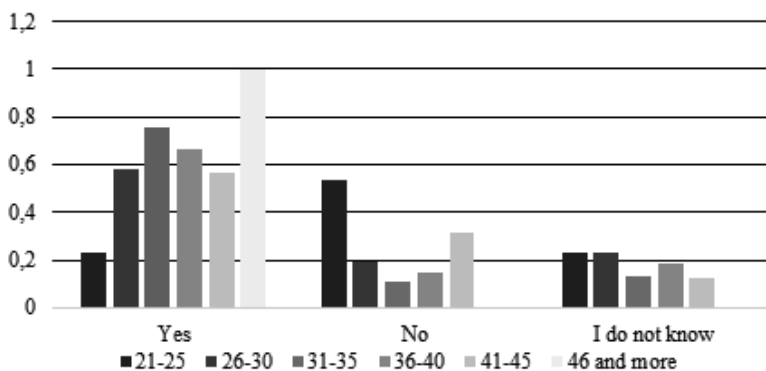


Figure 4: Interest in group seminars – variation by age category

WH3: Soldiers' interest in consultations about starting a business varies by their age, rank, and remaining length of service.

The analyses did not show that interest in consultations about starting a business varies by age, rank, or remaining length of service. For age, the Fisher test yielded a p-value of 0.580 and the χ^2 test 0.161. For rank, the p-values were 0.666 and 0.297, and for remaining length of service, 0.473 and 0.575, respectively.

WH4: Soldiers' interest in job fairs varies by their age, rank, and remaining length of service.

In contrast, interest in job fairs varied significantly by both age and rank, but not by remaining length of service. For age, Fisher's test produced a p-value below 0.001 and the χ^2 test 0.003; for rank, the p-values were 0.035 and 0.050. No significant variation was found for remaining service time ($p = 0.297$ and 0.403). As shown in Figures 5 and 6, the highest interest in job fairs was among respondents aged 31–40 and those in the OR-5 to OR-9 rank category.

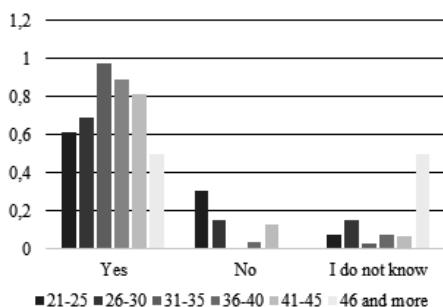


Figure 5: Interest in job fairs – variation by age category

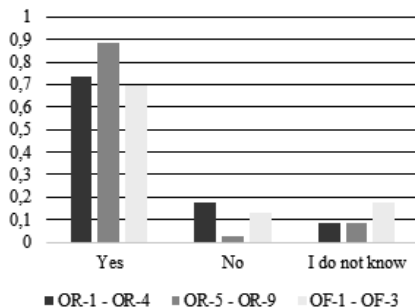


Figure 6: Interest in job fairs – variation by rank category

WH5: Soldiers' interest in job portal services varies by their age, rank, and remaining length of service.

Similarly, interest in job portal services also varies by age and rank, but not by remaining length of service. For age, Fisher's test produced a p-value of 0.021 and the χ^2 test 0.027. For rank, the values were 0.019 and 0.009, while for remaining service time they were 0.975 and 0.761. As shown in Figures 7 and 8, the greatest interest in job portal services was recorded among respondents aged 31 to 40 and those in the OR-5 to OR-9 rank category.

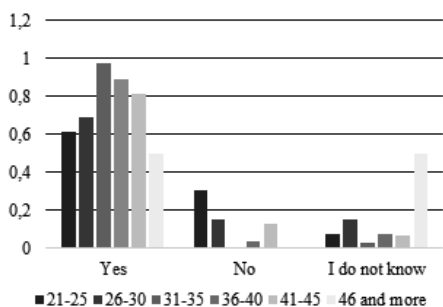


Figure 7: Interest in job portal – variation by age category

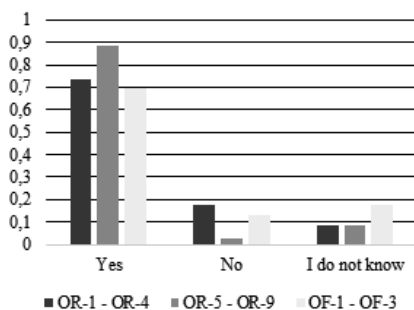


Figure 8: Interest in job portal – variation by rank category

WH6: *Soldiers' interest in internships with civilian employers varies by their age, rank, and remaining length of service*

Finally, interest in internships with civilian employers does not vary significantly by age, rank, or remaining length of service. For age, the Fisher test returned a p-value of 0.068 and the χ^2 test 0.634. For rank, the p-values were 0.663 and 0.955, and for remaining length of service, 0.955 and 0.688, respectively.

RQ3: How do soldiers from two selected military units perceive the key challenges and opportunities associated with transitioning to a second career?

In response to RQ3, 52.4% of respondents believed that soldiers face difficulties finding employment after leaving the military. The main reasons cited included the limited transferability of military-specific skills, insufficient preparation for a second career, lack of awareness of civilian job opportunities, employer bias against former soldiers with retirement benefits, older age at the time of transition, and differences between military and civilian work cultures.

One of the mentioned causes is also related to the respondents' views on whether the preparation of soldiers for a second career is well-developed (see Figure 4).

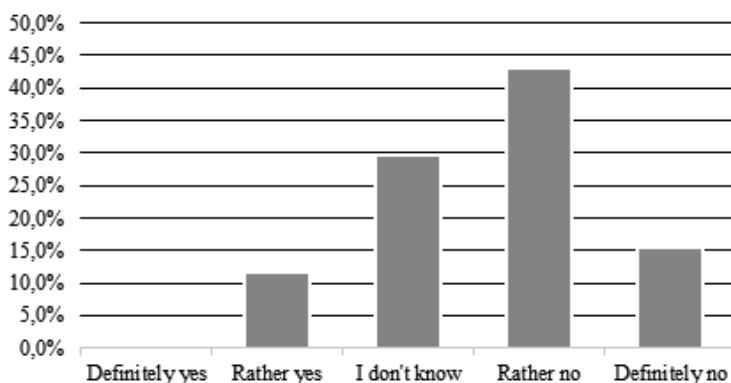


Figure 9: The level of sophistication of the system for preparing soldiers of the CAF for a second career.

Approximately three-fifths of the respondents assess the sophistication of the system for preparing soldiers of the CAF for a second career as either somewhat or definitely underdeveloped. No respondent rated it as definitely well-developed, while 11.7 % rated it as somewhat well-developed (“Rather yes”).

DISCUSSION

In the present study, respondents most frequently preferred a second career in the private sector (31%), followed by the public sector (22%). Fewer expressed interest in a civilian position within the Ministry of Defence (15.6%) or in employment with security forces (22.6%), most often citing the Fire Rescue Service. These results differ notably from those of Binková and Mašlej (2020), where the public sector was the top choice (45%), followed by the private sector (24%), and a higher proportion showed interest in both civilian roles within the Ministry of Defence (35%) and security forces (43%), especially the Police of the CR.

Regarding the timing of preparation for a second career, the majority of respondents indicated a preference for beginning their planning 7-12 months prior to service termination. This was followed by preferences for a 13-18 month and a 4-6-month preparatory window, respectively. These findings are broadly consistent with those of Binková and Mašlej (2020), suggesting that the preferred timeline for transition preparation among active-duty soldiers has remained relatively stable.

A large majority of respondents showed interest in improving their knowledge and skills during military service – primarily through retraining – to increase their competitiveness in the civilian labor market. This supports findings by Skýpalová and Binková (2022), who also noted strong interest in qualification improvement, especially via

retraining. Ďuriš and Hodný (2020) similarly identified retraining as the most valued form of support. Šafandová (2024) highlights the importance of ongoing development for a smoother transition, a view echoed by Kubínyi and Veteška (2018), who promote a competency-based, lifelong learning approach. Karadencheva (2015) adds that tailored development enhances motivation by aligning skills with career goals.

Furthermore, Ďuriš and Hodný (2020) identified additional support forms valued by soldiers, such as a specialized job portal, pre-selection counseling, career guidance, and extended service leave for job searching. These findings are echoed in the current research, where respondents showed strong interest in all support tools, especially the job portal, while group seminars were least preferred. Among individual approaches, coaching was rated most highly.

Consistent with previous studies, former soldiers often use online platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook to find job opportunities (Weinburger, Strider, & Vengrouskie, 2015; Hall, 2017). Coaching also plays an important role in building skills for civilian employment, with models such as Zarecky's (2014) focusing on identifying and applying personal strengths. Workshop-based interventions have proven effective as well – Gati, Ryzhik, and Vertsberger (2013) found that a five-day workshop reduced career decision-making difficulties and improved decision self-efficacy among young veterans.

In the context of group seminars, respondents found preparation for job interviews and understanding labor market dynamics and job search methods most beneficial. For job portals, regularly updated listings were especially valued. Overall, the findings related to the six examined support tools – coaching, seminars, business startup consultations, job fairs, job portals, and internships – align with the results of Skýpalová and Binková (2022). However, in their study, the most highly rated seminar topic was self-presentation techniques at job interviews.

Previous research confirms the strong demand for employment support among veterans. Meca (2011) found that over half of respondents were interested in job search assistance, with many repeatedly seeking retraining or career counseling. Soukopová (2021) similarly highlighted the need for better access to job offers, help with CVs, labor market orientation, long-term support, and individualized transition services.

The importance of tailored career counseling for veterans is further stressed by Zalaquett and Chatters (2016), who argued that counselors must be attuned to the specific cultural context of the military. Likewise, James (2017) and Stonebraker et al. (2019) highlighted the role of job fairs in fostering direct personal interactions between veterans and potential employers, facilitating better employment matching.

Respondents aged 46 and older showed the greatest interest in group seminars, while the highest interest in job fairs and job portals was found among Warrant Officers and those aged 31–40. These results align with Aronson et al. (2019), who found that veterans from junior enlisted ranks were less likely to use support services than their senior counterparts.

Despite existing support structures, 52.4% of respondents believed that soldiers face difficulties securing civilian employment after leaving the service, and 58% considered the second career preparation system to be somewhat or definitely underdeveloped. Although these figures are lower than those reported by Binková (2018a) – where 79%

perceived employment as difficult and 73% viewed the system as insufficient – they still point to a clear need for improvement in transition support.

CONCLUSION

This research offers valuable insights into the preferences of CAF soldiers regarding their transition to the civilian labor market. Most respondents preferred a second career in the private sector and wished to begin preparing several months before the end of their service. Interest in support tools was high, with the job portal rated most favorably. A key finding is that many soldiers view the current preparation system as underdeveloped, highlighting the need to improve and expand transition support programs.

A limitation of this study is that it included respondents from only two military units, which may affect the generalizability of the results. However, the findings should be of interest not only to HR professionals within the MoD CR, but also to civilian HR managers responsible for workforce planning who may benefit from employing military professionals leaving military service.

One of the objectives of the CAF Development Concept 2035 is to foster cooperation with the civilian sector and to improve retraining opportunities in order to better reintegrate outgoing personnel into civilian life. It is therefore essential to explore the attitudes of all categories of soldiers to ensure that this goal is achieved. Future research should include a broader sample of respondents from across the CAF and also investigate the attitudes of civilian employers toward hiring former soldiers. Further studies should involve longitudinal research to better understand long-term trends and their impacts. It will also be valuable to address this issue in the context of cooperation with other countries and armed forces across NATO.

Overall, our findings highlight the importance of systematic and timely preparation of soldiers for their transition to civilian life, which should be a priority for both the military and society as a whole.

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