

world

Ukrainian amputee veterans climb for recovery

A host of activities and communities are popping up to cater to wounded soldiers

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KYIV
AFP/JJJ

Energetic pop music blasted from speakers at a modern climbing gym in Kyiv as Ukrainian veterans stood at the foot of the wall doing burpees and crab walks, resistance bands looped around their prosthetic legs.

The men were wounded at the front fighting off the Russian invasion, which has now dragged into its fifth year and is seeing casualties mount every day.

Tens of thousands of wounded veterans are readjusting to civilian life, finding solace in the host of activities and communities popping up to cater to their growing numbers.

"It's scary, it's interesting, it's adrenaline, it's an unusual kind of physical exertion," Oleg Khmylevskiy, a muscular 38-year-old who lost his right leg at the front, said.

The men adjusted their harnesses before setting off to tackle the overhangs, latching on to colorful holds as they worked their way up.

According to the National Health Service of Ukraine, by early 2025, about 95,000 amputations had been performed since the invasion.

Ukraine does not routinely disclose its total number of wounded soldiers, arguing Russia would benefit from such information. In late 2024, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy put the number at 370,000.

Ex-soldiers with missing limbs are often seen in the streets of Kyiv in military fatigues and on crutches.



A former Ukrainian service member, who was injured in the war against Russia and now has a prosthetic leg, takes part in an indoor climbing session at Climbing SPACE in Kyiv on Feb. 26. AFP/JJJ

According to a December survey by the Rating Group pollster, more than three-quarters of veterans said they feared a lack of understanding among the public, and a similar number worried about the lack of inclusive spaces.

With his shaved head, neatly trimmed beard and piercing gaze, Khmylevskiy recounted how he drove to Kyiv to join the fight with a friend in the first days of the invasion.

"The two of us had, almost like in a movie ... two helmets, two bulletproof vests and a samurai sword," he said, chuckling.

Khmylevskiy is an entrepreneur — but 3 in 4 veterans said finding a job was a problem they worried about after being discharged from the army.

Six months into the war, he stepped on a mine in a forest in the eastern Lugansk region.

He embarked on a daylong trek from his

position to the nearest evacuation point, refusing strong painkillers so he could check and readjust the tourniquets — tight bandages that stop massive bleeding.

He credits the ordeal with saving his knee and avoiding a full leg amputation.

Climbing now gives him a dose of "pleasant fear and adrenaline," he said.

That mix can help veterans with their recovery, said Oleksandr Pedan, a Ukrainian TV host and activist who founded a club

called Second Wind to get veterans hiking, rafting and climbing.

"Military veterans after combat also need adrenaline, and heights give you adrenaline," Pedan said.

Climbing helped them feel "alive, energetic, athletic" again and has "turned out to be an extremely powerful tool for rehabilitation and reintegration."

Ukraine has been rolling out "veteran hubs" with co-working areas, event space,

children's corners and gyms to cater to the hundreds of thousands coming back from the front.

His prosthetic leg lying next to him as he waited his turn to climb the wall, Roman Govrylyak recounted how he lost his left leg after a mine explosion in 2023.

"The first thing I said — I remember this very clearly — was, 'But how am I going to ski?'"

The 35-year-old now goes hiking and fishing with other wounded veterans from the club, calling it a "great circle" of camaraderie. "You're always among people who understand you, to whom you don't need to explain anything," said Govrylyak, who now works in the defense technology sector.

Up to 60% of veterans return to their previous workplace after leaving the army, according to the veterans affairs ministry.

They have become "a particularly valuable group in the labour market," Veterans Affairs Minister Natalia Kalmykova told the RBC Ukraine news outlet in December.

"A veteran is someone who definitely won't be mobilized and who has experience," she added.

For climbing instructor Alina Bilyakova, 33, the amputee veterans are perfect students.

"They don't complain about anything. They're never late," she said.

"They inspire me to do more."

And they can often "do much more than people without disabilities," she added, lauding their willpower and resolve.

Khmylevskiy said he can sometimes even forget about his missing leg.

Jokingly, he called his wound — losing one leg below the knee joint — "the jackpot among potential misfortunes."

"Overall, it's something you can live with. Basically the same way you lived before, just with a few nuances."

Tunisia National Day Special

70 years of trusted partnership and progress

AHMED CHAFRA
AMBASSADOR OF TUNISIA



On Tunisia's National Day, I am honored, on behalf of the government of Tunisia, to convey our warmest greetings and deepest respect to the emperor and empress, as well as to the government and the people of Japan, a friendly nation with which Tunisia has built a relationship founded on trust, solidarity and enduring cooperation.

As Tunisia commemorates its independence, we also celebrate the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations with Japan. Our ties were forged in 1956, shortly after Tunisia regained its sovereignty. Over seven decades, this partnership has steadily evolved, guided by mutual respect, constructive dialogue and a shared belief in international cooperation.

Our collaboration has expanded across a range of sectors, including political consultation, economic exchange, education, culture and technical assistance. A notable highlight was Tunisia's participation in the Osaka Expo. Through its national pavilion, Tunisia presented the richness of its history, the diversity of its cultural heritage and the promise of its dynamic economy and tourism potential.

Tunisia has also reaffirmed its strong engagement in Japan-Africa cooperation

by participating at a high level in the ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Yokohama. The presence of Tunisia's prime minister reflected our deep attachment to the TICAD process.

Both countries are working to finalize negotiations on an investment protection and promotion agreement. This important instrument is expected to create a secure and predictable environment for investors and to further stimulate trade and economic exchanges between our nations.

Security cooperation remains another pillar of our dialogue. In June 2025, Tunisia and Japan held the fourth round of their security and counterterrorism consultations in Tokyo, providing an opportunity to exchange expertise and address common challenges.

Technical cooperation continues to deliver tangible results. With the support of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, major projects have been implemented in Tunisia in areas such as water treatment, water resource management, infrastructure and renewable energy. These initiatives contribute not only to economic growth, but also to knowledge transfer and capacity building, supporting Tunisia's sustainable development objectives.

Having been designated by JICA as an African Kaizen Center of Excellence, Tunisia is expected to play a key role in strengthening industrial competitiveness at both national and continental levels.

Indeed, Tunisia had the honor of hosting the Junior Chamber International World Congress last November, welcoming thou-

sands of young leaders and entrepreneurs from around the world, including 1,400 Japanese participants. Their strong presence reflected the dynamism of our youth, opening new perspectives for innovation, networking and business cooperation.

Today, we reaffirm our shared commitment to further strengthening this trusted and valued friendship. Together, we can continue to build an even more dynamic partnership, one that serves the interests of our peoples, promotes mutual prosperity and contributes meaningfully to peace, stability and sustainable development.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.

A warm and lasting friendship

YOHEI ONISHI
PARLIAMENTARY VICE MINISTER
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS



This year marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Tunisia, a significant milestone reflecting the deep bonds, mutual respect and lasting trust

between our nations.

Last year, our nations engaged in increased high-level exchanges, including visits to Japan by H.E. Prime Minister Sara Zafarani and H.E. Samir Abdelhafidh, minister of economy and planning.

In this commemorative year, I am fully committed to redoubling my efforts to further strengthen and expand our bilateral relations in various fields.

Additionally, we welcome the match between our teams in the World Cup this June. I sincerely wish for the continued health, happiness and prosperity of the Tunisian people, as well as the further growth and deepening of the warm and friendly ties between our countries.



70th ANNIVERSARY OF
TUNISIA - JAPAN
DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS
1956 - 2026

Congratulations
to the People of the Republic of Tunisia
on the Anniversary of Their Independence


石巻市
City of Ishinomaki

Congratulations
to the People of the Republic of Tunisia
on the Anniversary of Their Independence



Japan-Tunisia Friendship Association

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Their Independence

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