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Annual Report

**Conscientious Objection
to Military Service
in Europe
2024**





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Foreword by Daniele Taurino, EBCO President

This year's *EBCO Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe* is being released in an increasingly complex and militarised global context. From the re-emergence of conscription policies in various European countries to the ongoing brutal consequences of war across and beyond our continent, from the European Union's clashes with Trump's "new" United States to European rearmament plans (but ultimately affecting national states individually), the call for the recognition and protection of conscientious objectors is more urgent than ever.

The 2024 report highlights persistent violations and emerging threats to the right to conscientious objection under the Council of Europe framework. These include continued persecution of objectors in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Türkiye. Importantly, this year also marks a significant effort by EBCO and its partners to influence international legal mechanisms: our collective complaint to the European Committee of Social Rights concerning Greece exemplifies our strategic focus on enforcing legal protections under the European Social Charter.

We must underscore why this report, while global in scope, does not cover Israeli conscientious objectors or the war in Gaza. EBCO's mandate focuses on the Council of Europe area and its member and former member states. Although we stand in solidarity with all those resisting militarisation and violence, our reporting scope remains legally and institutionally bound. Nevertheless, we reaffirm our moral and political support for both Israeli and Palestinian peace activists, and we denounce all forms of occupation, aggression, and indiscriminate violence against civilians.

As conflicts rage in Ukraine, Armenia-Azerbaijan, and other regions, we must also speak clearly against the growing militarisation within the European Union. The push to *ReArm Europe* is not only a threat to the peaceful future of our societies: it also undermines the democratic space needed to foster a culture of peace and human rights. Conscientious objection is not only a human right (and especially a "youth right" according to the definition of the European Youth Forum, to which EBCO is member) but also a pillar of civil resistance to this trend, and must be protected and promoted as a legitimate and nonviolent act of dissent.

We strongly oppose the EU's proposed €800 billion increase in military spending, which represents a direct diversion of resources away from essential public services like health, education, and climate action. This massive investment will enrich arms manufacturers at the expense of peace, social justice, and the wellbeing of future generations. Rather than enhancing security, it will intensify war risks, deepen social inequalities, fuel climate breakdown, and increase debt and austerity. What Europe truly needs is not more weapons, but a bold shift toward real, social, ecological, and shared security for everyone.

This report is not only a register of violations, but also a testimony of resilience. EBCO continues its active participation in the international *ObjectWar Campaign* (promoted together the two worldwide network War Resisters' International and International Fellowship of Reconciliation and the German NGO Connection e.V.) which brings together civil society actors from across Europe and beyond to support objectors from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. We advocate for the rights of these individuals to asylum, protection, and freedom from persecution, and we work to ensure that no one is forced to take part in war against their conscience.

As part of our advocacy efforts, particular recognition should be given to the recent amicus curiae opinion issued by the Venice Commission (the Council of Europe's advisory body of constitutional law experts), in response to a constitutional complaint filed by Dmytro Zelinsky, a Seventh-Day Adventist imprisoned for reasons of conscientious objection. According to what we are fighting for, the Venice Commission



unequivocally stated that “under no circumstances may a conscientious objector to military service be obliged to bear or use arms, even in self-defence of the country.”

At the same time is also important to highlight a deeply disturbing development within PACE (the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe), where a motion was introduced aimed at discrediting Russian conscientious objectors and antiwar activists by urging states not to support them, including by denying asylum and withholding financial assistance. This move constitutes an attack on the entire peace movement, which, in this context, is being unjustly portrayed as a vehicle of Russian propaganda. We must recognize the necessity of resisting all forms of war, including information warfare, and of mobilizing civil society towards nonviolent resistance.

Just as I was about to begin writing this preface, we received the news of Pope Francis’s passing. He was a tireless advocate for peace and human dignity, and his voice will be deeply missed. Among some memories related to this Pope I’d like to remember when in February 2023, we were welcomed in Vatican with the tour of the three nonviolent women — Katya Lanko, Olga Karach, and Darya Berg — representing conscientious objectors, deserters, and draft evaders from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. After attending the general audience with Pope Francis, they declared: “We are here to say that there are people who do not want to fight, who do not want to find themselves with weapons in their hands, who want neither to kill nor be killed.” Pope Francis sent them his apostolic blessing.

I consider his last *Urbi et Orbi* message a kind of spiritual and political testament: “Nor is peace possible without true disarmament! The requirement that every people provide for its own defence must not turn into a race to rearmament. The light of Easter impels us to break down the barriers that create division and are fraught with grave political and economic consequences. It impels us to care for one another, to increase our mutual solidarity, and to work for the integral development of each human person. I appeal to all those in positions of political responsibility in our world not to yield to the logic of fear which only leads to isolation from others, but rather to use the resources available to help the needy, to fight hunger and to encourage initiatives that promote development. These are the ‘weapons’ of peace: weapons that build the future, instead of sowing seeds of death!”

Our report concludes with strong recommendations to states, including the full recognition of the right to conscientious objection in all circumstances - war or peace, conscription or voluntary service - and the provision of non-punitive, truly civilian service. We urge the implementation of legal reforms that reflect international human rights standards, particularly those articulated by the United Nations Human Rights Committee and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Let this report be a resource, a wake-up call, and a roadmap for action. Let it remind us that peace begins with the individual decision to say no to violence, and that this decision must be respected and protected, especially in this war preparation times.

Daniele Taurino

*President, European Bureau for Conscientious Objection
June 2025, Rome-Brussels*



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1. DEVELOPMENTS IN INTERNATIONAL BODIES & JURISPRUDENCE

1.1. COUNCIL OF EUROPE

1.1.1. EBCO's collective complaint to the ECSR for violations of social and economic rights of conscientious objectors

As reported by Georgios Karatzas and covered in Section 2.19.

On 30 June 2024, EBCO submitted a collective complaint to the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) concerning violations of the European Social Charter in the case of conscientious objectors in Greece.¹

The complaint concerns violations of social and economic rights of conscientious objectors to military service, performing the alternative civilian service, in conjunction with the violation of the right to freedom from discrimination. EBCO submits that Greece is in violation of Article 30 (The right to protection against poverty and social exclusion) and Article 31 (The right to housing), insofar conscientious objectors performing alternative civilian service are not provided with adequate resources and housing, as well as Article 16 (The right of the family to social, legal and economic protection), insofar the families of conscientious objectors are also affected and not adequately protected. EBCO submits that Greece is in violation of the above articles in themselves, as well as in conjunction with Article E (Non-discrimination), insofar the legal provisions for conscientious objectors performing alternative civilian service, and their families, provide less protection in comparison to the protection provided to conscripts performing military service, and their families. The discrimination faced by the conscientious objectors is on the grounds of "religion" (as for those conscientious objectors citing religious grounds for their conscientious objection), and "political or other opinion" (as for those conscientious objectors citing ideological grounds for their conscientious objection), which are both covered in the definition of discrimination in Article E. In certain cases, the above violations are in conjunction with violations of other articles, such as Article 1.2, as for the length of alternative service for a specific category of reduced service, and Article 11, as for providing housing inside hospitals, which increases health risks.

By the end of 2024, the examination of the admissibility of EBCO's collective complaint by the ECSR was still pending.

1.2. EUROPEAN UNION

1.2.1. Recent developments

On 30th October, the Commission published its latest Enlargement Report on Ukraine's application for membership.²

Sadly, although EU officials have raised the treatment of conscientious objectors in private, the report identifies no freedom of religion issues in Ukraine.

Likewise, the Report on Türkiye,³ published on the same date, seems to omit any mention of freedom of religion or belief, although on several other human rights issues, notably freedom of expression, it observes euphemistically that Türkiye "remains at an early stage of preparation".

¹<https://rm.coe.int/cc242casedoc1-en/1680b0dbd6>

²https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/1924a044-b30f-48a2-99c1-50edeac14da1_en?filename=Ukraine%20Report%202024.pdf

³https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/8010c4db-6ef8-4c85-aa06-814408921c89_en?filename=T%C3%BCrkiye%20Report%202024.pdf



1.3. UNITED NATIONS

1.3.1. Treaty Bodies

1.3.1.1. Human Rights Committee

In the course of 2024, the Committee included the issue of conscientious objection to military service in its Concluding Observations on Periodic Reports under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on **Chile** (140th Session - March), the **Syrian Arab Republic** (141st Session - July) **Greece** and **Türkiye** (142nd Session, October)

On **Chile**, the Concluding Observations stated: *“The Committee continues to regret, as in its previous concluding observations, that the legislation in force in the State party does not recognize conscientious objection to military service (art. 18). The Committee reiterates that the State party should expedite the adoption of legislation recognizing conscientious objection to military service.”*⁴

With regard to **Syria**, the Concluding Observations included the following: *“While welcoming the information that the State party is considering shortening the duration of mandatory military service, the Committee remains concerned that the State party continues to allow for individuals to opt out of military service by paying a fee and does not recognize the right to conscientious objection to military service (art. 18). The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation and urges the State party to respect the right to conscientious objection to military service and consider establishing an alternative civil service of a non-punitive nature.”*⁵

EBCO members and associates played an active part around the examination of Greece and Türkiye in October. Connection eV⁶ and Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI)⁷ made submissions on both; for Greece the CPTI submission was made jointly with EBCO; for Türkiye EBCO member Conscientious Objection Watch⁸ made its own submission. Local EBCO members participated by Zoom in informal briefing sessions on both; in the formal briefings (which were in person only) Connection eV spoke on Greece and CPTI on Türkiye. After a dialogue which sometimes seemed frustratingly not to probe deeply enough, the Committee made strong recommendations on both countries:

On **Greece**, the Committee observed that it *“remains concerned about: (a) the length of alternative service for conscientious objectors, which is longer than military service; (b) the composition of the committee responsible for examining applications from citizens to be granted conscientious objector status and its reported lack of independence and impartiality; and (c) reports indicating that conscientious objectors are discriminated against on the basis of the different grounds of objection to military service (arts. 14, 18 and 26)”*, and recommended: *“The State party should ensure that its legislation recognizing the right to conscientious objection to military service encompasses an alternative to military service that is accessible to all conscientious objectors*

⁴CCPR/C/CHL/CO/7, 1st. May, 2024, paras 39, 40.

⁵CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4, 21st August, 2024, paras 38, 39.

⁶<https://en.connection-ev.org/article-4260>

Full report on Greece: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FGRC%2F59913&Lang=en

Full report on Türkiye: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FTUR%2F59789&Lang=en

⁷Full report on Greece: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FGRC%2F59918&Lang=en

Full report on Türkiye:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FTUR%2F59755&Lang=en

⁸https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FTUR%2F59757&Lang=en



and is not punitive or discriminatory in terms of its nature, cost or duration. The State party should also consider placing the assessment of applications for conscientious objector status under the full control of civilian authorities.”⁹ The Committee also examined to which extent Greece has implemented the Views of the Committee in the Petromelidis v. Greece case. For more details see Section 2.19..

On **Türkiye**, the Committee continued “**to regret that the State party does not recognize the right to conscientious objection to compulsory military service, that there is no provision of alternatives to it and that conscientious objectors face administrative and judicial fines and imprisonment**”, adding “*It is of concern that refusal to perform military service is regarded as a continuing offence, with no limit as to the number of sanctions that may be imposed on an individual objector. The Committee continues to be concerned that objectors are in practice deprived of some of their civil and political rights. The Committee is also concerned that criticism of compulsory military service is criminalized under article 318 of the Criminal Code (arts. 2, 18, 19 and 26).*”, and recommended “*The State party should recognize the right to conscientious objection to compulsory military service and grant conscientious objectors access to alternative, civilian service of a non-discriminatory and non-punitive nature. It should also consider repealing or amending article 318 of the Criminal Code.*”¹⁰ It did not, however, take up the suggestion by Connection eV that following the ECtHR’s judgement in the *Kanatli* case (see Section ..., above) it should refer also to Türkiye’s responsibility for similar violations in the northern part of Cyprus.

Conscientious objection to military service did not feature at all in the examination of other State reports, including those on a number of countries in the EBCO area - **Croatia, France, Malta, Serbia**, and the **UK**. This, however, was not surprising as in none is it currently an important issue, and it had not featured in the examination of previous reports, except from Serbia before 2011. Although for all of these, and all countries in other regions, Conscience and Peace Tax international¹¹ had made submissions this was principally in the interests of maintaining a comprehensive record, without great expectations that any issues would be raised. The one slight exception was France, where the Committee might have asked questions about the introduction of a *Service national universel* for young people (see country report on France), but probably felt that the scheme remains too nebulous for serious consideration.

Likewise, on all the States where the issue of conscientious objection to military service had previously come up in the past and on which it prepared “Lists of Issues” in the course of 2024 - **Austria**¹² and **Azerbaijan**¹³ (“Lists of issues prior to reporting” under the new “simplified reporting procedure”) and **Mongolia**¹⁴, the Committee did again include the issue. The Reports from Austria and Azerbaijan are likely

⁹CCPR/C/GRC/CO/3, 28th November 2024, paras 28,29.

¹⁰CCPR/C/TUR/CO/2, 7th November 2024, paras 49, 50.

¹¹Full report on Croatia: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FHRV%2F58565&Lang=en

Full report on Malta: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FMLT%2F58662&Lang=en

Full report on Serbia: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FSRB%2F57436&Lang=en

Full report on UK: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FGBR%2F57471&Lang=en

¹²Full report on Austria by CPTI: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FICS%2FAUT%2F58304&Lang=en

¹³Full report on Azerbaijan by CPTI: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FICS%2FAZE%2F57006&Lang=en

¹⁴Full report on Mongolia by Connection e.V.: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FMNG%2F62291&Lang=en

Full report on Mongolia by CPTI: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FMNG%2F62293&Lang=en



to appear sometime in 2026 and be examined in 2026 or 2027; Mongolia's report, under the "traditional" system, is to be examined in the Committee's March 2025 Session.

On **Austria**, the Committee asks; " *Recalling the Committee's most recent concluding observations (para. 34), please report on the measures taken to provide all conscientious objectors with an alternative to military service that is not punitive or discriminatory in terms of its nature, cost or duration. Please clarify whether the State party intends: (a) to revise article 1 (2) of the Civilian Service Act establishing a time limit on the submission of applications for recognition of a conscientious objector status; (b) to amend the legal framework to allow for serving members of the armed forces to apply for early release for reasons of conscience; and (c) to raise the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into the military to 18 years of age.*"¹⁵

This is an excellent example of the detailed follow-up from one Report to the next which can occur at best; it will also be noted that the specific issues raised go beyond the normal list, including most unusually and encouragingly the situation of serving members of the armed forces.

The List of Issues prior to reporting on **Azerbaijan** contains (at the end of a long paragraph on freedom of religion of belief) " *Please describe the steps taken to provide, in law and in practice, for non-discriminatory alternative service of a civilian nature for conscientious objectors to military service and to repeal all sanctions against them.*"¹⁶

In the List of Issues on **Mongolia**, the Committee asked " *Please provide information on measures taken to ensure: (...) (c) that the right to conscientious objection to military service is guaranteed in law and in practice to all individuals who are required to perform military service, that alternatives to military service are accessible to all conscientious objectors without discrimination, and that such alternatives are not punitive or discriminatory in nature or duration, compared with military service.*"

In terms of the Committee's agenda, then, there is no change; no new States were added to those to which it had posed questions in the past; on the other hand, none were lost, there were some small advances in substance (see Austria) and in particular questions continued to be posed to States like Chile, Mongolia and Syria where we have had no individual cases to report in the recent past. It is our job to ensure that the Committee continues to focus on the issue even where there are no recent headline-grabbing violations...

1.3.1.2. Committee on Enforced Disappearances

On 23rd and 24th September, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances considered Ukraine's Initial Report. In their Concluding Observations, the Committee expressed concern about "Allegations of arbitrary detention of conscripts, including conscientious objectors, in military commissariats [Recruitment Offices], sometimes incommunicado, with a view to ensure their conscription", and called on the Ukrainian government to "ensure that cases of arbitrary detention of conscripts .. are promptly, thoroughly and independently investigated; that alleged perpetrators are prosecuted and punished if found responsible, and that victims are provided with effective remedies."¹⁷

1.3.2. Human Rights Council

1.3.2.1. OHCHR Report

The most significant development in 2024 was the publication of the Report from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Conscientious objection to military service,¹⁸ which had been

¹⁵CCPR/C/AUT/QPR/6, 20th August, 2024, para 21.

¹⁶CCPR/C/AZE/QPR/5, 16th May, 2024, para 21.

¹⁷CED/C/UKR/CO/1, 4th October 2024, paras 51(2), 52(d)

¹⁸A/HRC/56/30, 24th April 2024.



mandated in Resolution 51/6, and the discussions towards which were reported in the EBCO Report for 2023.

The report was most impressive, and represented a forceful statement of the implications of the full recognition of the right of conscientious objection to military service which is all the more welcome at a time when it is coming under increasing threat in practice.

It considered in detail the various, reinforcing, ways in which the right of conscientious objection to military service can be embodied by States in domestic law and constitutions (paras 8 to 14), and mentioned the various exceptions made by States, including of selective conscientious objectors - ie persons who believed that the use of force was justified in some cases but not in others - and also, very significantly in the context of the developments described in our annual report situations of armed conflict, while pointing out in all cases that the international legal standards did not permit of limitations on the right (paras 15 to 22). The consequences of the lack of recognition of the right were briefly outlined (paras 23 and 24); recommendations were made on the elimination of such consequences. Procedures for the recognition of conscientious objection were discussed at some length, (paras 25 to 32), and the question of the refugee status of conscientious objectors, another issue of major current concern, was raised (paras 33 and 34). Alternative service arrangements were examined in detail (paras 35 to 44), and finally the report touched on "other measures to respect and ensure the right to conscientious objection" - refraining from unduly restricting the rights of those representing or advocating for the rights of conscientious objectors, ensuring good faith in the implementation of the right, promoting human rights within the public administration, promoting understanding of and tolerance for conscientious objection through public messaging and education, and implementing a participatory approach to decision making (paras 44 to 52): - in all these respects the report goes deeper into the underlying enabling environment than did any of its predecessors.

The concluding section is worth quoting in full:

"53. There is a need for a renewed political commitment to the universal implementation of the right of conscientious objection to military service. In this regard, the High Commissioner makes the following recommendations:

54. States should give recognition to the right of conscientious objection to military service in their domestic legal systems. In accordance with international human rights law, the domestic legal basis should be:

- (a) General, recognising all forms of thought, conscience and religion protected under international human rights law;
- (b) Applicable to all forms of military service, including voluntary service and service in military reserve forces, as thought, conscience and religion may change over time;
- (c) Applicable in all contexts, including situations of armed conflict and during mobilisation;
- (d) Unconditional on the further implementing laws;
- (e) Justiciable.

55. The procedure allowing for the recognition of conscientious objection should be aimed at facilitating the exercise of the right. To this end, States should implement the recommendation contained in previous reports (A/HRC/41/23 and A/HRC/50/43). In addition:

- (a) States should consider accepting claims of conscientious objection without enquiry; or, in the alternative;



(b) States retaining a system of enquiry of claims of conscientious objection should review their procedures to ensure that they preserve respect for the dignity of individuals, are conducive to promoting the right of conscientious objection to military service, are limited to identifying relevant information without arbitrary interference in the privacy of those concerned, and are under civilian control.

56. In order to facilitate respect for the right to conscientious objection, States should consider removing compulsory alternative service for individuals exempted from military service. Should States choose to maintain compulsory alternative service, such compulsory service should:

- (a) Be compatible with the reasons for conscientious objection.
- (b) Serve the public interest. In particular, States should consider specifying in law the public interest purpose to be promoted by alternatives to military service;
- (c) Encompass a variety of alternatives spanning various sectors, and States should consider including alternatives outside the public sector, as appropriate. States should also consider how to take into account the preferences of conscientious objectors for placement in alternative services;
- (d) Not be punitive or discriminatory;

57. States should also take other measures to respect and ensure the right of conscientious objection to military service. To this end, States should:

- (a) Refrain from unduly restricting the rights of those advocating for the rights of conscientious objection to military service or of conscientious objectors;
- (b) Implement appropriate measures, including education and training, to foster a culture of respect for conscientious objection to military service within relevant parts of the public administration and in the broader society;
- (c) Implement a participatory approach in the development and review of law and policies related to conscientious objection to military service with the involvement of affected stakeholders.

58. States should respect and protect the rights of conscientious objectors arriving from third States, including through adherence to the principle of non-refoulement and international human rights and refugee law and the implementation and dissemination of guidance on the interpretation of applicable international law, such as the UNHCR guidelines on international protection on claims relating to military service.

It will be noted that quite apart from the general underlying theme of enhancing recognition of and respect for the right, these recommendations at two points go slightly farther than any of their predecessors, by not only welcoming that some States accept claims of conscientious objection as valid without enquiry, but recommending that others consider do so, and also that they consider not requiring a civilian alternative service of conscientious objectors - a state which to date has been taken only by Norway.

Ukraine

The office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights gave oral, and occasionally written, updates on the situation of human rights in Ukraine at each Session of the Council,¹⁹ including not only the violations associated with the Russian invasion and occupation of territory, but also raising various concerns about human rights in the territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine. These concerns did not, however,

¹⁹A/HRC/55/CRP.9 (covering the entire period from the Russian invasion until the end of 2023), 26th March 2024, A/HRC/55/CRP.10, 26th March 2024; A/HRC/56/1, 3rd July 2024; A/HRC/57/7, 2nd October 2024.



include anything regarding military mobilisation until the update written in December 2024 for the Intersessional Update, in the event postponed to January 8th 2025, which stated; “Under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the right of conscientious objection to military service allows no restrictions or derogation. The right to conscientious objection to military service is also enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine. However domestic law in Ukraine unduly restricts this Constitutional right only to some forms of religion or belief, excluding others, contrary to applicable obligations of equality before the law and non-discrimination under the ICCPR. Furthermore, military service mandated under the legislative framework in relation to conscription during mobilisation, while granting exemptions on other bases, does not appear to allow for any exemptions to military service for reasons of conscientious objection, even for those religions or beliefs that otherwise would qualify for exemptions under domestic law in Ukraine. Thus, during the reporting period, [September through November 2024] courts handed down five decisions convicting conscientious objectors belonging to religious communities which would otherwise be eligible for alternative non-military service under domestic law, for evading military service. The individuals were sentenced to one and three years of imprisonment [in a footnote, it quotes the Human Rights Committee’s General Comment 35 to the effect that all detention is arbitrary when imposed as punishment for the legitimate exercise of Convention rights]. In three cases, courts *inter alia* highlighted the lack of legal regulations providing for the exercise of this right during periods of mobilisation and martial law. In one case, the court considered conscientious objection as itself evidence of the individual’s intent to evade military service, while it did not address the defendant’s arguments regarding conscientious objection at all in another.”

Moreover, “during the reporting period, OHCHR documented the cases of five men who were assigned to military duty and transferred to a military training facility after attempting to exercise their right of conscientious objection to military service [One of the five was still undergoing military training at the time of the report]. In all cases, the men were arbitrarily detained between two to four days by military personnel responsible for conscription and subjected to ill-treatment or torture. They faced threats of violence and ‘being sent to the frontline’, and four of them were subjected to beatings and suffocation and being dragged across the floor.”²⁰

In another footnote, it is reported that “According to the Government of Ukraine, the process of bringing the Law of Ukraine “On Alternative (Non-Military) Service” in line with Article 35 of the Constitution is ongoing, and on 4 October 2024, an interdepartmental working group was created to prepare proposals for legislative amendments to allow for alternative non-military service during martial law.”

Resolution 55/43 addressed the obligations of Ukraine only in Operative Paragraph 7, in which it demands that all parties to the conflict abide by the stipulations of the Geneva Convention regarding the treatment of prisoners of war.

Russian Federation

The second Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation again included a section on conscientious objection to military service, which covered many issues regarding the current mobilisation. Obviously much of what was reported mirrored the information in the previous Report, but there were new developments. Noting that, despite the fact that “The Russian Constitution guarantees the right to alternative civilian service to every citizen”, there is no legal provision for such service under mobilisation, she reports “In November 2023 the Supreme Court affirmed the right to alternative civilian service during mobilisation but the authorities have yet to establish a procedure for this, and conscientious objectors continue to be forcibly sent to fight. Those who refuse have been tortured

²⁰Ibid, para 91.



and criminally prosecuted.”²¹ “Regular contract troops”, she adds, “are not allowed to request alternative civilian service” - she might have expanded this to say that they have no ability to request release on the grounds of conscientious objection, which right is broader than that of alternative civilian service. “ Physical violence and underhanded tactics have been used to force men into signing contracts to join the war, she reports, “Individuals who avoid mobilisation can be prosecuted.”²² Last year, she reported on the disproportionate targeting for mobilisation of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities and the spread of recruitment into prisons; to this list she adds this year “socioeconomically vulnerable people, (...) Russian citizens who had recently acquired citizenship, men with military-related specialisations and, in some cases, migrants with temporary residence.” Regarding the last-named group “87. Military recruitment offices have been opened in migration processing offices; in the Kaluga region, officials demanded signed military contracts as a precondition for applying for naturalisation, contrary to Russian law. Migrants, in particular from Central Asia, have been targeted by police raids, forcing them into signing contracts to join the war. The head of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation claimed that, by June 2024, more than 30,000 foreigners who had received citizenship but had not registered for military service, had been “caught”. About 10,000 have already been sent to the war zone.”²³

Regarding recruitment in prisons: “A March 2024 federal law regulated the practice of prisoner recruitment. It exempts a suspect from an ongoing criminal prosecution or changes an inmate’s existing conviction to conditional if they sign a military contract. According to estimates by the non-governmental organisation Russia Behind Bars, between June 2022 and June 2024, around 170,000 prisoners were sent to the war, including about 1,000 women.”²⁴

Finally, she gives more details of the situation of conscientious objectors among contract troops: “Regular contract troops are not allowed to resign. New, harsher punishments have been added to the law for desertion, going absent without leave and opposing a superior. A new crime of “voluntary surrender” has also been added. Reports suggest that torture and ill-treatment are used by Russian army commanders as punishment against servicemen who refuse to obey orders, including locking soldiers in pits in the ground, called “zindan”, without food or water.”²⁵

Among her recommendations, she calls upon the Russian authorities to “Ensure full respect for the constitutional right to conscientious objection to military service, including in the context of mobilisation - equally for those called up and for those already serving - and provide for a strictly civilian alternative to military service. Without delay, end the harassment and criminal prosecution of conscientious objectors and the practice of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment of those refusing mobilisation or refusing to fight”²⁶ and upon the States members of the United Nations to “Consider granting protection and asylum to conscientious objectors of military service who have fled the Russian Federation and exercise due diligence to prevent their expulsion or extradition back to the Russian Federation in violation of the principle of non-refoulement, since there is a well-founded fear of persecution and substantial grounds to believe that, upon their return, they would be prosecuted and face imprisonment and/or torture and ill-treatment in custody.”²⁷

The consequent resolution did not specifically mention conscientious objection to military service, although early in the brief section of Operational paragraphs it did “urge the Russian authorities to uphold

²¹A/HRC/57/59, 13th September 2024, para 85.

²²Ibid, para 86.

²³Ibid, paras 87, 88.

²⁴Ibid, para 89.

²⁵Ibid, para 90.

²⁶Ibid, para 150p.

²⁷Ibid, para 151e.



the fundamental freedoms of thought, conscience, religion or belief²⁸ It did, however, building on details given by the Special Rapporteur, in the course of the preamble “note with deep concern the laws on so-called ‘foreign agents’, ‘extremism’ and ‘undesirable organisations’.

Belarus

The question of conscientious objection to military service was not specifically mentioned in the update by the High Commissioner at the March Session, nor this year’s report by the Special Rapporteur, in June, and thus did not feature in the resolutions adopted. Both however expressed concern Presidential Decree No. 278 of 4th September which forces Belarusians abroad to return to Belarus if they want to renew their passports. “Returning to Belarus places individuals at risk of violence and repression²⁹ -. of course of particular concern to those who have left the country in the hope of avoiding military mobilisation. The Special Rapporteur points out that this may ultimately render stateless the children born abroad to Belarusians who are unable to return³⁰. In Operative Paragraph 4(l), Resolution 56/55 strongly urges the Belarusian authorities to “withdraw and prevent measures that undermine the enjoyment of any human rights, including those of Belarusians living abroad, including the Presidential Decree adopted in September 2023 ordering the consulates of Belarus to stop renewing or extending the passports of such persons and limiting other consular services”.

The Special Rapporteur also draws attention to Law 363-Z of 3rd April 2024, which as part of tightened surveillance of potential conscripts, “obliges mobile operators to share phone numbers of persons liable for military service with military enlistment offices and the State Security Committee and legalises the distribution of military summonses by SMS”.³¹ Failure to respond to such SMS results in prosecution.

As well as extending the mandate of the Special Rapporteur by a further year, the Resolution mandated the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry on the situation of human rights in Belarus, to report at the 58th Session of the Council in March 2025. This may seem somewhat to duplicate the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, but it importantly provides more resources.

Eritrea

Predictably, military service again featured strongly in the Report by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Eritrea.³² In his opening summary (para 2), he lists first “the continued violations committed against Eritrean citizens in the context of the indefinite compulsory national service”; he also “denounces the situation of Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers and calls upon States to express solidarity, adequately protect them and ensure their access to and enjoyment of human rights”. In para 3, as well as “serious human rights and humanitarian law violations” in the context of Eritrea’s intervention in the war in Ethiopia, he refers to “the individual persecution of draft evaders and deserters and the collective punishment of their families and communities”.

Section VI of his report focusses on national military service, which had been covered at length the previous year (see EBCO Report 2023/4). There were no reforms to the indefinite service or the recruitment methods, no word of any investigation of abuses committed against those performing military service. No details had been released on the thousands of Eritreans believed to have been killed or seriously injured in the Ethiopian conflict.

²⁸Resolution 57/20, OP2.

²⁹A/HRC/55/61, 25th March 2024, para 49

³⁰A/HRC/56/65, 9th May 2024, para 26

³¹A/HRC/56/65, para 68.

³²A/HRC/56/24, 7th May 2024.



Subsequently, under the heading of “religious persecution”, para 45 addresses the specific issue of conscientious objection:

“ Eritrea does not recognize the right to conscientious objection, and no provisions have been made to allow for an alternative civilian service for those who object to military service on religious, ethical or other conscientious grounds. During the reporting period, the Special Rapporteur received substantial evidence regarding the forcible enrolment of worshippers of non-authorized religions, including conscription in the military service of Jehovah Witnesses, as well as of religious leaders and clergy of registered denominations, including the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo faith, in contradiction with their religious beliefs and against the dogma of the church.” In para 57 he adds, “ The requirement that all high school students finalize their studies at the Sawa Military Camp, where they receive military training, prevents Jehovah’s Witnesses from completing their high school education, due to their conscientious objection to military service”

Resolution 56/17 does not go into detail on violations, but in Operative Paragraph 6b calls for “a demonstrated commitment to introducing reforms to the national/military service”.

1.3.2.2. Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council

Communication on Ukraine

In November 2023, the Special Rapporteurs on the right to freedom of assembly and association, on minority issues and on freedom of religion or belief addressed a communication to the Government of Ukraine.³³ The communication dealt first with alleged persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which has retained its links to the Moscow Patriarchate, but also with the situation regarding conscientious objection to military service. It noted the legislative and constitutional provisions with regard to conscientious objection, but the suspension of these provisions under martial law. It specifically raised the cases of Vitaly Aleksienko, of Andrii Anatolianiiovych Vyshnevetskyi and Yuri Sheliashenko, all reported in the EBCO Report 2023/24. The Special Rapporteurs express their concern about “the prosecution of persons who refuse to perform the compulsory military service based on reasons of conscientious objections, including those who are advocating the right of conscientious objection to military service”. They remind the Government that “the right to conscientious objection to military service derives from the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion pursuant to article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ICCPR. They note also that if confirmed the allegations “would also contravene articles 2 (effective remedies), 3 (non-discrimination), 9 (liberty and security of persons) and 26 (equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground) guaranteed under the ICCPR”. They ask the State to indicate “any measure taken to ensure that the right of freedom of religion or belief of Mr. Andrii Anatolianiiovych Vyshnevetskyi and Mr Vitaly Aleksienko is being respected.”, to “provide information regarding the status of the investigation of Mr. Yuri Sheliashenko including the factual and legal basis for his night house arrest.”, and to “explain how the decision taken to suspend the implementation of alternative service as provided for through law of Ukraine (...) ‘On alternative (non-military) service’, is compatible with the right of conscientious objection to military service derived from article 18 of the ICCPR”.

In accordance with practice, after 60 days the communication and the reply received from Ukraine on 22nd January 2024 were published on the OHCHR website (<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/>). The reply did not directly address the protection of the right of conscientious objection to military service, focussing instead on procedural information; it detailed the availability of free legal aid, but reported that this had not been sought in any of the three cases quoted. Nothing else was said about the Vyshnevetskyi, case; with

³³AL.UKR.1.2023, 8th November, 2023.



regard to Aleksiienko the procedures for pre-trial investigation, including the presumption of innocence, were outlined.

With regard to Yurii Sheliashenko (a Board Member of EBCO), the reply seemed to give startling new information. It stated that a pre-trial investigation was underway under Part 2 of Article 436-1 of the Criminal Code (“production and distribution of communist, Nazi symbols and propaganda of communist and national socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regimes”). It also stated that “the restraining measure in the form of night house arrest was imposed on the subject and subsequently extended by the investigating judge of the Solomyansky District Court of Kiev”. Whatever the (unexplained) background to this account of the charges under investigation, it was felt necessary to issue a correction dated 20th June 2024 to this “editorial mistake”. In accordance with the information which had already been given, it was reported that in fact the investigation was under Part 2 of Article 436-2 (“justification, recognition as lawful, denial of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which began in 2014, including by presenting the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine as an internal civil war as well as justification, recognition as lawful, denial of the temporary occupation of a part of the territory of Ukraine, as well as glorification of the persons who carried out the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine which began in 2014, representatives of the armed formations of the Russian Federation, irregular illegal armed groups”). Not mentioned is that the only evidence which has been publicly cited, a declaration published on 21st September 2022 in the name of the Ukrainian Peace Movement, cannot be interpreted as containing any of these assertions.

Regarding the decision to suspend the implementation of alternative service, the reply quotes paragraphs 11 and 8 of the Human Rights Committee’s General Comment 22, and Article 3 of ICCPR on permissible limitations on the right, without mentioning that the Human Rights Committee now holds that conscientious objection to military service is covered by Article 18.1, to which no limitations are permitted nor derogations allowed. It quotes Article 8 of the Law On Legal Regime of Martial Law is quoted, which permits the military command “to introduce and implement, within the limits of temporary restrictions on the constitutional rights and freedoms of a person and citizen (...) such measures of the legal regime of martial law as, in particular, restrictions on alternative (non-military) service. The declaration of martial law is quoted, but there is no reference to the specific decision to suspend alternative service. It is revealed that between 2022 and November 2023, 20 persons had applied to local free legal aid centres for “free primary legal aid on the procedure for obtaining a deferment from military service due to religious beliefs” and that it had received 14 similar telephone enquiries. Nothing is revealed as to what advice may have been given.

The constitutional and legislative provisions governing military recruitment and alternative service are quoted in full. As the Law on Alternative (Non-Military) Service is only applicable in place of “regular military service” which is suspended under martial law, it is reported that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights “referring to numerous cases of citizens whose military service contradicts their religious beliefs and who belong to active religious organisations whose beliefs do not allow for the use of weapons, being called up for military service during mobilisation, and referring to the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, the Commissioner considers it necessary to amend the current version of Law No. 1975 or adopt a new version in order to remove obstacles to the right to replace military duty during mobilisation guaranteed by Article 35 of the Constitution (...) The possibility for citizens to perform alternative (non-Military) service for the period of martial law is also in the focus of the Government of Ukraine. Thus on 19 October 2023, representatives of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations (AUCCRO) had a meeting with the Prime Minister (...) during which, among other things, this issue was discussed. As a result, the Prime Minister instructed ministries and departments to work on the possibility



of regulating the performance of military duty under martial law and replacing it with alternative (non-military) service. This issue is currently under consideration. In order to effectively address this issue, to ensure everyone's right to freedom of thought and freedom of conscience, as well as to prevent abuse of the right to alternative (non-military) service, to guarantee the defence capability of the state and the number of the Armed Forces (...) the DESS [State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience] holds working consultations with the relevant executive authorities and representatives of the AUCCRO".

It might be observed that, more than a year on, as can be seen from the report on the State in the following section, there is no sign of any outcome of these various discussions and considerations, either in the form of legislative amendments or even of an interim relaxation in the intensity of launching prosecutions for the refusal of mobilisation on grounds of conscience.

1.3.2.3. Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

The extent to which conscientious objection features in a UPR Session depends very much on the States reviewed at the Session. After a considerable number of recommendations in 2023, very few States where this issue was sufficiently prominent to attract attention in the UPR were reviewed in 2024. There were none in the 45th Session (January), and only Eritrea in the 46th Session (May). CPTI, together with the Child Rights International Network (CRIN) had also made submissions on Cyprus and New Zealand, largely focussing on juvenile recruitment, but none of their suggestions for recommendations were taken up. In the 47th Session (November), however, Costa Rica made recommendations to both Albania and Norway, notably raising for the first time under the UPR the question of conscientious objection for serving members of the armed forces.

Eritrea received four recommendations relating directly to conscientious objection or alternative service, including the first on the subject to have been made in the UPR by Madagascar:³⁴

"Reform the system of compulsory national service by prohibiting the recruitment of minors and establishing an alternative civilian service".

"Release individuals who are arbitrarily detained, including those detained indefinitely, for exercising freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, or religion or belief, including the inability to conscientiously object to Eritrea's compulsory, indefinite national service" (United States of America);³⁵

"End the practice of unlimited national service and establish provisions for conscientious objection to military service" (Germany);³⁶

"Recognize the right of conscientious objection to military service and establish an alternative service of civilian nature for conscientious objectors" (Panama)³⁷

The recommendation from Norway³⁸, more specifically than others relating to repression of minority religions, obviously includes detained conscientious objectors.

"End the practices of arbitrary arrest, indefinite detention, torture and ill-treatment of detainees and release human rights defenders and political prisoners, including journalists and members of religious groups held on account of their beliefs or affiliations");

³⁴A/HRC/57/14, 19th June 2024, para 132.159

³⁵Ibid, para 132.107

³⁶Ibid, para 132.144

³⁷Ibid, para 132.148

³⁸Ibid, para 132.101



Scattered through the long list of recommendations are many others which cumulatively address comprehensively and in a nuanced way various aspects of Eritrea's militarisation

Eight³⁹ recommendations, in addition to that by Germany already quoted, called on Eritrea to end indefinite military service; the UK and Australia⁴⁰ addressed provision of employment opportunities and prohibition of forced labour, respectively, in the specific post-demobilisation context.

Seven other States⁴¹ joined Madagascar in calling for an end to juvenile recruitment; Lithuania specifically alluded to the practice of forcing students to complete their secondary education in the vicinity of a military camp.

Recruitment of women and children by militias and armed groups was addressed by Uganda; the treatment of women in the armed forces by Slovakia, Indonesia and Germany.⁴²

Abuses by security and paramilitary forces were addressed by Malta (100), and by the armed forces in the specific context of their involvement in the Ethiopian war by Luxembourg, Spain, Costa Rica, Canada and Ukraine.⁴³

Finally, Zambia and Costa Rica⁴⁴ called for an end of the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians.

All of these recommendations were among those (unusually in the UPR, the majority) merely "noted" by Eritrea, except that referring to militias and armed groups which it claimed, credibly given the ubiquity of the armed forces, did not exist.

To **Albania**, Costa Rica recommended that it "establish conscientious objection to military service for professional soldiers and reservists."⁴⁵ Albania "approved" this recommendation without further comment.⁴⁶ Albania did not report to the Council of Europe on its implementation of Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)4 on human rights of members of the armed forces, but we have traced a reference⁴⁷ to an ILO finding that a 2014 directive from the Ministry of Defence violated the Forced Labour Convention by stating that the contracts of military personnel were for a fixed six-year term. "Within this period, they cannot resign or leave. In case of violation, they may face criminal prosecution." This applied "even in time of peace" - an exemption from the Convention applies to the armed forces in time of war, but this of course does not affect the right of conscientious objection to military service, from which no derogation is permitted. Despite this directive, the State reported in reply to EBCO's questionnaire for last year's Report that a number of armed forces personnel had been released from their contracts "for various family reasons", but there has been no mention of any such releases being on grounds of conscientious objection.

In the case of **Norway**, Costa Rica's recommendation was that it "provide for conscientious objection to military service for professional soldiers and reservists in accordance with international human rights standards and process asylum applications from objectors in accordance with UNHCR Guidelines on

³⁹Slovakia (para 132.109) Luxembourg (132.157), Italy (132.158), Estonia (132.160), Malta (132.161), Netherlands (132.162), Austria (132.165), and Czechia (132.166)

⁴⁰Paras 132.164 and 132.167, respectively.

⁴¹Luxembourg (Para 132.157,) Italy (132.158), Lithuania (132.206), Bulgaria (132.207), Spain (132.208), Zambia (132.209), Argentina (132.277)

⁴²Paras 132.281, 132.163, 132.267, and 132.276, respectively.

⁴³Paras 132.100, 132.115, 132.116, 132.117, 132.118 and 132.126, respectively.

⁴⁴Paras 132.127 and 132.129.

⁴⁵A/HRC/58/5, 28th December 2024, para 132

⁴⁶A/HRC/58/5/Add.1, 12th February 2025, para 3a

⁴⁷Nen Si, " 'Modern day slaves' ILO: Albania does not allow soldiers to resign", Euronews, 13th September 2022 <https://euronews.com/en/modern-day-slaves-ilo-albania-does-not-allow-soldiers-to-resign/>



International Protection No. 10.”⁴⁸ (In the same session, Colombia recommended in more general terms that it “ensure the principle of non-refoulement in the processing of asylum and refugee applications.”⁴⁹ In reply to Costa Rica, Norway “partially accepted” the part of the recommendation relating to asylum, stating “Applications for asylum are handled according to our human rights obligations. UNHCR Guidelines on International Protection are not legally binding, but Norwegian Immigration Authorities will give due weight to the guidelines, in addition to relevant international case law.”⁵⁰ In fact, Norway’s track record on asylum for conscientious objection has been less than perfect (see Country Entry, below). Regarding professional soldiers and reservists, it merely “noted” the recommendation, observing in line with what it had earlier stated “According to Norwegian law conscientious objection to military service includes conscripts, reservists are almost exclusively conscripted personnel. If professional military personnel become conscientious objectors during their service, and thus wish to end their service contract, they are free to terminate their contract based on the regular rules of contract law and labor law. The same applies to reservists under voluntary contract.”⁵¹ The important point here is that to comply with [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2010\)4](#) any serving member of the armed forces should be able to obtain release from his or her contract without any financial or other penalty which would otherwise apply in the case of early termination, and should, while the application is under consideration, be protected from the possibility of receiving any new orders which are in conflict with the objection (this should cause no problem to Norway, which already immediately releases from armed service any conscript who seeks release on grounds of conscientious objection). Specific measures are necessary.

⁴⁸A/HRC/58/4, 20th December 2024, para 132.90

⁴⁹Ibid, para 132.275

⁵⁰A/HRC/58/4/Add.1, 25th February 2025, 90...

⁵¹Ibid



2. SITUATION IN INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES

In this section we give for each European country, in alphabetical order, an update of the current situation regarding military recruitment and conscientious objection, together with the latest statistics, followed, where appropriate, by an account of developments during 2024, or, failing that, a note of EBCO's principal concerns in the country.

The area covered is effectively the "Council of Europe area", except that two States within the area are included which have themselves never been members of the Council of Europe: Belarus applied for membership in 1993 but consideration of its application has been suspended since 1997 on account of lack of progress in abolishing the death penalty, while Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence from Serbia has been recognised by the EU and the majority of States worldwide but, mainly because of Serbian opposition, it has not been admitted to the Council of Europe or the UN as a member. Moreover Russia withdrew from the Council of Europe in 2022, but EBCO continues to work on it.



2.1. ALBANIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 2010 under Article 42 of Law 9999. Could be reinstated in time of war.	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1998	Constitution, Articles 166 and 167. First provisions in Law no. 9047 (10.07.2003) "On military service"	
CO release of professional soldiers	-	No provisions	
Minimum recruitment age	18	18 in case of general/partial mobilisation	
Population⁵²	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	3,107,100	2.8%	17,400
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	7,500	-	Total strength is 43.1% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	536m (+21.1%)	\$191	2.0%

Principal EBCO concerns

- It is unclear if and how the provisions on alternative service would apply to an event of emergency mobilisation.
- No recognition of the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers.

Based on public information and the Ministry of Defence reply to the EBCO Questionnaire:

Developments

In 2024, Albania introduced a law to establish a reserve service. The reserve service will be voluntary and fully integrated with the active military. The reserve force will include up to 25% of the armed forces, or around 2,100 personnel, over the next 5-6 years.^{53,54} According to the Ministry of Defence, "there are still other legal acts to be in place in order to make it efficient."

⁵²Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

⁵³<https://www.mod.gov.al/eng/newsroom/1734-government-approves-draft-law-on-reservists-to-serve-as-additional-capacity-alongside-active-armed-forces-in-operations>

⁵⁴<https://www.tirfaxnews.org/2024/12/albanian-parliament-approves-new-reserve-force-law-to-strengthen-military-readiness/>



As reported in Section 1.3.2.3, Albania received a recommendation from Costa Rica to “establish conscientious objection to military service for professional soldiers and reservists”. Albania “approved” the recommendation without comment.

Conscription provisions and procedures

Conscription was abolished in 2010 under Law no. 9999 of 2008.

However, Article 166 paragraph 1 of the Constitution still reads, “The Albanian citizens have the duty to participate in the defence of the Republic of Albania, as provided by law.”

It can also be reinstated in time of war under Article 171, “In case of external threat, or when a common defence obligation derives from an international agreement, the Assembly, upon proposal of the President of the Republic, declares the state of war and decides on the state of general or partial mobilisation or demobilisation.”⁵⁵

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

After the abolition of conscription, no alternative service exists in Albania.

The right to conscientious objection is recognised in Article 166 paragraph 2 of the Constitution, “The citizen, who for reasons of conscience refuses to serve with weapons in the armed forces, is obliged to perform an alternative service, as provided by law.”⁵⁶

Under Law no. 9047 of 2003, applicants for conscientious objection need to submit a request accompanied by documentation that is determined “by order of the Minister of Defence” either to the recruitment centre “before reaching the legal age of call-up for compulsory military service, or to the command of the [military unit], when performing compulsory military service” (article 20). The requests are assessed by an Alternative Service Commission of the Ministry of Defence (article 21). Alternative service can be performed in public service institutions, local government units, non-profit organisations with a humanitarian character, environmental protection services, or firefighting services. Applicants may also choose to perform it in the Armed Forces in positions that do not require carrying or using weapons (article 22).⁵⁷

It is unclear if and how these provisions would apply to an event of reintroduction of compulsory military service. It is also unclear if they apply in the event of emergency mobilisation since the rights enshrined in Article 166 paragraph 2 of the Constitution are not included among the ones that cannot be limited during a state of war or emergency as per Article 175 of the Constitution.⁵⁸

Voluntary recruitment

Since January 2010, a volunteer military service system is established in Albania, governed by Law no. 59 established in 2014 and sublaws.

Any Albanian citizen between the ages of 18 and 30 can apply to join the Armed Forces (age exceptions apply for healthcare personnel). The duration of service after the recruitment phase and completion of the basic course is defined by an initial contract lasting for a period of three years.

Total first-time military recruitment in 2024 is shown in the table below.

⁵⁵[https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF\(2016\)064-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2016)064-e)

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷<http://qbz.gov.al/eli/ligj/2003/07/10/9047>

⁵⁸[https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF\(2016\)064-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2016)064-e)



Age	Recruitment for 2024	Gender	
		M	F
18-22	282	631	81
23-26	223		
27-30	207		

Statistics from 2020 and 2021 show that 72% and 76% of recruits respectively, signed up for a second period of voluntary service of the same length or longer.

Conscientious objection during and after military service

Albania does not recognise the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers and has not reported to the Council of Europe on its implementation of Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)4 on human rights of members of the armed forces.

Asylum for conscientious objectors

No information was available.

Militarisation of the education system

According to the Ministry of Defence, the Armed Forces organise activities in city centers, schools and military units to provide the youth with more knowledge about the Armed Forces.

However, no such programmes are “obligatory for secondary education program,” and the “Armed Forces do not have access to personal data of students.”

2.2. ANDORRA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Peacetime conscription never existed. No regular military forces. Defence is the responsibility of France and Spain.

Article 38 of the 1993 Constitution however states that the State may create by law duties of community service to pursue tasks of general interest.



2.3. ARMENIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	2003	Law on Alternative Service (unarmed military service) Law on Alternative Service 2013 (alternative civilian service)	
Current provisions	Law on Military Service and the Status of Servicemen Law on Alternative Service 2013		
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	24 months	36 months (150%) Unarmed military service 30 months	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not permitted		
Minimum recruitment age	18	Admission to military schools at 17	
Population⁵⁹	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	2,976,765	2.9%	17,265
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	42,900	18,950 (44.2%)	Total strength is 248.5% of cohort Conscripts are 109.8% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	1,418m (+6.8%)	\$475	5.5%

⁵⁹Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.4. AUSTRIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1955	National Service Act 1955 (unarmed military service) Civilian Service Act (Zivildienstgesetz) 1974 (alternative civilian service)	
Current provisions	Zivildienstgesetz 1974, last amended as Act 106/2005		
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	6 months	9 months (150%)	
CO release of professional soldiers	-	No specific provisions.	
Minimum recruitment age			
Population⁶⁰	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	8,967,982	2.4%	43,046
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	22,800	15,544 (68.2%)	Total strength is 53.0% of cohort Conscripts are 36.1% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	5,259m (+14.5%)	\$576	1.0%

⁶⁰Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.5. AZERBAIJAN

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1995	Constitution, Article 76. Implementing legislation not yet promulgated (see below)	
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	18 months	None available	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not permitted		
Minimum recruitment age	18	Admission to military schools at 17	
Population⁶¹	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	10,650,239	3.9%	83,072
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	68,200	Not known	Total strength is 82.1% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	3,777m (+3.9%)	\$366	5.0%

Developments

On 16th December 2024, the *Mille Majlis* (Parliament) adopted amendments to a number of Acts, including the Law on Mobilisation Preparation and Mobilisation in the Republic of Azerbaijan bringing down the upper age limit for conscription from 35 to 30, entailing also a reduction in the maximum service age, after the 18 month period of obligatory service from 36.5 years to 31.5 years. At the same time, the fines for failure to provide information for military registration and conscription were doubled from a maximum equivalent to \$150 for individuals and \$650 for legal entities. Avoiding military service leads to a sentence of two years' imprisonment, increased to between three and six years in time of war.⁶²

⁶¹Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

⁶²Source: JAM News, Baku, 17th December 2024.



2.6. BELARUS

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1994	Constitution, Article 57 Alternative Service Law, 2015	
Current provisions	Alternative Service Law, 2015		
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	18 months 12 months for graduates	36 months (200%) 24 months for graduates (200%)	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not permitted (even for reservists)		
Minimum recruitment age	18	Admission to military academies from 16	
Population⁶³	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	9,501,451	2.7%	51,308
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	48,600	Not known	Total strength is 94.7% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	1,491m (+9.3%)	\$164	2.1%

Principal EBCO concerns

Although Belarus has since 2016 had provisions for a civilian alternative service for conscientious objectors, applications are accepted on religious grounds only, and from members of a small list of denominations whose teachings specifically prohibit the bearing of arms.

There are widespread fears that Belarus will actively join in the Russian military action against Ukraine, and that when it does so it will enforce universal reserve mobilisation following the Russian model.

Not only all former servicemen, including conscripts, but also, ironically, conscientious objectors who have performed alternative civilian service are automatically placed in the military reserve, as are all those who have graduated from military training programmes – those who did so in “military departments” in parallel to their studies proceed straight to reserve officer status, without performing normal military service. Also

⁶³Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



others who have for any reason not performed military service – and including women – but are considered to have “military-accounting specialties” (e.g., medical or technical skills) may also be subject to call-up for reserve service. Refusal is prosecuted under Article 435 of the Criminal Code with maximum sentences of five years.

As a result, not only potential first-time conscripts, but also persons with reasons to fear that they might be targeted early in such reserve mobilisation have been fleeing Belarus in large numbers, but have particular difficulties in obtaining refugee protection elsewhere.

Partly in response to this, Belarus has imposed increasingly stringent restrictions on those liable for military service and has further increased the penalties for evasion.

Developments

Forced conscription was expanded by a number of Presidential Decrees in 2024:

- No.48 (February 12th) mandates conscription for all men aged 18 or over, eliminating most exemptions.
- No.179 (April 29th) requires compulsory service for former officer cadets, requires mobile network operators to report Telegram activity related to conscription evasion, introduces enhanced monitoring of financial transactions linked to organisations providing assistance to draft evaders and imposes digital access restrictions on websites advocating conscientious objection or for the rights of conscientious objectors.
- No. 312 (August 7th) eliminates deferment of military service by those studying abroad, unless they are state-sponsored.

On 3rd April, the Law No. 363-3⁶⁴ “On amending laws on issues of ensuring national security” introduced sweeping restrictions on the freedom of movement, (Article 12.2 of the ICCPR), and access to civil, social and economic rights for conscription-age individuals who have not completed military registration, and also imposed measures violating the right to privacy (Article 17 of the ICCPR). Provisions include:

- Travel bans for individuals not registered with military authorities;
- Denial of passport issue and renewal abroad. The new restrictions, reinforcing those announced by Presidential decree in September 2023, which had been criticised by Human Rights Council,⁶⁵ disproportionately impact Belarusians living abroad whether or not in order to avoid military conscription. By prohibiting passport renewals at embassies and consulates, the government forces individuals to return to Belarus, however inconveniently. Those liable for military service thereby additionally risk detention, forced conscription, or criminal charges. This effectively leaves these and many others stateless, without valid documentation for legal residence, employment, or travel in foreign countries. In particular, as pointed out by the Human Rights Council’s Special Rapporteur on Belarus,⁶⁶ children born abroad to Belarusians may find themselves stateless as a result.
- Mandatory military registration as a prerequisite for access to employment and education, thereby violating Articles 6.1 and 13 of the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and to identity documents (e.g., passports, driving licences). Individuals who have not fulfilled their military service obligations already face restrictions on employment in state institutions, effectively barring access to public sector jobs and limiting career prospects in government related sectors;

⁶⁴<https://pravo.by/document?guid=12551&p0=H12400363>

⁶⁵A/HRC/RES/55/27, 11th April, 2024. para 4(l)

⁶⁶A/HRC/56/65, 9th May, 2024, para 26.



- Real-time surveillance through interagency data sharing between military commissariats, border control, and security services;
- Delivery of military call-up notices via SMS, with legal penalties for failure to respond;
- Mandatory disclosure and prompt updating of personal mobile phone numbers;
- Authorised use by the security services of geolocation data, mobile metadata, and financial transaction records to track and identify individuals attempting to evade conscription.

Moreover, the Law amended Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code by expanding liability for “participation in extremist formations” to include following, subscribing to, or engaging with such organisations online. This has led to:

- Increased prosecution of individuals sharing draft avoidance information or discussing conscientious objection.
- The blocking of digital resources offering legal advice to conscripts.
- Detention and sentencing of human rights activists working with refugees and conscientious objectors.

On 12th September, the Council of Ministers adopted Resolution No. 670, amending Resolution No. 837 of 1997 on the Rules for the Personalised Record-Keeping of Insured Individuals in the State Social Insurance System ¹. The changes were enacted in accordance with Article 14 of the Law No. 363-3 of 3 April 2024 on Strengthening national security. Key provisions include:

- Inclusion of conscripts, reservists, and individuals undergoing military training in the State Social Insurance System;
- Mandatory reporting by employers and local authorities regarding military-related employment and insurance contributions;
- Employer reimbursement of all military service-related employment costs.

Additionally, revised reimbursement policies require private and public enterprises (excluding national budget funded institutions) to:

- Cover administrative costs related to military registration and conscription procedures;
- Maintain and update military service records of their employees;
- Continue paying full salaries to employees during periods of military training, mobilisation, or active duty;
- Coordinate all financial settlements with military commissariats, armed forces units, State Security Committee (KGB) offices, and other relevant state agencies.

These measures, aimed at integration of civilian economic actors into the military infrastructure, blur the line between civilian and military spheres, effectively compelling civilian employers to subsidise the state’s militarisation agenda, and reinforces government control over both individual livelihoods and corporate operations. The resulting integration of civilian sectors into military logistics and enforcement systems represents a further erosion of socio-economic autonomy in Belarus.

Conscientious objection during and after military service

As of 1 March 2024, only 75 individuals were recorded as performing alternative service (65% in healthcare, 35% in social care).



Asylum for conscientious objectors

There has been no improvement in the situation of conscientious objectors who flee from Belarus to Lithuania, who, against all logic, are primarily viewed by the Lithuanian authorities as a security hazard, and no further developments in the individual cases on which we reported in 2023.

We did become aware of one sad case in 2024. A conscientious objector (with no background as a political activist) who had sought and (like all others) been refused political asylum in Belarus, became depressed and despairing of his situation decided at the beginning of August to return voluntarily to Belarus. He was however detained by the Lithuanian border guards, who insisted on formally deporting him the following day. It is known that he faced imprisonment in Belarus; for his own security we are unable and unauthorised to reveal his identity and have not been able to ascertain his fate since return.

Militarisation of the education system

The militarisation of society is proceeding apace, particularly through the education system. Even primary schools have formal links with military units, whose members may provide supplementary teaching. Military training is an obligatory part of the secondary school curriculum. School-age children attend semi-compulsory summer camps of a military nature and participate in the 755 military/patriotic clubs, which have a total membership of almost 11,000.



2.7. BELGIUM

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 1993. Last conscripts demobilised 1995. Could be reinstated, but only in time of war.	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1964	Law of 3rd June on Status of Conscientious Objectors	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provision. Early release can be sought but may be denied for operational reasons.	
Minimum recruitment age	18 (nominally)	The formal requirement is to have completed mandatory education thus in fact a small number of 17 year olds are recruited each year.	
Population⁶⁷	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	11,977,634	3.0%	71,866
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	23,500	–	Total strength is 32.7% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	8,562m (+7.4%)	\$730	1.3%

Principal EBCO concerns

- No recognition of the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers or reservists.

Based on replies by the Belgian Ministry of Defence to the EBCO Questionnaire, and public information:

Developments

As detailed below, questions about asylum for conscientious objectors from Russia and Ukraine were discussed in the Federal Parliament.

⁶⁷Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

⁶⁸Loi du 31 décembre 1992 modifiant les lois sur la milice, coordonnée le 30 avril 1962.



Conscription provisions and procedures

Conscription is suspended since 1993.⁶⁸ There are no specific provisions regarding the circumstances in which conscription could be reinstated. An amendment to article 1bis of the “*Lois sur la milice, coordonnée le 30 avril 1962*” (law concerning the conscription) would be necessary.

There is no ongoing registration procedure for those liable for military service.

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

The provisions on conscientious objection are also suspended and, in case of reinstatement of conscription, would need to be amended separately to be effective.⁶⁹

Voluntary recruitment

Belgium maintains voluntary armed forces, regulated by “*Loi du 28 février 2007 fixant le statut des militaires et candidats militaires du cadre actif des forces armées*”.

The formal requirement for recruits is to have completed mandatory education, thus in fact a small number of 17 year olds are recruited each year.

According to the Ministry of Defence, “there are [...] protective measures to meet the requirements of international humanitarian law regarding child soldier rules” since:

- “minors must provide the proof of the consent of the person or persons who exercises parental authority over them”;⁷⁰
- “for the candidate aged under eighteen the status of ‘military candidate’ is automatically withdrawn when a period of war is decreed”;⁷¹
- “in times of peace, soldiers who have not reached the age of eighteen may only wear weapons and military uniform when it’s required for their training”;⁷²

⁶⁹Lois portant le statut des objecteurs de conscience, coordonnées le 20 février 1980, as amended by Loi du 31 décembre 1992.

⁷⁰Article 21, para. 6 of Loi du 28 février 2007 fixant le statut des militaires et candidats militaires du cadre actif des forces armées.

⁷¹Ibid. Article 21/1

⁷²Ibid. Article 192



Total first-time military recruitment in the years 2022 to 2024 is shown in the table below.

Age	2022		2023		2024	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
16	0	1	0	3	0	1
17	7	73	12	104	20	127
18	46	319	53	439	52	380
19	49	336	42	397	38	377
20	35	267	31	278	29	257
21	18	240	29	215	23	174
22	28	180	24	179	18	157
23	31	148	33	146	39	155
24	29	134	19	122	32	130
25	25	102	31	117	27	138
26	24	68	22	77	29	94
27	11	83	16	59	21	85
28	11	39	9	39	11	53
29	6	52	20	33	18	64
30	7	27	8	24	12	28
31	3	11	8	15	14	26
32	4	11	6	12	10	20
33	2	4	1	4	4	7
36	0	0	0	1	0	0

According to the Ministry, "Personnel in the Belgian Armed Forces under the Limited Duration Service (BDL) status starts with an initial eight-year contract, with the option to extend this by an additional four years, allowing for up to twelve years of service under BDL. Depending on career objectives and performance, personnel may transition to a career status for indefinite service, enabling long-term commitments within the Defense. Additionally, certain roles may allow for direct recruitment into career positions."

For reserve service, the duration initially required is 10 years.⁷³

Conscientious objection during and after military service

No specific provision. Early release can be sought but may be denied for operational reasons.

According to the Ministry of Defence, "The Law of 1980, which governs conscientious objection in Belgium, also applied to reservists. Because the laws are currently suspended, they are not applicable to reservists now,"⁷⁴ but "to our knowledge, there have been no recent cases of individuals refusing reserve service on the grounds of conscientious objection."

Asylum for conscientious objectors

The Agency in charge of refugees (CGRA/CGVS) does not have statistics specific on conscientious objectors.

⁷³Loi du 16 mai 2001 portant statut des militaires du cadre de réserve des Forces armées.

⁷⁴Lois portant le statut des objecteurs de conscience, coordonnées le 20 février 1980, as amended by Loi du 31 décembre 1992.



In answer to a question in the Federal Parliament (Chamber) on 31 January 2024, Minister Nicole de Moor (Asylum and Migration) answered about Russian conscientious objectors:

‘In 2023, there were 931 requests for international protection of Russian nationals. These were mainly conscientious objectors, persons who fear mobilisation and political opponents.’

‘Processing of these files will in principle resume from February (2024). For each file, an individual assessment will take place, examining the motives for denial of service. It is impossible to say in advance how these applications will be treated. After all, it falls to the CGRS to do so independently.’

With regard to humanitarian visas for conscientious objectors, I can inform you that this is one of the elements that can be taken into account. One must have a special fear. Refusal of service can be taken into account in the assessment of the visa application, but I am not aware of any concrete cases in this regard for the time being.’

On another parliamentary question on 28 February 2024, Minister Nicole de Moor (Asylum and Migration) stated:

‘(...), if conscientious objection - whether total or partial, for example in relation to the conflict in Ukraine - is invoked in the context of an application for international protection, it may give rise to the granting of international protection status, provided that this conscientious objection is sincere and, where appropriate, deeply rooted.’

This aspect is examined on a case-by-case basis for each application for international protection. The fear invoked by the applicant must, of course, be well-founded. In other words, there must be a reasonable likelihood that the applicant will actually have to perform military service or be deployed in the conflict in Ukraine or in any other conflict. In addition, opponents of the war in Ukraine may also qualify for international protection because of their anti-war stance if the applicant has a well-founded fear of persecution upon return to their country of origin. This issue is also examined on a case-by-case basis for each application for international protection.’

Militarisation of the education system

According to the Ministry of Defence, “No programmes which could be seen as preparatory to military recruitment form an obligatory part of the secondary education curriculum”.⁷⁵

However, the Armed Forces are “engaged in several programs designed to introduce young people to military careers” like a youth holiday camp “held during school vacations,” as well as “the cadet program, which runs activities on weekends and during school holidays.”

Moreover, “within the 3rd Degree in Defence and Security program, military personnel from the reserve corps are present in participating schools to conduct classes” where they provide “specialised instruction related to security and defence.”

⁷⁵https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2024-05-15-EBCO_Annual_Report_2023-24.pdf#page=59



2.8. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA 🇧🇦

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 2005 Conditions for reinstatement unknown	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1996	Parallel Defence Acts in the Federation and the Republika Srpska	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not permitted		
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population⁷⁶	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	3,798,671	2.3%	17,474
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	10,650	–	Total strength is 60.9% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	216m (+7.0%)	\$68	0.8%

Principal EBCO concerns

- No recognition of the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers.

Based on the reply of the Ombudsperson of Bosnia and Herzegovina to EBCO's Questionnaire and public information:

Developments

In December 2024, the Defence Minister stated that conscription is being reconsidered due to "new global developments." However, he conceded that "it would be very difficult to implement" due to the "complex constitutional structure" and that it would require "the consent of multiple political entities."⁷⁷

Conscription provisions and procedures

Conscription was abolished in 2006.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

⁷⁷<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/bosnia-and-herzegovina-considers-reintroducing-mandatory-military-service-defense-minister/3435290>

⁷⁸Article 79 of Law on Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, "Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina", nr. 88/05 <https://www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/legal/laws-of-bih/pdf/014%20-%20ARMY%20LEGISLATION/BH%20Law%20on%20Defence%20of%20Bosnia%20and%20Herzegovina%2088-05.pdf>



According to the Ombudsperson, “reserve service [...] has not been formed yet because of the lack of funds and thus there has been no call-up so far”.

Voluntary recruitment

The Law on Service in the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina governs the voluntary military service. The minimum duration of contracts is not stipulated, but according to information from the Ombudsperson, it cannot be shorter than three years.

Conscientious objection during and after military service

There is no recognition of the right to conscientious objection for serving members of the armed forces. Termination is only possible through the standard procedure.

Regarding prosecutions for desertion, the Ombudsperson reports that “not a single person has been processed for desertion since the end of the war” and those subject to prosecution during the war were given amnesty immediately after it ended.

Asylum for conscientious objectors

Statistics on approvals/rejections of asylum applications that were citing conscientious objection were not available.

The Ombudsperson reports that “based on monitoring the case law, we know that the Asylum Department of the Ministry of Security of BiH previously rejected asylum applications filed by persons who indicated that they did not want to serve in the military service of their countries of origin (in this case, Eritrea) in the period between 2012 and 2014. We do not have access to complete asylum applications, so we cannot fully confirm to what extent conscientious objection was cited.”

After judgments of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina,⁷⁹ the administrative body changed its practice and in 2014 recognized the status of the above-mentioned persons.⁸⁰

Moreover, “the status of asylum seekers was recognized for three persons from Eritrea in 2019, but we do not know on what grounds.”

Militarisation of the education system

The Ombudsperson reports that there is no military curriculum in education. No armed forces personnel is involved in teaching classes at schools or has access to personal data of students.

⁷⁹Judgment no: S1 3 U 0010098 12 U, dated 13 June 2012;
Judgment of the Court of BiH, no, S1 3 U 001010012 U, dated 14 June 2012;
Judgment of the Court of BiH, no S1 3 U 010097 12 U, dated 13 June 2012;
Judgment of the Court of BiH no S1 3 U 007612 11 U, dated 2 February 2012

⁸⁰Decision no UP-01-07/1-41-1-67-9/13, dated 14 April 2014



2.9. BULGARIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 2008 by amendment of the Defence and Armed Forces Act. May be reinstated in the event of declaration of state of war, martial law or a state of emergency pursuant to Article 116 of the Act. ⁸¹		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1991	Constitution, Article 59.2 First implemented under Law for Replacement of Military Service with Alternative Service, 1998		
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions. Early release may be requested (see below).		
Minimum recruitment age	18			
Population⁸²	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18	
	6,782,659	2.8%	37,983	
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above	
	36,950	–	Total strength is 97.3% of cohort	
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP	
	2,330m (+13.8%)	\$344	2.2%	

⁸¹ <https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/attachments/2023-01-31-Bulgaria-gov-reply.pdf>

⁸² Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.10. CROATIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 2008 but enabling provisions retained	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1991	Constitution, Article 47.2 Defence Law, 1991	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not permitted		
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population⁸³	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	4,150,116	2.6%	21,581
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	16,800	–	Total strength is 77.8% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	1,629m (+8.7%)	\$419	1.8%

Principal EBCO concerns

- Plans to reintroduce conscription entail a punitively longer alternative civilian service.
- It is unclear if and how the provisions for conscientious objectors would apply to an event of emergency mobilisation.
- It is unclear if the right to conscientious objection is recognised for voluntary or professional soldiers.

Developments

In 2024, the government announced plans to reintroduce conscription. Work on legislative proposals would commence in January 2025 and the first calls to conscripts would start in mid-2025. Military service is set to last two months, and conscripts will receive a monthly fee of 900 euros.⁸⁴

The Minister of Defence has hinted at a punitively longer duration of alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors, up to twice the length.⁸⁵ He also made concerning remarks that “there is no right

⁸³Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

⁸⁴<https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/morh-prvi-pozivi-rocnicima-sredinom-2025-zakonska-procedura-krece-nakon-izbora--887378.html> (in Croatian).

⁸⁵<https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/pokrenuta-peticija-protiv-obveznog-vojnog-roka-spremaju-se-i-tuzbe/2577015.aspx> (in Croatian).



of conscience during general mobilisation” and inaccurately mentioned that that is the case in countries like Germany or Austria.⁸⁶

Conscription provisions and procedures

Article 47, paragraph 1 of the Constitution reads: *“Military service and the defence of the Republic of Croatia shall be the duty of every capable citizen of the Republic of Croatia.”*⁸⁷

However, conscription has been suspended since 1 January 2008.⁸⁸

A state of war can be declared by the President only after a decision of the Parliament, pursuant to Articles 80 and 100 of the Constitution. However, in an event of “clear danger” to the Republic, the President can mobilise the armed forces with the countersignature of the Prime Minister and even without a state of war having been declared.⁸⁹

The organisation of defence in Croatia and the mobilisation provisions in case of emergency or war are generally regulated by the Defence Act.⁹⁰

There is an ongoing military registration process that male citizens have to follow on the year they reach the age of 18 (Article 22 of the Defence Act).

According to Article 25 and 25a, the reserve forces are divided into a contractual and mobilisation reserve, and the mobilisation reserve is divided into an unclassified and classified reserve. A classified reservist is a conscript who has served his military service or has been in voluntary military training or in active military service and has been assigned a military specialty. Conversely, an unclassified reservist is a conscript entered into the military register, older than 27 years of age, who has not been assigned a military specialty.

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

Article 47, paragraph 2 of the Constitution reads: *“Conscientious objection shall be allowed for all those who, based on religious or moral conviction, are not willing to perform military duties in the armed forces. Such persons are obliged to perform other duties as specified by law.”*⁹¹

It is unclear if and how the provisions for conscientious objectors would apply in the case of emergency mobilisation.

Voluntary recruitment

Voluntary military service in Croatia is available to all citizens of ages 18-30, men and women,⁹² and lasts 8 weeks.⁹³

⁸⁶<https://www.zagorje.com/clanak/vijesti/anusic-krene-li-u-hrvatskoj-opca-mobilizacija-nema-prigovora-savjesti> (in Croatian).

⁸⁷https://www.usud.hr/sites/default/files/dokumenti/The_consolidated_text_of_the_Constitution_of_the_Republic_of_Croatia_as_of_15_January_2014.pdf

⁸⁸Decision 3065/2007 of the Croatian Parliament. https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2007_10_105_3065.html (in Croatian).

⁸⁹Articles 80 and 100 of the Constitution. https://www.usud.hr/sites/default/files/dokumenti/The_consolidated_text_of_the_Constitution_of_the_Republic_of_Croatia_as_of_15_January_2014.pdf

⁹⁰Defence Act (Zakon o obrani) of 2013, as amended. Official Gazette nr. 73/13, 75/15, 27/16, 110/17, 30/18, 70/19, 155/23. <https://www.zakon.hr/z/334/zakon-o-obrani> (in Croatian).

⁹¹https://www.usud.hr/sites/default/files/dokumenti/The_consolidated_text_of_the_Constitution_of_the_Republic_of_Croatia_as_of_15_January_2014.pdf

⁹²Ordinance on Voluntary Military Training (Pravilnik o dragovoljnom vojnom osposobljavanju), Official Gazette 22/2023. https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/full/2023_02_22_375.html (in Croatian).

⁹³<https://www.predsjednik.hr/en/news/president-milanovic-tells-voluntary-military-training-soldiers-your-fundamental-duty-is-the-defence-of-the-homeland-and-its-borders/>



Those serving are entitled to 900 euros for each completed month,⁹⁴ reimbursement of travel expenses, basic and supplementary health insurance, insurance against the consequences of an accident, compulsory health insurance in case of injury at work, accommodation and food, military uniform and sports equipment, and leave of up to five days.⁹⁵

⁹⁴<https://vreme.com/en/vesti/od-2025-u-hrvatskoj-obavezan-vojni-rok-dok-se-u-srbiji-prica-komsije-prelaze-na-delo/>

⁹⁵Ordinance on Voluntary Military Training (Pravilnik o dragovoljnom vojnom osposobljavanju), Official Gazette 22/2023. https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/full/2023_02_22_375.html (in Croatian).



2.11. CYPRUS

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1992	National Guard Act, 2/1992 (unarmed military service) Civilian alternative service finally became available in about 2005.	
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	14 months	19 months (136%)	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not permitted	Release from reserve service now possible.	
Minimum recruitment age	17	"Voluntary" early performance of military service – way of calculating age means that enrolment may actually be at 16	
Population⁹⁶	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	925,000	2.8%	5,180
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	12,000	Not known	Total strength is 231.7% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	598m (+4.6%)	\$442	1.6%

Principal EBCO concerns

- Alternative service is punitive and discriminatory, inter alia, in terms of its nature, cost, and duration.
- Conscientious objectors are not recognised prima facie. The process has yet to be placed under the full control of civilian authorities.

Based on replies by the Ministry of Defence of Cyprus to EBCO's questionnaire and information from EBCO's Cypriot member, Initiative for Conscientious Objection:⁹⁷

⁹⁶Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

⁹⁷More info about the organisation at: <https://www.facebook.com/kibrstavicdaniret>



Developments

Applications for recognition of conscientious objectors seem to be on the rise in recent years.

Conscription provisions and procedures

Conscription is regulated by the National Guard Act of 2011 and applies to citizens turning 18 on the year of the call-up.⁹⁸

The duration of the military service is 14 months as of 2016.⁹⁹

Reserve duty applies until the age of 50, while there also exists an alternative reserve service for those who have performed alternative service or who performed military service as conscripts but have since followed the procedure for recognition as conscientious objectors.¹⁰⁰

Reserve mobilisation necessitates a decision of the Minister of Defence upon recommendation of the Chief of Defence Staff.¹⁰¹

No data was available from the Ministry of Defence regarding numbers of persons prosecuted for evasion or refusal of military service, how many had declared conscientious objections, and what the sentences imposed were.

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

Recognition of conscientious objectors requires the submission of an application which is assessed by a committee of two (2) university professors from the fields of philosophy, sociopolitical sciences or psychology, one (1) legal advisor from the Law Office of the State, and two (2) high officials of the National Guard, with the final decision being taken by the Minister of Defence.

Statistics on approvals/rejections in recent years as provided by the Ministry of Defence:¹⁰²

Year	Requests on religious grounds	Approved	Requests on ideological grounds	Approved	Total	Total approved
2019	8	5	1	1	9	6
2020	12	10	3	1	15	11
2021	9	5	13	8	22	13
2022	11	11	44	27	55	38
2023	10	1	19	11	29	12
2024	16	14	19	12	35	26
Total	66	46	99	60	165	106

Note: The numbers provided include both conscripts and reservists.

The Ministry could not indicate grounds for rejections, stating merely that, in those cases “the requirements of the law about religious or ideological grounds were not met.” Rejection decisions can be appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court.

⁹⁸National Guard Act of 2011 (“Νόμος περί Εθνικής Φρουράς”)

⁹⁹Decision of the Council of Ministers, Official Gazette of 9 September 2016, nr. 4503.

¹⁰⁰Article 18 and 56 of the National Guard Act of 2011

¹⁰¹Article 45 of the National Guard Act of 2011

¹⁰²See EBCO Annual Report 2018 for years 2009-2018, <https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/attachments/EBCOreport2018fin.pdf#page=26>



Based on the Ministry's response, no information is provided to conscripts about the possibility of applying for alternative service, other than the annual publication in the Official Gazette for the call-up procedure. During the alternative service, the local recruitment office is responsible for supervising the start and end of service and any transfers or changes, while the institution of placement administers day-to-day matters.¹⁰³

The duration of the alternative service is calculated in addition to the duration of military service:

- Those liable to **14 months** of military service are subjected to **19 months** of alternative service (increase of 5 months).
- Those liable to **6 to 14 months** of military service are subjected to an increase of **+4 months** for alternative service.
- Those liable to **less than 6 months** of military service are subjected to an increase of **+3 months** for alternative service.

Compensation for those performing alternative service is currently set at 105€. Bonuses might apply for certain categories.¹⁰⁴ The Ministry justifies the subpar level of compensation as stemming from the reduced hours (8) of service and duties, compared to those serving in the military, while also functioning as a "counterbalance for fulfilling their obligations to the State" and towards "those contributing in arms to the defence and security of the country".

The alternative service is performed in public bodies. According to the Ministry of Defence, most needed positions are in bodies supervised by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

Conscientious objection during and after military service

According to the Ministry of Defence, conscripts can follow the procedure for recognition as conscientious objectors even after starting their service, however no such case has been noted. No information was provided on the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers.

Asylum for conscientious objectors

No information was available.

¹⁰³Article 55 of the National Guard Act of 2011

¹⁰⁴Law on the Allowances and Remuneration of the National Guard ("Νόμος περί Χορηγημάτων και Απολαβών της Εθνικής Φρουράς") as amended in 2021



“Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”

Conscription currently imposed? Yes

Conscientious objection first recognised	No recognition		
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	12 months	None available	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not permitted		
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population ¹⁰⁵	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	383,000	2.8%	2,145
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	3,000	Not known	Total strength is 139.9% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
		\$	

Principal EBCO concerns

- No recognition of the right to conscientious objection despite repeated condemnations from international courts.

As reported by EBCO's Cypriot member, Initiative for Conscientious Objection (Kibris'ta Vicdani Ret):¹⁰⁶

Developments

Murat Kanatli

ECtHR's Grand Chamber rejected the Turkish government's request for the case to be referred to them, and as such, the original ruling that the country had violated the human rights, is now final.

The Turkish government paid Kanatli 9,000€ “in respect of non-pecuniary damage” and 2,363€ in court costs and other expenses.

¹⁰⁵Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

¹⁰⁶More info about the organisation at: <https://www.facebook.com/kibrstavicdaniret>



Mustafa Hürben

On 18 January 2024 at the Security Forces Court of Nicosia (Military Court of Nicosia in the northern part of Cyprus), the prosecution accepted that Mustafa Hürben is a conscientious objector. As there is no legislative provision, the judge explained that the option of acquittal was not available. However, considering all the previous court decisions on the issue the court avoided giving a prison sentence. According to the law, the lowest possible fine which can be given is 800TL (approximately 25 euro). Mustafa was sentenced to a fine of 800TL (approximately 25 euro), payable in 5 days, otherwise he would be imprisoned for 3 days. Mustafa Hürben announced in Court that he had no intention of paying the fine and was arrested on 23 January 2024, symbolically in front of the Parliament building during a solidarity action organised by the Initiative for Conscientious Objection in Cyprus (Kıbrıs'ta Vicdani Ret). EBCO Chief Editor Derek Brett attended his trial as international observer.

Regarding Mustafa Hürben, on 3 December 2024, the Military High Court on the appeal against the decision was to be announced and was rejected.

Halil Karapaşaoğlu

On 30 May 2024, Halil Karapaşaoğlu was sentenced by the Security Forces Court of Nicosia (Military Court of Nicosia in the northern part of Cyprus) to a fine of 1000 Turkish liras (29 euro) for refusing to serve his reservist military service on grounds of conscientious objection. Halil Karapaşaoğlu refused to pay the fine, so it was converted to 3 days' imprisonment, and he was immediately arrested and transferred to the prison, even in handcuffs. The Initiative for Conscientious Objection in Cyprus (Kıbrıs'ta Vicdani Ret) organised solidarity actions in front of the court and in front of the prison the same day. Halil Karapaşaoğlu was released the next morning, 31 May 2024.

EBCO President Alexia Tsouni and WRI Council Member and human rights lawyer Hülya Üçpınar were present at the trial of Halil Karapaşaoğlu as international observers, gave press statements, and met with deputy parliament speaker Fazilet Ozdenefe, parliamentary law committee members Urun Solyalı and Aysegül Baybars at the "TRNC Parliament" together with conscientious objectors Murat Kanatlı and Alp Bürge from the Initiative for Conscientious Objection in Cyprus on 30 May 2024.

In December 2024, Halil Karapaşaoğlu got another invitation to join the military reservist service exercise. Halil has a pending application to the ECtHR against Turkey (case number 40627/19) for violations of articles 5, 6 and 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights which refer to deprivation of liberty, the right to a fair trial and the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion respectively.



2.12. CZECHIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 2004 by amendment of the Military Act. May be reinstated in a situation of threat or wartime.		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1992	Civilian Service Act (of Czechoslovakia) No. 18/1992		
CO release of professional soldiers	–	“An administrative procedure with a possibility of judicial review”. No details known.		
Minimum recruitment age	18			
Population¹⁰⁷	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18	
	10,837,890	2.7%	58,525	
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above	
	26,600	–	Total strength is 45.5% of cohort	
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP	
	6,525m (+32.0%)	\$605	1.9%	

¹⁰⁷Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.13. DENMARK

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1917	Alternative Service Act of 13th December	
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	4 months	4 months (100%) but see below	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions. Even those who terminate their service contracts retain reserve liability.	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹⁰⁸	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	5,973,136	3.0%	35,839
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	13,100	4,700 (35.9%)	Total strength is 36.6% of cohort Conscripts are 13.1% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	9,959m (+20.3%)	\$1,670	2.4%

Principal EBCO concerns

- No recognition of the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers.

Based on replies to EBCO's questionnaire by the organisation Aldrig Mere Krig¹⁰⁹ and the Ministry of Defence:

Developments

A new conscription system was announced to commence from 2027 which will see the expansion of conscription to women, an increase of conscripts from 4,700 to 6,500 a year (plus 1,000 for the Emergency

¹⁰⁸Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

¹⁰⁹More info about the organisation at: <https://aldrigmerekrig.dk>



Management Agency), and an increase of duration from 4 months to 11 months of service or more.¹¹⁰

The recruits will start with basic education for the first five months, followed by six months in more operational roles.

Under the current plan, military recruits will only serve within Denmark or abroad in the case of NATO deterrence missions. In serious security situations, the Defence Minister may allow volunteers to serve in other missions.

Conscription provisions and procedures

According to section 81 of the Constitutional Act: “Every male person able to bear arms shall be liable with his person to contribute to the defence of his country under such rules as are laid down by statute.”¹¹¹

Conscription is regulated by the Conscription Act Nr. 225¹¹² as well as the Defence Personnel Act Nr. 667.¹¹³

The legal minimum age for conscription in a time of peace and war is 18.

The duration of military service varies from 4 months up to 12 months.

The Ministry of Defence reports a total first-time military recruitment of 4575 in “recent years”, of which 75% were men and 25% women. The majority of conscripts are between 19-21 years old.

According to the Ministry of Defence, in 2024 approximately 54 conscripts were prosecuted for evasion/refusal of military service and not showing up for military service, of whom none had applied for CO-status. The outcomes in these cases were fines for evasion of military service in 50 cases and prison sentences in 3 cases. In one case, charges were waived. The Danish Police and Prosecution Service issues fines and handles cases of possible prison sentences for conscripts serving in the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). In 2024, there were two cases of evasion of military service, where the outcome was imposition of fines.

The national armed forces use different types of public promotions, including advertising on their own platform (HP, SoMe, promotion fairs, Open House engagement, etc.) or paid platforms (TV, SoMe, Cinema, etc).

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

Conscripts in Denmark can apply for recognition as conscientious objectors within 8 weeks of receiving the call-up papers. The call-up papers include information about the right to refuse military service for conscientious reasons, the procedure of applying for CO-status, and the length and types of work in the civilian service.

Applications must be sent in writing, stating the reasons for applying, i.e. the matter of the conscience, and must be based “on religious or ethical reasons” since applications “solely based on political reasons will be refused.”

The applications are decided upon by the Danish Ministry of Defence Personnel Agency (MDPA).

¹¹⁰<https://www.fmn.dk/globalassets/fmn/dokumenter/nyheder/2024/-anden-delaftale-under-forsvarsforliget-2024-2033-.pdf>

¹¹¹<https://www.ft.dk/da/dokumenter/bestil-publikationer/publikationer/mingrundlov/min-grund-lov/kapitel-8/paragraf-81>

¹¹²<https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/ta/2006/225>

¹¹³<https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/ta/2006/667>



The statistics in recent years are shown below.

Year	No. of CO applications	Successful	Unsuccessful
2020	9	5	4
2021	19	18	1
2022	11	11	0
2023	12	10	2
2024	3	2	1

Appeals on negative decisions can be sent as a letter of complaint to the Danish Ministry of Defence. No such appeals were received in the years 2020–2024.

Arrangements for the civilian service are administered under the authority of the Danish Ministry of Defence Personnel Agency (MDPA). The placements are in public or publicly funded institutions, approved by the CO-Administration for this purpose only, and include local or regional governmental, public or private institutions for the common good, that receive public funding. All of them are within the fields of social, health, culture, religion, peace or environment and cannot replace existing vacant jobs or cover functions demanding special skills. Applicants can choose the placement most suitable to their interest, location etc. excluding institutions to which they are attached or where they were previously employed.

Those serving receive cash benefits same as military conscripts, like daily remuneration, subsistence allowance, transport allowance, clothing allowance and housing allowance (average 1,900 EUR/month).

If a conscientious objector does not report to the civilian service, then they receive a letter with a new date for reporting, as well as a fine for not reporting, imposed by the Prosecution Authorities. After a number of incidents, the case is considered denial of service, which can lead to imprisonment for a period corresponding to the length of the service.

Conscientious objection during and after military service

It is possible to apply for conscientious objector status even after the eight-week time limit and after the initiation of service in the military forces or in the Danish Emergency Management Agency. In this case, applicants need to state the time their conscience began, and the reason for it.

The same does not apply for professional soldiers where no such provisions exist. Even those who terminate their service contracts retain reserve liability.

Asylum for conscientious objectors

No information was available.

Militarisation of the education system

There is a possibility to apply for one week of professional practice in military institutions to students under 18.

Four Danish secondary schools (gymnasiums) now offer a voluntary Defence Study education, specially designed courses which includes training with soldiers at the barracks, to try the many aspects of a soldiers life. Throughout the three years, students also gain knowledge and understanding of defence and security policy as well as society's overall preparedness. The subjects in the field of study are all arranged in cooperation with the Danish Armed Forces.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴<https://www.tvsyd.dk/varde/gymnasieelever-kan-nu-indrullere-sig-pa-forsvarslinje>



2.14. ESTONIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1991	Constitution, Article 124. Military Service Act, 1994.	
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	8 months 11 months in some cases	12 months (150%)	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No release during a state of emergency.	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹¹⁵	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	1,193,791	2.9%	6,924
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	7,100	3,500 (49.3%)	Total strength is 102.5% of cohort Conscripts are 50.5% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	1,442m (+12.7%)	\$1,055	3.4%

¹¹⁵Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.15. FINLAND

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1931	Alternative Service Act of 4th June	
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	165 days 225 or 347 days in some roles	347 days for all (209%)	
CO release of professional soldiers	No specific provisions		
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹¹⁶	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	5,626,414	2.8%	31,508
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	23,850	16,050 (67.3%)	Total strength is 75.7% of cohort Conscripts are 50.9% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	6,988m (+16.3%)	\$1,245	2.3%

Principal EBCO concerns

- Alternative service is punitive and discriminatory in terms of longer duration (more than 2x that of military service).
- Poor availability of information about the right to conscientious objection.
- Reports that conscripts are deterred by military officers from applying to be transferred to alternative service.
- Plans to introduce an obligatory national defence day for 17 year-olds. Military courses already offered to 16-17 year-olds.

¹¹⁶Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



As reported by EBCO's Finnish member, AKL (Aseistakieltäytyjälitto - the Finnish Association of Conscientious Objectors):¹¹⁷

Developments

In February 2024, the Finnish defence minister Antti Häkkänen told the public about his intention to find a legal way to stop the reservist objection - launching a new flood of applications to the supplementary service. Currently it is unclear whether Häkkänen's idea will proceed to a concrete legislative proposal.

The current government coalition plans to introduce an obligatory national defence day for all 17 year olds in secondary education "to share information about national defence, conscription and comprehensive security".

In addition to that, the Ministry of Employment and the Economy has informed that in 2025 they will set up a new working group to renew the Act of Non-Military Service in line with the government programme. According to the programme, the aim is to develop non-military service and link it more clearly to the comprehensive security model.

In AKL's view, linking the non-military service more closely to the comprehensive security approach, which includes military security, and preparedness in society, might endanger the conviction-based nature of the alternative service when focusing solely at crisis time instead of proactive peace building.

Conscription provisions and procedures

Conscription is based on the Constitution of Finland, Section 127, "*National defence obligation: Every Finnish citizen is obligated to participate or assist in national defence, as provided by an Act. Provisions on the right to exemption, on grounds of conscience, from participation in military national defence are laid down by an Act.*"

The Conscription Act, Section 2 defines the conscription further, "*Military service: Every male Finnish citizen is liable for military service starting from the beginning of the year in which he turns 18 years old until the end of the year in which he turns 60, unless otherwise provided for herein.*"

Fulfillment of military service includes service as a conscript, participation in reservist training, extra service, and service during mobilisation, in addition to participation in call-ups and examinations assessing fitness for military service.

Persons liable for military service are in active military service, in the reserves or in the auxiliary reserves.

The legal rights of a person liable for military service may not, pursuant to this Act, be limited beyond what is necessary for his performing of military service, the maintenance of military order and measures that are necessary to ensure the safety of the persons liable for military service and other persons."

The minimum age for conscription is 18 years.

According to the Conscription Act, Section 37:

The term of military service is:

1. 180 days for training in the rank and file,
2. 270 days for training for demanding duties that require special and professional skills,
3. 362 days for officers, non-commissioned officers and conscripts trained for especially demanding duties

According to the Finnish Defence Forces, approximately 43% of conscripts serve for 347 days, some 14% for 255 days, and 43% for 165 days.

¹¹⁷More info about the organisation at: <https://akl-web.fi/en>



In 2024, in total 24 285 conscripts were ordered to the mandatory military service, meaning 76% of the male age group.¹¹⁸

For reserve service, according to the Conscription Act, *"Membership in the reserve or auxiliary reserve: After persons liable for military service complete their military service, they become members of the reserve:*

1. *until the end of the year in which they turn 50 years of age, in the case of the rank and file,*
2. *until the end of the year in which they turn 60 years of age, in the case of officers, non-commissioned officers, and warrant officers,*
3. *as long as they are fit for service, in the case of an officer of the rank of Colonel, Captain (Navy) or higher.*

Persons liable for military service belong to the auxiliary reserve if:

1. *they have not completed military service,*
2. *no longer belong to the reserve, or*
3. *have been exempted from service in peacetime"*

Section 50 defines the obligation to reservist training further, *"Obligation to participate in reservist training: A person liable for military service who is in the reserves is liable for participation in reservist training. The maximum total time of the training is:*

1. 40 days for the rank and file,
2. 75 days for persons trained for demanding duties that require special and professional skills,
3. 100 days for non-commissioned officers, warrant officers and officers.

In addition to the times referred to in subsection 1, a person liable for military service may, at his consent, be assigned to participate in reservist training as a member of his or her wartime unit for a maximum of 20 days total per calendar year if that person is vital for the Defence Forces for the leadership or training of that unit. Moreover, such an assignment requires the written consent of the employer of the person in question if the training is to take place during working hours.

If a person liable for military service does not report for reservist training at the appointed time because of a legitimate impediment, he must do so immediately once the impediment is removed, unless otherwise instructed by the military authorities."

Even if the law gives these maximum days for reservist training, not all reservists are called up for reservist service. There are a total of 870,000 reservists and approximately 280,000 are currently deployed in emergency situations. According to the Finnish Defence Forces, the majority of the latter group are participating in mandatory or voluntary reservist exercises during their reservist time.¹¹⁹ Year 2024 about 25,330 reservists were called up to training.¹²⁰

The regional office of the Finnish Defence Forces orders the reservists to the training through letters they send at least three months before service. An exception to this three-month limit can be granted on reservist's permission. A leave from reservist service can be granted only for a justified and documented reason.¹²¹

Conscientious objectors who refuse to perform both military service and non-military service are called "total objectors". They are sentenced to imprisonment for a period corresponding to half of their remaining

¹¹⁸ <https://maavoimat.fi/-/vuoden-2024-kutsunnat-ovat-paattyneet-noin-76-kutsuntaikalukasta-palvelukseen>

¹¹⁹ <https://yle.fi/a/74-20084471>

¹²⁰ <https://www.ess.fi/uutissuomalainen/8065252>

¹²¹ <https://intti.fi/en/refresher-training-exercises>



non-military service time. Maximum imprisonment period is 173 days. Since 2013, total objectors have had the chance to apply to perform monitoring sentences, meaning home arrest where their movements are monitored by electronic ankle bracelets.

Total objection is possible to happen by giving a declaration of conscientious objection to either military officers or Non-Military Service Centre. In 2024, 16 conscientious objectors were prosecuted for not performing non-military service, and 2 for not performing military service. Aseistakieltäytyjäliitto has information that a total objector was acquitted in the court, because they could show that they were not fit to serve, and should have been granted medical exemption from the service. Also, one person did not apply for a monitoring sentence, and received a sentence to prison. All other total objectors were judged to monitoring sentences for half of the length of their remaining non-military service days.

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

According to the Non-Military Service Act, chapter 1, *"A person liable for military service who holds that serious reasons of conscience founded on conviction prevent him from carrying out the service laid down in the Conscription Act (1438/2007) will be exempted from such service and assigned to perform non-military service as provided for in this Act."*

All conscientious objectors are required to do the non-military service, if not exempted from it because of health reasons or double citizenship and regular living abroad. The law doesn't give a provision for exemption of all service due to one's conviction.

A conscript can apply to non-military service due to their conviction in the call up, before the military service and whenever in the military service. Also after the military service it is possible to apply to supplementary service due to conviction reasons to change from military reserve to the civilian reserve. There is no inquiry of conviction in peacetime, but the applications are accepted automatically.

The Non-Military Service Act's Section 13 states, *"Non-military service applications must be processed without delay. Call-up boards or Defence Forces regional offices must approve all applications that comply with the requirements laid down in section 12. Commanders of military units and the Centre for Non-Military Service must pass on all applications submitted to them to a Defence Forces regional office for approval. Call-up boards and Defence Forces regional offices must without delay notify the Centre for Non-Military Service that the non-military service application has been approved."*

Still, the right to apply for non-military service during the army service often has problems. The Union Of Conscientious Objectors gets dozens of contacts every year from military servicemen who are willing to change to non-military service but who face denial or procrastination by the army brass.

The Non-Military Service Act, §18 also states that during extraordinary service or partial or general mobilisation of the Defence Forces, the applications to non-military and supplementary service will be processed by the Investigation Committee of Conviction of Persons Liable for Military Service.

Information provided

The Non-Military Service Act obligates authorities to provide information about the possibility to apply for non-military service. Act's section 104 says: *"The Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the Centre for Non-Military Service, and the Defence Forces must provide those liable for conscription with sufficient information on the possibility to apply for, and the content of, non-military service."*

The Human Rights Council draw attention in the theme in its Resolution 24/17: *"[The Council] affirms the importance of the availability of information about the right to conscientious objection to military service, and the means of acquiring conscientious objector status, to all persons affected by military service – [and] –*



welcomes initiatives to make such information widely available, and encourages States, as applicable, to provide information to conscripts and persons serving voluntarily in the military services about the right to conscientious objection to military service."

In the seventh periodic report of Finland (CCPR/C/FIN/7) also the Human Rights Committee was concerned about "the insufficient dissemination of information about the right to conscientious objection and alternatives to military service."

This obligation is not realised. Firstly, there is not much information about non-military service before the call-ups or during the call-ups.

Finnish males receive a call-up letter on the year they turn 18 years old. On the letter there is a call-up notice, a questionnaire to ascertain military service and state of health and a guide book for military service. There is not any information about non-military service in the call-up notice. In the questionnaire there are questions about what kind of wishes the draftee has for army service. In the whole call-up letter there is neither possibility to announce about the wish to serve in the non-military service nor information about how to apply to it.

The call-ups are organised by the Finnish Defence Forces and the municipality. It differs how the non-military service is presented in the call-ups. Normally it is mentioned quickly, sometimes not at all. Often the atmosphere is propagandist: there are screenings of films made by Defence Forces and often there are war veterans giving speeches. Sometimes the manner of speaking makes non-military service sound suspicious and negative. Conscientious objectors need to find information about non-military service by themselves from the internet.

The Union of Conscientious Objectors has been collecting experiences from the participants who have not received enough information in the call-ups. The Union is also sharing leaflets that inform conscripts about the alternatives for military service. This campaign has continued for decades.

Assessment of applications

In the case of a call-up, the body responsible for deciding upon applications for recognition of conscientious objection is the call-up board, while in the case of a person already performing military service, it is the commander of the military unit concerned, or in other cases the regional office of the Defence Forces.

The call-up board comprises the head of the military district or the officer assigned to use his decision-making power in matters of conscription as chairman, and, as members, the secretary of call-up related issues and the representative of the municipality.

In 2024, there were 2292 applications to non-military service and 3457 applications to supplementary service. All the applications were successful, even if according to the Finnish Union of Conscientious Objectors in several dozens cases of applications made during the military service were more or less deferred by the military officers.

Rejection decisions are accompanied by instructions to submit an appeal.

Terms of alternative service

Alternative service is performed in public and nongovernmental organisations, excluding those under the command of Ministry of Defence. The Ministry of Labor and Economy administers the arrangements.

It lasts 347 days. In comparison, military service lasts 165-347 days, depending on tasks – the upper end of 347 days only applies to officers, non-commissioned officers and conscripts trained for especially demanding duties.



The allowance in the non-military service is same to the one for military service – 6,10 EUR daily, then 10,15 EUR after 165 days in service, then 14,15 EUR after 255 days in service. Accommodation and meals are provided during the service for free.

According to the Non-military Service Act 15 §, The Non-Military Service Centre assigns the placements. In practice, the Centre gives the conscientious objectors an opportunity to apply for different placements with a free choice.

Assignment at the place of residence is possible if the applicant finds an organisation and comes to an agreement with them about performing their service there.

Voluntary recruitment

Finland maintains a voluntary military service for women aged 18 to 29 which is regulated by the Act about Women's Voluntary Military Service.¹²²

On an application round ending on 15 January 2025, 1448 women applied to voluntary military service.¹²³

The required duration is in principle the same as the duration of regular military service of conscripts, from 165 to 347 days depending on tasks.

Even if applying is voluntary for women and they can end their service without consequences during the first 30 days of service, after that they are treated as conscripts and cannot anymore end their service, except for a valid reason, like a health situation or to apply for non-military service. Reserve duty also applies for those who complete the voluntary service.

Conscientious objection during and after military service

The Non-Military Service Act 12 § states that it is possible to apply to the non-military service also during the military service.

The procedure requires completing an application form which is available online or can be requested from the base unit officer. The form is forwarded from the base unit to the military department commander for approval.

According to AKL, conscripts are not officially informed about this possibility.

Close to half of the applications (~1000) of conscientious objectors are submitted during the military service which, according to AKL, hints at poor access to information about the right to conscientious objection.

Applicants often face pressure or delays by the lower rank officers before their applications get processed properly. The applications that do reach the deciding officer (the commander of the military unit in this case) are all accepted in practice.

28 people were prosecuted for desertion in 2024. There is no information on whether they had claimed conscientious objection grounds. The sanction of desertion depends on the length of unallowed absence from the military unit, varying from fines up to 2 years imprisonment.

Section 58 of the Non-Military Service Act states that: *"A person liable for non-military service who has completed said service under the Conscription Act or the Act on Women's Voluntary Military Service and has filed an approved application for non-military service after completing the service in question, is liable to participate in supplementary service."*

¹²²"Laki naisten vapaaehtoisesta asepalveluksesta" <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2022/20220285>

¹²³<https://maavoimat.fi/-/yli-1400-naista-haki-vapaaehtoiseen-asepalvelukseen>



Applying for supplementary service exempts the person from the reserve service, even if after their call-up. In 2024, there were 3457 applications to supplementary service, which is the second highest number of all time.

Asylum for conscientious objectors

There are no statistics of asylum applicants who have cited conscientious objection grounds.

There has been public discussion about Russian asylum seekers, who have fled the military service or mobilisation in Russia. Currently only few have been granted asylum due to that.¹²⁴

Militarisation of the education system

A working group set up by the government of Finland published a plan in January 2024 to introduce an obligatory national defence day for all 17 year olds in secondary education “to share information about national defence, conscription and comprehensive security.”¹²⁵ As of 2024, this has not been realised yet.

Military-themed 3-day “courses” are offered to young people aged 16 and above, organised by the Association for National Defence Education (“Maanpuolustuskoulutusyhdistys”) and are marketed especially to secondary education students.¹²⁶

¹²⁴<https://yle.fi/a/74-20122140>

¹²⁵<https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/1410845/kutsuntatyoryhma-ehdottaa-yhteista-maanpuolustuspaivaa-ja-ennakkoterveystar-kastuksia-koko-ikaluokalle>

¹²⁶<https://koulutuskalenteri.mpk.fi/Default.aspx?tabid=1054&id=181035>



2.16. FRANCE

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 1997 under Law 97-1019 Conditions for reinstatement unclear.	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1963	Act No 1255/63 of 21st December.	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹²⁷	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	68,374,591	3.1%	423,922
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	202,200	–	Total strength is 47.7% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	64,675m (+6.1%)	\$973	2.0%

Principal EBCO concerns

- Military-themed programmes form obligatory parts of the education curriculum (Day of Defence and Citizenship).
- Plans to introduce a mandatory “Universal National Service” for young people of ages 15-17.

As reported by Christian Renoux on behalf of the Mouvement international de la Réconciliation (MIR France):¹²⁸

Developments

In September 2024, the Court of Audit (Cour des Comptes) issued a very harsh report on the proposed SNU (Universal National Service) noting that “the conditions under which the system is implemented are unsatisfactory, and that its development has not been accompanied by clarification of its objectives, which remain uncertain”.

On 16th January 2025, the Senate eliminated the budgetary appropriations allocated to the deployment of the SNU but the government continues to defend Emmanuel Macron's flagship scheme.

¹²⁷Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

¹²⁸More info about the organisation at: <https://mirfrance.org/MIR/>



Conscription provisions and procedures

In 1997, conscription was suspended by law (not abolished), along with the possibility to request recognition as a conscientious objector. The last conscripts left the barracks in November 2001. The government then opted to professionalise the army.

During the presidential campaign of 2017, a new element emerged when Emmanuel Macron as candidate proposed the re-establishment of a national service in the armed forces and the gendarmerie, which would create against a time of crisis a “mobilisation reservoir supplementary to the National Guard.” This was subsequently elaborated by the government (without a vote in the Parliament) as a Service National Universel or SNU (Universal National Service) which would be obligatory for all young people, male and female, between the ages of 15 and 17 and with the aim to convey “French values”, to strengthen social cohesion and to promote social engagement, emphasising that it is not a matter of reintroducing conscription.

The first experiment of the SNU is launched in 2019 in thirteen departments on a voluntary basis with 2,000 young people. COVID caused the cancellation of the programme planned for 2020, however in 2021, 14,650 young volunteers from all the country took part, a number rising to 32,000 in 2022 and 40,000 in 2023 and in 2024, still however only a small fraction of the 800,000 or so per annum who would be involved were it to become compulsory, as it is planned, in 2026 (according to Prime Minister Gabriel Attal’s announcement in January 2024).

The first part of this service is a sejour de cohesion (summer camp) of twelve days spent in uniform, and featuring activities such as daily raising of the flag, singing of the Marseillaise and parade ground drills. The second part is a placement of not less than 84 hours of service in the public interest, including in voluntary organisations, the police, the gendarmerie, the fire service, civil defence and the armed forces; a third, optional and non-obligatory, element is a period of six to twelve months paid service to be undertaken between the ages of 18 and 25 in the same areas. Some of this, for example “civil service” caring for the disabled, would incorporate voluntary programmes which are already in existence; others would where relevant entail becoming a full member of the armed forces, albeit on a temporary basis.

Widespread opposition and legal and logistical problems have delayed until now the scheme to become compulsory. Another aspect which the voluntary pilot schemes do not address was the likelihood of a high refusal rate in an obligatory programme. It is not yet clear what the consequences of refusal will be.

Meanwhile, a Senate committee which reported on 8 March 2023 pointed out the logistical difficulties and enormous cost of “generalising” the scheme; As detailed above in Developments, the Court of Audit has since published a critique of the plans, while in 2025 the Senate eliminated the budgetary allocations.

The Collective “NON au SNU” REF was founded in 2019 bringing together some forty associations, trade unions, political parties, youth movements, neighbourhood groups etc. It denounced the SNU as representing the repression of youth, a threat to workers rights, a waste of money and a reinforcement of militarisation.

Because of the target age range, the SNU cannot be defined as military service. Nevertheless somehow it aspires to use its link with national defence and the military to evade the International Labour Office’s definition of forced labour, embodied in Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights, to which the only permitted exceptions are work performed as part of a penal sentence or military service (including alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors).

Meanwhile, it undeniably represents a reimposition of a form of conscription, and given the overtly militaristic nature of the concept, and many of the actual placements, some provision for conscientious objection would clearly be appropriate.



Militarisation of the education system

After ending conscription in 1997, France created a mandatory one-day programme for high school students called the "Day of Defence and Citizenship". This programme aims to teach students about citizenship and national defence, and to inform them about military careers.

Students who do not attend this day cannot take the final high school exam (baccalaureat), get a driver's licence, register for university or apply for civil service jobs. No provisions exist to obtain exemption on grounds of conscientious objection.



2.17. GEORGIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1992	Military Service Act, Article 12.	
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	12 months	18 months (150%)	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions	
Minimum recruitment age	18	Admission to Military Technical School from 16	
Population¹²⁹	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	4,900,961	2.9%	28,426
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	20,650	4,350 (21.1%)	Total strength is 72.6% of cohort Conscripts are 15.3% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	616m (+24.4%)	\$162	1.9%

¹²⁹Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.18. GERMANY

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 2011 under Act Amending the Law on Military Service (BT-Drs 17/2841) Could be reinstated in time of war.	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1949	Grundgesetz Article 4 Law on Military Service, 1956	
CO release of professional soldiers	Yes	Kriegsdienstverweigerergesetz applies equally to conscripts and professional soldiers. However in some circumstances release may bear a financial penalty.	
Minimum recruitment age	17	For voluntary service	
Population¹³⁰	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	84,119,100	2.3%	386,948
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	179,850	–	Total strength is 46.5% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	88,459m (+28.3%)	\$1,044	1.9%

Developments

In 2024, the Federal Minister of Defence submitted a draft of the “Act on the Modernisation of Military of military service regulations and the introduction of a new military service” for consultation, which would see the reintroduction of military registers and monitoring through digital questionnaires.¹³¹

Young men of age 18 will be obliged to complete the questionnaires, while women can do so voluntarily. The online questionnaire is used to collect personal data, interest, and willingness to perform military service.

The aim of the Ministry of Defence's campaign is to recruit more young people into the Bundeswehr. The military is planning to create around 3,000 additional posts each year in the coming years. The new military service is still intended to be voluntary military service with a duration of 6-23 months.

¹³⁰Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

¹³¹<https://www.bmvg.de/de/service/gesetze-und-verordnungen/entwurf-gesetz-modernisierung-wehrersatzrechtlicher-vorschriften-5849530>



As the governing coalition in Germany collapsed in December 24, it remains unclear whether the act will be implemented in 2025.

Conscription provisions and procedures

Compulsory military service was suspended in Germany in 2011, but not abolished. It can automatically be reinstated in a state of emergency or war.

In case of war, all men aged 18-60 could be called up. In the event of full mobilisation for war, all reservists would also be called up. Exceptions, for example for health reasons, would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

In their election manifestos, the conservative parties are talking about either a return to general compulsory military service or a general conscription requirement. As in Scandinavian countries, this would allow those who are fit for military service to be drafted into the Bundeswehr.

The question of compulsory military service raises the question of the relationship between civilian and military service, the relationship between service and freedom. In December 2024, the Working Group Services for Peace (AGDF) together with the Protestant Association for Conscientious Objection and Peace (EAK) presented a position paper on this.¹³² In view of the discussions about general compulsory service and the reactivation of conscription in peacetime or the redesign of compulsory military service, both emphasise the priority of civil conflict resolution and civil voluntary peace service.

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

In case of emergency or war, conscientious objectors can be called up for civilian service under the Civilian Service Act (ZDG).¹³³

In 2024 (as of 31 October 2024), 2,468 applications for conscientious objection were received.¹³⁴ The majority of these applications were submitted by unserved conscientious objectors (1492) and by reservists (840 applications). 136 active military servicemen and women submitted applications. This means that the number of applications has once again increased compared to the previous year.

By 30 September 2024, 1,035 applications for conscientious objection had been recognised and 236 applications rejected. 55 other applications were rejected due to incompleteness.

Voluntary recruitment

Voluntary service in the Bundeswehr is permitted from the age of 17 with the consent of the parents.

¹³²https://www.evangelische-friedensarbeit.de/system/files?file=2024-12/eak-agdf_positionspapier_dienstpflicht_0.pdf

¹³³Article 79 of the Civilian Service Act (Zivildienst der Kriegsdienstverweigerer). See also parliamentary question of Die Linke and response by the Federal Government on 16 October 2024. <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/133/2013395.pdf>

¹³⁴<https://www.bild.de/politik/anstieg-der-kriegsdienstverweigerungen-bundeswehr-in-der-krise-675fe02515f99f7a780dc603>



2.19. GREECE

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1997	Law No. 2510/97	
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	12 months 9 months in some cases depending on location of posting	15 months (125%–167%) There is a complicated tariff of shorter service periods depending on family circumstances	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not permitted		
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹³⁵	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	10,461,091	2.9%	60,674
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	132,000	50,400 (38.2%)	Total strength is 217.6% of cohort Conscripts are 83.1% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	8,022m (+11.0%)	\$791	3.1%

Principal EBCO concerns

- Alternative service is punitive and discriminatory, inter alia, in terms of longer duration, discriminatory geographical restrictions, and compensation being below the poverty threshold.
- Conscientious objectors are subjected to inquiry and are discriminated against when applying on ideological grounds. The process has yet to be placed under the full control of civilian authorities.
- Punishment of certain categories of conscientious objectors continues, in violation of international law. Such punishment may also be repeated in violation of *ne bis in idem*.

¹³⁵Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



- Non-compliance to the UN Human Rights Committee decision on Petromelidis v. Greece.

Developments

As reported by Georgios Karatzas:

EBCO's collective complaint to the ECSR for violations of social and economic rights of conscientious objectors

On 30 June 2024, EBCO submitted a collective complaint to the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) concerning violations of the (Revised) European Social Charter in the case of conscientious objectors in Greece.¹³⁶

The complaint concerns violations of social and economic rights of conscientious objectors to military service, performing the alternative civilian service, in conjunction with the violation of the right to freedom from discrimination. EBCO submits that Greece is in violation of Article 30 (The right to protection against poverty and social exclusion) and Article 31 (The right to housing), insofar conscientious objectors performing alternative civilian service are not provided with adequate resources and housing, as well as Article 16 (The right of the family to social, legal and economic protection), insofar the families of conscientious objectors are also affected and not adequately protected. EBCO submits that Greece is in violation of the above articles in themselves, as well as in conjunction with Article E (Non-discrimination), insofar the legal provisions for conscientious objectors performing alternative civilian service, and their families, provide less protection in comparison to the protection provided to conscripts performing military service, and their families. The discrimination faced by the conscientious objectors is on the grounds of "religion" (as for those conscientious objectors citing religious grounds for their conscientious objection), and "political or other opinion" (as for those conscientious objectors citing ideological grounds for their conscientious objection), which are both covered in the definition of discrimination in Article E. In certain cases, the above violations are in conjunction with violations of other articles, such as Article 1.2, as for the length of alternative service for a specific category of reduced service, and Article 11, as for providing housing inside hospitals, which increases health risks.

The complaint was registered on 1 July 2024 and has been given the reference number **242/2024**.¹³⁷ In conformity with Article 6 of the Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter providing for a system of collective complaints and in application of Rule 28§2 and Rule 29§1 of the Rules of the European Committee of Social Rights, the President of the Committee has set 6 September 2024 as the time limit within which the respondent Government could submit written observations on admissibility. According to the information received, it appears that the Greek government did not raise any objections as of the admissibility of the complaint.

By the end of 2024, the examination of the admissibility of EBCO's collective complaint by the ECSR was still pending.

Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee

In October and November 2024, during its 142nd session, the Human Rights Committee (hereinafter the Committee) examined the 3rd periodic report of Greece, concerning compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and issued its concluding observations.

¹³⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/cc242casedoc1-en/1680b0dbd6>

¹³⁷ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter/-/no.-242/2024-european-bureau-for-conscientious-objection-ebco-v-greece>



Worth noting that in the context of this procedure there have been two submissions to the Human Rights Committee fully dedicated to conscientious objectors to military service (by Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI) jointly with EBCO,¹³⁸ and by Connection e.V.¹³⁹), while issues of conscientious objectors were also cited in at least two further submissions (by Amnesty International¹⁴⁰ and the Greek National Commission for Human Rights¹⁴¹).

Among numerous and serious human rights issues in Greece, the Committee indeed addressed, once more, issues of civil and political rights of conscientious objectors to military service in Greece.

The relevant paragraph of the concluding observations of the Committee reads as follows:¹⁴²

“Conscientious objection to compulsory military service

28. The Committee remains concerned about: (a) the length of alternative

service for conscientious objectors, which is longer than military service; (b) the composition of the committee responsible for examining applications from citizens to be granted conscientious objector status and its reported lack of independence and impartiality; and (c) reports indicating that conscientious objectors are discriminated against on the basis of the different grounds of objection to military service (arts. 14, 18 and 26).¹⁴³

29. The State party should ensure that its legislation recognizing the right to conscientious objection to military service encompasses an alternative to military service that is accessible to all conscientious objectors and is not punitive or discriminatory in terms of its nature, cost or duration. The State party should also consider placing the assessment of applications for conscientious objector status under the full control of civilian authorities.”

A careful reading of the concluding observations reveals that the Committee has, more or less, repeated its concerns on issues that had been already cited during the previous examination, in 2015, and issued similar recommendations. More specifically, the Committee cited:

- The issue of **length** of alternative service. This is even though the discrepancy between the length of alternative service and that of military service has been somehow reduced in recent years, given the 2021 increase of the length of military service in the Army, where the vast majority of conscripts serve. Nowadays, the discrepancy between alternative and military service ranges between 25% and 67%, depending on the category of full or reduced service according, mainly, to family status. It is important, though, that the Committee has raised the issue of length in a country situation where the (full) alternative service is 25% longer than the (full) military service.

¹³⁸https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FGRC%2F59918&Lang=en

¹³⁹https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FGRC%2F59913&Lang=en

¹⁴⁰See particularly chapter 7 “Freedom of Religion and Belief (articles 14 and 18)”, pp. 12-14.

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FGRC%2F59911&Lang=en

¹⁴¹See paras. 41-44.

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FNHS%2FGRC%2F59915&Lang=en

¹⁴²UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Greece, (CCPR/C/GRC/CO/3), 28 November 2024, paras. 28-29. Available at: <https://undocs.org/CCPR/C/GRC/CO/3>

¹⁴³[CCPR/C/GRC/CO/2](https://undocs.org/CCPR/C/GRC/CO/2), para. 37, and [CCPR/CO/83/GRC](https://undocs.org/CCPR/CO/83/GRC), para. 15.



It is possible that the Committee took seriously into consideration that, in 2019, the length of alternative service had been reduced and then increased, within only a few months, by different governments, without any reasonable grounds whatsoever.

- In any case, the Committee did not limit itself on the issue of length, but also mentioned, once more, issues of **nature** and **cost** of the alternative service. (“**not punitive or discriminatory in terms of its nature, cost or duration**”)
- The issue of the **composition** of the committee examining applications for granting CO status (despite the reduction of the number of military members of such committee from 2 to 1, and the increase of civilian members from 3 to 4, in 2019). However, once more, the Committee addressed also more generally the issue of examination of applications (“**consider placing the assessment of applications for conscientious objector status under the full control of civilian authorities**”)
- The issue of **discrimination between different groups** of conscientious objectors on the basis of the **different grounds of objection** to military service, as well the **access of all** conscientious objectors to alternative service (“**accessible to all conscientious objectors**”).

It is important to note that in addition to articles 14 and 18 of ICCPR cited in the concluding observations of 2015, the Committee, this time, cited also **article 26** concerning **discrimination**.

The only issue which is not explicitly mentioned by the Committee, in comparison with the issues cited in 2015, is that of the repeated punishment of certain conscientious objectors (i.e., repeated prosecutions and sentences, as well fines, for insubordination, for those who are not recognised as conscientious objectors, or do not perform or conclude, for some reason, the (punitive) alternative civilian service). A repeated punishment which the Committee has consistently stated that it is in violation of the *ne bis in idem* principle, i.e., “No one shall be liable to be tried or punished again for an offence for which he has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with the law and penal procedure of each country.” (art. 14 (7) ICCPR). However, this issue too, even though not explicitly mentioned, it is nevertheless included implicitly by citing article 14. As well by the direct reference to the previous concluding observations of 2015 (footnote 7 in the original document).

Worth noting also that the Committee, as far as it concerns the repeated punishment of conscientious objectors in Greece, in violation of the *ne bis in idem* principle, has not highlighted this issue only in the context of the concluding observations of 2015, but also more recently, in 2021-2022, in the context of the decision on the case of *Petromelidis v. Greece*¹⁴⁴ (see also at the relevant part).

Following the issuing of the Committee’s concluding observations, the opposition political party of SYRIZA submitted at the parliament an extensive question about their implementation, signed by 12 MPs, and addressing 9 Ministers of the government, including the Minister of National Defence. In the question, the issue of conscientious objectors to military service is briefly mentioned, among many other issues, accompanied by a recommendation of the party, along the lines of the Committee’s one, i.e. “alternative service that is accessible to all conscientious objectors which should not be punitive or discriminatory in terms of its nature, cost or duration”. By the end of 2024 the Ministry of National Defence has not responded.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴<https://undocs.org/CCPR/C/132/D/3065/2017>

¹⁴⁵Question No. 2352, 19 December 2024. Available in Greek, along with replies by Ministers at: https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Koinovouleftikos-Elenchos/Mesa-Koinovouleutikou-Elegxou?pcm_id=6ee4a858-a835-418e-a2e4-b24c00f32956



Follow-up of the Human Rights Committee on the *Petromelidis v. Greece* case

During the same 142nd session of October-November 2024, the Committee examined to which extent Greece has implemented the Views of the Committee in the *Petromelidis v. Greece* case, in which violations of Articles 9 (1), 12 (2), 14 (7) and 18 (1) had been found. This was case of a conscientious objector who had been persecuted for decades and repeatedly punished, for not performing the military service, nor an extremely punitive, by that time, alternative civilian service.

Before examining the assessment of the Committee in this particular case, it should be noted that the Assessment criteria (as revised during the 118th session), are as follows:

Assessment of replies:

- A. Reply/action largely satisfactory: The State party has provided evidence of significant action taken towards the implementation of the recommendation made by the Committee.
- B. Reply/action partially satisfactory: The State party has taken steps towards the implementation of the recommendation, but additional information or action remains necessary.
- C. Reply/action not satisfactory: A response has been received, but the action taken or information provided by the State party is not relevant or does not implement the recommendation.
- D. No cooperation with the Committee: No follow-up report has been received after the reminder(s).
- E. Information or measures taken are contrary to or reflect rejection of the recommendation.

In the present case, as far as it concerns all issues concerning personally Mr. Petromelidis, the Committee, reasonably, rated the response of Greece with **C**:

(a) Expunging criminal records: **C**

(b) Reimbursement of sums paid as fines [i.e., financial penalties instead of imprisonment]: **C**

(c) Adequate compensation [for all the violations suffered, including repeated arrests/imprisonment, as well further ones, like prohibition to leave the country, etc.]: **C**

The assessment of the Committee means that, for these issues “Reply/action not satisfactory: A response has been received, but the action taken or information provided by the State party is not relevant or does not implement the recommendation.” This is reasonable because, in fact, the State party, to date, has not taken **any action whatsoever** to provide Mr. Petromelidis with an effective remedy, i.e. full reparation.

However, as far as it concerns the broader issues, the Committee rated Greece’s response with **B**:

(d) Non-repetition [i.e., “take all steps necessary to prevent similar violations from occurring in the future”]: **B**

(e) Review of the legislation [i.e., “the State party should review its legislation with a view to ensuring the effective guarantee of the right to conscientious objection under article 18 (1) of the Covenant, for instance by providing for the possibility of undertaking alternative civilian service that is not punitive and discriminatory in nature”]: **B**

This rating means: “Reply/action partially satisfactory: The State party has taken steps towards the implementation of the recommendation, but additional information or action remains necessary.”

In EBCO’s view, this assessment is wrongful, because whatever insufficient improvements had been made to the legislation concerning conscientious objectors, in 2019, besides the fact that they have been partially overturned by the next government, in any case they had occurred **prior to 2021**, when the Committee issued its Views in the *Petromelidis*’ case. In fact, **following the issuing of the Views, no substantial legislative action whatsoever has been taken** in order to improve the legislation and bring it in line with



international human rights law and standards. On the contrary, the only attempt to amend the relevant legislation concerned an attempt to deteriorate (instead of improving) the legislation, i.e. the attempt to increase the number of military members of the special committee which examines applications for CO status. An attempt which occurred when the Ministry of National Defence published a bill for public consultation containing such a provision, in December 2022,¹⁴⁶ and which was finally thwarted following backlash, including, *inter alia*, by conscientious objectors, Amnesty International,¹⁴⁷ and most importantly by the Greek National Commission for Human Rights,¹⁴⁸

In any case, the combination of the Committee's concluding observation concerning the 3rd periodic report of Greece, as well the assessment concerning the (non) implementation of Views in the Petromelidis' case, demonstrate the obligation of Greece to comply without delay with the decisions of the Committee and implement international law as far as it concerns the conscientious objectors to military service.

Conscientious objector punished with extension of alternative service for "unjustifiable absence"

A conscientious objector has been punished with extension of the duration of the already punitive alternative civilian service for "unjustifiable absence".

The conscientious objector, who was serving at the General Hospital of Chalkida, had requested some days or weeks of (additional) leave, in order to be able to work and cope with the extremely punitive financial conditions of the alternative civilian service. The conscientious objector had asked for an "unpaid leave" equivalent to the one provided to public employees, and to perform these days or weeks as additional time at the end of the period of his service. His request was firmly substantiated, based on a provision of the law which equates conscientious objectors with the public employees of the same institution on certain issues.

However, both the administration of the General Hospital of Chalkida, as well the Recruitment Agency of Attica, denied granting such an "unpaid leave". Furthermore, despite the pressing need for leave in order to work and earn the necessary income to be able to conclude the punitive alternative civilian service, they considered his absence as "unjustifiable". Subsequently, making use of a provision of the law concerning "unjustifiable absence", they punished the conscientious objector by requesting to perform an additional time **twice the time** he was absent. In addition to that, the initial calculation of the required additional time, by the General Hospital of Chalkida, did not include holidays, but rather only working days, thus extending even further the actual duration of the alternative service. Finally, following, *inter alia*, a complaint of the conscientious objector to the Greek Ombudsman, the Recruitment Agency of Attica insisted on considering the absence as "unjustifiable" and on the requirement to perform an additional time **twice the time** he was absent, and only accepted that the calculation of the additional time should have included holidays.

¹⁴⁶<http://www.opengov.gr/mindefence/?p=6830>

¹⁴⁷[in Greek] Διεθνής Αμνηστία, «Ελλάδα: Να αποσυρθεί το άρθρο 62 που προτείνει μεταρρυθμίσεις του νόμου 3421/2005 καθώς αυτό θα παραβίαζε περαιτέρω τα δικαιώματα των αντιρρησιών συνείδησης», ["Greece: Withdraw article 62 proposing amendments of law 3421/2005 since this would further violate the rights of conscientious objectors", 28 December 2022. Available Greek at:

<https://www.amnesty.gr/news/press/article/26957/ellada-na-aposyrthei-arthro-62-poy-proteinei-metarrythmiseis-toy-nomoy>

¹⁴⁸[in Greek] ΕΕΔΑ, Επιστολή της ΕΕΔΑ επί του Σχεδίου Νόμου του Υπουργείου Εθνικής Άμυνας «Μέριμνα υπέρ του προσωπικού των Ενόπλων Δυνάμεων, εξορθολογισμός της νομοθεσίας των Ενόπλων Δυνάμεων, οργάνωση της Εθνοφυλακής και άλλες διατάξεις», 9 January 2023 (published 17 January 2023). <https://www.nchr.gr/2020-02-26-05-51-20/34-antirrisies-syneidisis/1538-epistoli-ybeta.html>



Arrests of civilians for insubordination

According to official police reports,¹⁴⁹ in 2024, police continued to arrest civilians for insubordination, i.e. for draft evasion. It appears that most such arrests were random, in the context of broader police operations.

Indications of unreported criminalisation

Despite not receiving public information about trials of conscientious objectors to military service by military courts in 2024, EBCO has strong indications that the military courts continued to summon conscientious objectors to trials on charges of “insubordination” in 2024 and will continue to do so in 2025. However, it appears that certain conscientious objectors prefer not to reveal publicly or even to the authorities their conscientious grounds for not performing the military service (and the punitive alternative civilian service) and rather undergo the trial as “common insubordinates”, i.e. common draft evaders. In certain cases, this could be out of fear of harsher punishment in case they reveal that they are in fact conscientious objectors or if they make their trial a public issue. The harsher punishment could occur in different ways. On the one hand, while the conviction is almost certain (although occasionally there have been certain cases of acquittal, usually because of “technical” issues, like procedural errors during someone’s call-up for military service), nevertheless, the sentence could vary at the discretion of the military court, i.e., usually it could range from some months up to 2 years for each period of insubordination. On the other hand, someone could fear that if he reveals that he is a conscientious objector, he could face harsher persecution *after* the first conviction and sentence for the first period of insubordination. This is related to the fact that a sentence for insubordination does not absolve someone from military duties, and conscientious objectors are repeatedly called-up for military service, and subsequently prosecuted and punished, in violation of the *ne bis in idem* principle. It is also related to the fact that an arrest concludes a period of insubordination, which means that, in such case, the next call-up will initiate a new period of insubordination, which will eventually entail an additional sentence. This means that the more times someone is arrested, the more periods of insubordination, and consequently sentences for insubordination, he accumulates. Therefore, someone could fear that if he declares publicly or to the authorities his conscientious objection to military service, he might be persecuted more systematically by the police, in comparison with common draft evaders.

CO status statistics for 2024

According to the official data provided to EBCO by the Greek Ministry of National Defence:¹⁵⁰

Statistics of applications for conscientious objector status in 2024

Category	Examined	Approved	Rejected
Ideological beliefs	8	4	4
Religious beliefs	101	101 (among them 4 reservists)	0
TOTAL	109	105	4

¹⁴⁹E.g. reports of [13 January 2024](#), [15 January 2024](#), [10 March 2024](#), [15 March 2024](#), [29 March 2024](#), [11 April 2024](#), [25 April 2024](#), [31 May 2024](#), [12 June 2024](#), [9 August 2024](#), [21 August 2024](#), [24 August 2024](#), [27 August 2024](#), [6 September 2024](#), [13 September 2024](#), [18 September 2024](#), [15 October 2024](#), [1 November 2024](#), [8 November 2024](#), [13 November 2024](#), [5 December 2024](#), [12 December 2024](#), [28 December 2024](#).

¹⁵⁰Ministry of National Defence, “Conscientious Objectors”, (Φ.429/1/9727 Σ.1389), 23 January 2025, Annexes A and B, pp. 14-17.



Statistics of administrative appeals on applications for CO status in 2024

Category	Examined	Approved	Rejected
Ideological beliefs	0	0	0
Religious beliefs	0	0	0
TOTAL	0	0	0

Research raises additional issues of lack independence and impartiality of the body examining applications for CO status

A new research by conscientious objectors published on 28 October 2024,¹⁵¹ challenges the **independence and impartiality** of the Chairs (or Presidents) of the Special Committee examining applications for conscientious objector status, who are members of the State's Legal Council,¹⁵² i.e. the body of lawyers of the government (different from the Council of State, the supreme administrative court). The research, which is citing **more than 30 cases** concerning conscientious objectors before the Council of State (Greece's supreme administrative court), reveals and documents that **the vast majority** of the Chairs of the Special Committee, (**at least 4 out of 5 Regular Chairs**, and **at least 5 out of 6 Substitute Chairs**, who have been appointed to the Special Committee since **2002** and until the date of the publication of the research), at some point, (**prior, during** or after they have served as Chairs of the Special Committee), have also **represented the Ministry of National Defence in legal disputes versus conscientious objectors** before the Council of State (Greece's supreme administrative court). The research also notes that the *only* Substitute Chair for whom it has not been possible to find, until now, a case representing the MoND versus conscientious objectors, nevertheless, according to official documents, he was **serving at the Office of the Legal Counsel of the MoND, by the time he was appointed as Substitute Chair of the Special Committee**.

The research documents a **pattern** of appointing as Regular or Substitute Chairs of the Special Committee, those members of the State's Legal Council who have already represented the MoND in legal cases versus conscientious objectors, as well a similar **pattern** of "employing" the actual Regular or Substitute Chairs of the Special Committee, during their term, in legal cases versus conscientious objectors.

This sheds new light to the **lack of independence and impartiality of the assessment of applications for CO status, and specifically the Special Committee**, for which the **Human Rights Committee has raised concerns in all 3 previous concluding observations**¹⁵³. The question now is not only that the Minister of National Defence is taking the decision, or that it does so after a recommendation of a Special Committee which still has military participation. It is also, that the Chairs of the Special Committee (who might play a crucial role, *inter alia*, as their vote prevails in case of a split vote inside the Committee), are also **directly related to the Ministry of National Defence** and are involved in **legal disputes versus conscientious objectors**.

¹⁵¹Available in Greek at: https://enalaktiki.wordpress.com/2024/10/28/%ce%b5%cf%81%ce%b5%cf%85%ce%bd%ce%b1-%cf%83%cf%87%ce%b5%ce%b4%cf%8c%ce%bd-%cf%8c%ce%bb%ce%bf%ce%b9-%ce%bf%ce%b9-%cf%80%cf%81%cf%8c%ce%b5%ce%b4%cf%81%ce%bf%ce%b9-%cf%84%ce%b7%cf%82-%ce%b5%ce%b9%ce%b4/#_edn1

¹⁵²Also cited as State Legal Council or Legal Council of State.

¹⁵³CCPR/CO/83/GRC, para. 15, CCPR/C/GRC/CO/2, paras. 37-38, CCPR/C/GRC/CO/3 paras. 28-29.

¹⁵⁴Ministry of National Defence, "Conscientious Objectors", (Φ.429/1/9727 Σ.1389), 23 January 2025.



Greek Ministry of National Defence continues to disregard both international law, standards and recommendations as well domestic court judgements

In its response to an EBCO questionnaire, dated 23 of January 2025,¹⁵⁴ the Ministry of National Defence (MoND), despite obvious efforts to portray the situation in Greece as in conformity with international human rights law, in fact it rather continues to show contempt both for international human rights law and standards, as reflected in the recommendations of international bodies, as well as for judgements of domestic courts.

For example, the MoND continues to disregard the recent concluding observations of the Committee, including as for the issue of the length of the alternative civilian service. It is also interesting that the MoND invokes the (rather unfavourable for the conscientious objectors and obsolete) standard of the ECSR, that the duration of alternative service should not exceed 1.5 times (50% additional time) the duration of the military service,¹⁵⁵ while in the same document, the MoND, itself, states that there is a category of reduced service for which conscientious objectors are required to perform 5 months of alternative civilian service instead of 3 months of military service, which is 67% additional time.¹⁵⁶

The MoND repeats the usual excuses that it has used in correspondence with international bodies and mandates, for all pending issues, as well the usual “tricks” to confuse the international community. For example, it states that those conscientious objectors performing alternative service, who are not provided food and housing by the institution where they are employed, receive a monthly amount of €223.53, and compares it with the (minimum) amount of €8.80 to certain conscripts performing military service.¹⁵⁷ Disregarding that the amount received by conscripts is **in addition** to food and housing provided by the armed forces, while the amount given to certain conscientious objectors is **instead** of food and housing. While other conscientious objectors, those receiving food and housing, they do not receive any amount at all. The MoND also conceals that the amount for conscripts in certain cases is greater and up to €140.87 (e.g. when having two children), while there is no equivalent provision for conscientious objectors having children.

The MoND continues to conflate the possibility for the professional members of the armed forces to resign for whatever reasons, which in certain cases, though, entails serious financial consequences for those resigning, as they have to pay heavy compensations to the state,¹⁵⁸ with the right to conscientious objection for professional members of the armed forces, which should not entail any consequence whatsoever.

Furthermore, the MoND informs that during the past year there has not been, neither is underway, any legislative procedure concerning military service, conscientious objection or any related issue.¹⁵⁹ Which implies that there is no intention to comply with international human rights law and standards.

However, what is perhaps more striking in the response of the MoND is the paragraph explaining the reasons for which applications for CO status are rejected, which completely disregards, not only international human rights law and standards, but also relatively recent judgements of the Council of State, (Greece’s Supreme Administrative Court).

The MoND states:

“The reason for which applications for eligibility for conscientious objector status and to perform alternative service are rejected is, mostly, because those interested do not demonstrate some **specific**

¹⁵⁵Ibid., para. στ(4) - f(4).

¹⁵⁶Ibid., para. στ(2)(δ) - f(2)(d).

¹⁵⁷Ibid. para. στ(6) - f(6).

¹⁵⁸Ibid. para. ζ(1) and (2) - g(1) and (2).

¹⁵⁹Ibid. para. ι(1) - j(1).



ideology, which impedes them from performing armed military service, nor they associate their internal esprit with **activities** characteristically corresponding to the beliefs they claim in order to be recognized as conscientious objectors and to perform alternative service. Specifically, they do not prove that it is morally unbearable for them to enlist in the armed forces, they just declare that they would prefer to perform alternative service".¹⁶⁰ (emphasis added)

However, the Council of State, in its judgements 2263/2023 and 2264/2023 has ruled that: a) it is not necessary for the conscientious objection to derive from affiliation to a specific religious or other system, b) it is not necessary to be combined with relevant activity or specific actions.¹⁶¹

Greek Ombudsman insists on his objections concerning the current regime for conscientious objectors

In a response to an EBCO questionnaire,¹⁶² the Greek Ombudsman has stated, *inter alia*, that [throughout the years] he has addressed meticulously the issue of alternative service of conscientious objectors, following a huge number of relevant complaints, on various issues. However, according to the Greek ombudsman, it's a fact that in recent years, following the reduction of the length of alternative service and the amendment of the composition of the relevant committee, (i.e., which examines applications for CO status), the relevant complaints, either by conscientious objectors serving [the alternative service], or by those interested to be granted this status, are minimum, and usually they focus on specific issues, such as the adequacy of the accommodation offered (as a condition for claiming the compensation instead of an inadequate accommodation), as well as how the time of release from alternative service is calculated (taking into account days of leave or unjustifiable absence). Nevertheless, always according to the Greek Ombudsman, his objections are repeated on any occasion. Such objections include the procedure for granting conscientious objector status (Annual Report 2013: "Personal interview as a mean to ascertain reasons of conscience is controversial per se insofar it submits an internal esprit to an examination of sincerity. [...] They are required to reply to questions concerning sensitive personal data."), as well as the sanctions for insubordination, especially the disproportionate amount of money of the administrative fine, its repeated imposition, as well as the fact that conscientious objectors are summoned to trials before military courts.

¹⁶⁰Ibid. para. ε(6) - e(6).

¹⁶¹See EBCO Annual Report, "Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2023/24", p. 87. Available at: https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2024-05-15-EBCO_Annual_Report_2023-24.pdf

¹⁶²Dated 30 January 2025, concerning the year 2024.



2.20. HUNGARY

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 2005 by constitutional amendment. Could be reinstated in time of emergency (see below).	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1989	Constitution, Article 70.	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No release during state of emergency.	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹⁶³	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	9,855,745	3.0%	59,134
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	32,150	–	Total strength is 54.4% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	4,735m (+8.3%)	\$489	2.2%

¹⁶³Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.21. ICELAND

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed? No

No regular armed forces despite NATO membership and base. Paramilitary coastguard of approx. 250

Conscientious objection first recognised			
CO release of professional soldiers	-		
Minimum recruitment age			
Population¹⁶⁴	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	364,036	3.3%	2,403
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	0	-	Total strength is 0.0% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
		\$	

¹⁶⁴Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.22. IRELAND

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Has never existed. Could be imposed in emergency under Article 54 of the 1954 Defence Act.		
Conscientious objection first recognised		No provision ever made, but has co-sponsored CO resolutions in the UN Human Rights Council.		
CO release of professional soldiers	–	“Discharge by purchase” possible, but not during state of emergency.		
Minimum recruitment age	18			
Population¹⁶⁵	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18	
	5,233,461	3.3%	34,541	
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above	
	7,400	–	Total strength is 21.4% of cohort	
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP	
	1,331m (+3.0%)	\$254	0.2%	

¹⁶⁵Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.23. ITALY

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended under Law 226/2004. Last conscripts demobilised 2005.		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1972	Act No. 772/1972		
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions.		
Minimum recruitment age	18			
Population¹⁶⁶	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18	
	60,964,931	2.5%	304,825	
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above	
	161,850	–	Total strength is 53.1% of cohort	
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP	
	37,965m (+1.4%)	\$639	1.6%	

Principal EBCO concerns

- It remains unclear whether the provisions for conscientious objectors would apply to an event of emergency mobilisation.
- It remains unclear whether the right to conscientious objection is recognised for voluntary or professional soldiers.

Based on information by EBCO's Italian member, Movimento Nonviolento:¹⁶⁷

Developments

In Italy, there is still an ongoing political debate on whether compulsory military service should be reintroduced. In May 2024, Italy's right-wing Lega Party introduced a bill aiming to reintroduce six months of compulsory military or civil service for individuals aged 18-26. The service would be conducted on a regional basis within Italy. Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini stated that the bill offers civil service options for conscientious objectors or those unwilling to perform military service. The proposal emphasizes civic education, discipline, and community service. As of now, the bill has been filed in the Chamber of Deputies but has not yet been enacted into law. Actually, the current Minister of Defence is not supporting such proposals, valuing the contribution of a professional army.

¹⁶⁶Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

¹⁶⁷More info about the organisation at: <https://www.nonviolenti.org/cms/>



- **Establishment of an Auxiliary State Reserve:** The Ministry of Defence is reportedly working on legislation to establish an Auxiliary State Reserve, comprising up to 10,000 volunteers. This initiative aligns with Law No. 119 of 2022, which provided a delegation to the executive to create such a reserve. The reserve would support internal security, disaster relief, and other specific needs, excluding compulsory conscription.
- **Amendments to Law 185/90 on Arms Exports:** Discussions are ongoing regarding amendments to Law 185/90, which regulates arms exports. Proposed changes could potentially reduce transparency in arms export authorisations. The data on Italian military exports for 2024, recently transmitted to Parliament through the Annual Report required by Law 185/90, shows that Italy's arms industry is also profiting from the current global context of rearmament. Overall arms export authorisations are significantly increasing, which will result in a major rise in revenues for weapons manufacturers over the coming years through sales to foreign countries.

Conscription provisions and procedures

In Italy, compulsory military service has been suspended, not abolished. This suspension took effect on 1 January 2005, following Law No. 226 of 23 August 2004.

However, the law explicitly states that conscription can be reinstated by government decree in cases of war or national emergency. The provision for the reinstatement of conscription during times of war or national emergencies is maintained under Law 331/2000.

Law No. 226/2004 stipulates that conscription may be reintroduced by decree of the President of the Republic, on the proposal of the Minister of Defence, in the event of a serious international crisis, war, or national emergency. The reactivation process would include determining the cohorts affected and reinitiating the mechanisms of selection and enlistment.

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

Since conscription has been suspended, there is no obligation to register, and the issue of conscientious objectors refusing registration does not arise in practice. Prior to the suspension, registration occurred at age 18, and conscientious objectors could apply for alternative civilian service.

As there is no legal framework supporting conscientious objection for serving professional personnel, the Italian armed forces do not provide information or guidance on this matter to their members.

Currently, there is no specific legislation in Italy that directly addresses reservists' right to claim conscientious objection after completing initial military service. The general framework for conscientious objection is outlined in Law No. 230 of 8 July 1998, which regulates the right to conscientious objection primarily for conscripts. However, after the suspension of conscription in 2005, the law has not been updated to cover the situation of professional soldiers or reservists. Thus, no formal mechanism exists for a reservist to apply for recognition as a conscientious objector under current Italian law. The lack of explicit legal provisions for reservists creates a legal vacuum in this area.

If conscription were to be reinstated in Italy, the legislation concerning conscientious objection -namely Law No. 230 of 8 July 1998- would also come back into effect. This law remains in force and provides for the recognition of conscientious objector status and would apply even under renewed conscription.

Voluntary recruitment

Currently, the Italian armed forces are composed entirely of volunteers, both male and female, and there is no active registration procedure for military service, as conscription remains suspended.

Voluntary recruitment is primarily governed by:



· Law No. 226 of 23 August 2004: This law suspended compulsory military service and established the framework for a professional, volunteer military force.

· Recent Legislative Amendments: New provisions have been introduced to allow recruits to volunteer for either a fixed term or a three-year term, with specific compensation structures.

On August 28, 2022, Law No. 119 of August 5, 2022,¹⁶⁸ amending existing legislation regarding the active contingent of the Italian armed forces, entered into effect in Italy.

The minimum age for voluntary military service in Italy is 18 years; recruits have to be aged between 18-25 years and commit to a minimum of one year of service.

Initial service duration can vary:

- Fixed-Term Contracts: Recruits may serve for a predetermined period, often ranging from 12 months to three years.
- Three-Year Terms: Recent legislative changes have introduced the option for recruits to commit to a three-year term, with compensation set at 80% of that for permanent volunteers.

Specific data on reenlistment rates in Italy is not publicly available.

Although conscription has been suspended, the military reserve, composed of volunteers, continues to exist and can be called upon for internal security duties, disaster relief, or other specific needs, but not for compulsory military service. As mentioned above, according to some sources, the Ministry of Defence is working on a legislation concerning the establishment of an Auxiliary State Reserve comprising up to ten thousand members.

The Italian Armed Forces employ various strategies to attract volunteers. For instance:

Financial incentives: Recruits receive competitive salaries and benefits. As mentioned previously, recent legislative changes allow them to volunteer for varying fixed terms, including a three-year option, with compensation set at 80% of that earned by permanent volunteers.

Career Opportunities: The military offers clear career progression paths, specialized training, and the possibility of transitioning into civilian roles within the defense sector.

Educational Benefits: Scholarships and educational programs are offered, particularly targeting regions with higher unemployment rates, to encourage enlistment.

Advertising Campaigns: The armed forces conduct recruitment campaigns through various media channels, highlighting the benefits and opportunities of a military career.

Asylum for conscientious objectors

As of now, Italy does not publish disaggregated statistics specifically detailing asylum applications or decisions based on claims of conscientious objection. While the Italian asylum system recognizes conscientious objection as a legitimate ground for international protection under the 1951 Geneva Convention—particularly when linked to persecution for political opinions or membership in a particular social group—such cases are typically categorized under broader headings like "political opinion" or "religion". Given the lack of publicly detailed statistics on this specific category, obtaining precise numbers on approvals or rejections of asylum applications citing conscientious objection in Italy is challenging.

¹⁶⁸<https://perma.cc/ERD9-FJTA>



Militarisation of the education system

In Italy, participation in military-oriented programs is not formally part of the mandatory secondary education curriculum.

Military personnel are not typically involved in teaching standard academic classes within the Italian public school system. However, they may participate in specific programs or events, such as career days or educational workshops, where they provide information about military careers or conduct demonstrations. These engagements are usually temporary and are intended to inform students about opportunities within the armed forces.

The *Osservatorio contro la militarizzazione delle scuole*¹⁶⁹ has documented instances where military personnel conduct presentations or activities in schools, sometimes without clear consent from students or parents.

These activities are often framed as educational or career-oriented but may serve as indirect recruitment efforts.

There are also military schools that combine traditional education with military training. For example, the Francesco Morosini Naval Military School in Venice enrolls students aged 15 to 18, combining traditional education with military training and maritime activities. Similarly, the Nunziatella Military School in Naples offers a curriculum that includes military discipline and training alongside standard academic subjects. These institutions are designed to prepare students for potential future careers in the armed forces.

There is no publicly available evidence indicating that the Italian armed forces have direct access to students' personal data through the education system. However, the *Osservatorio contro la militarizzazione delle scuole* has expressed concerns about the potential for indirect data collection during military-led school activities. For instance, when students participate in events or programs organized by the military, there may be instances where personal information is collected, raising privacy concerns. The extent and use of such data collection are not well-documented, highlighting the need for greater transparency.

¹⁶⁹<https://osservatorionomilsuola.com/>



2.24. KOSOVO 🇰🇲

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed? No

Conscientious objection first recognised	Voluntary paramilitary service since independence. CO provisions never introduced.		
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No provisions.	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹⁷⁰	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	1,977,093	4.3%	17,003
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	3,000	–	Total strength is 17.6% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	166m (+21.6%)	\$98	1.5%

¹⁷⁰Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.25. LATVIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes	Suspended 2006. Reinstated 2024 under National Defence Service Law of 25th April 2023.	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1990	Law on Substitute Service of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic Law on Alternative Service, 2002	
Current provisions	National Defence Service Law of 25th April 2023.		
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	11 months	11 months (100%)	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provision. No release during state of emergency.	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹⁷¹	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	1,801,246	2.8%	10,087
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	6,600	–	Total strength is 65.4% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	1,426m (+12.0%)	\$758	3.3%

Principal EBCO concerns

See “Recent developments”, below.

Developments

In a submission to the UN Committee on Human Rights,¹⁷² the European Council of Jehovahs’ Witnesses report that the supposed Alternative Civilian Service introduced with the reinstatement of conscription with effect from 1st January 2024 is in fact entirely military in nature, with all placements being in institutions subordinate to the Ministry of Defence, namely: (1) the National Defence Military Facilities and

¹⁷¹Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

¹⁷²INT_CCPR_IC5_58312_E, 3rd May, 2024.



Procurement Centre; (2) the National Defence Logistics and Procurement Centre; (3) the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency; and (4) the Latvian War Museum.

The information below, except where other sources are credited, was provided by the Latvian Ministry of Defence in reply to the EBCO questionnaire.

Conscription provisions and procedures

On April 5th 2023, the Latvian parliament (Saeima) approved the National Service Law (NDS), thereby reintroducing conscription in Latvia. The first call-up, primarily targeting volunteers, was announced on 1st July, 2023. Military service became compulsory on 1st January 2024.

Conscription is primarily regulated by the National Service Law (available in English translation) and other Cabinet regulations.

Citizens can apply or be randomly selected for NDS after reaching 18 years of age.

There are three types of NDS available for volunteers, differing in length and acquired skills:

Service in the National Armed Forces (duration 11 months)

Service in the National Guard (5 years, with 28-day annual trainings)

Reserve Officer programme for University and College students (5 years; total 160 days training).

The first two rounds of recruitment for NDS took place in July 2023 (253 recruits selected from 488 volunteers) and January 2024 (125 recruits from 224 volunteers); in these rounds no one was compulsorily recruited; most of those not selected were rejected on grounds of physical fitness.¹⁷³⁾

consisted of 253 (July 2023) and 125 persons (January 2024). Also in January 2024, twenty volunteers took the option of signing up for the National Guard.¹⁷⁴ On 1st December 2023, the application period for the July 2024 (third) NDS ended with 515 Latvian citizens volunteering. The shortfall was filled by a random selection of 300 citizens, which took place on 23rd January 2024. The third recruitment began their service in July 2024, consisting of around 378 volunteers and 64 conscripts, a total of 442. [EBCO Note: this implies that some 90% of volunteers but only 20% of those selected by ballot were eventually recruited. We do not have figures for recruitment in January 2025, but it is reported that by the closing date of 20th November 2024 782 volunteers had come forward for the July 2025 intake – total recruitment is expected to be 830. The random selection of potential conscripts took place on 26th November, and was broadcast live on “Facebook” and “You Tube”.^{175]}

After NDS, recruits are discharged and become part of the reserve force. They are required to be ready to undergo up to seven day-long trainings at any time in the five years following the discharge. After this five year period, recruits who have completed NDS and are discharged into the army reserve are registered for additional training according to general procedures for the reserve forces.

According to the NDS Law, failure to attend for the health examination specified for a recruit at the time and place indicated in the summons from the Ministry of Defence without a justifying reason results in a warning of the imposition of a fine of up to 70 “units”. The conscript is given at least three months’ notice of the time and place at which he is to report for service. “Arrival at the place of service, if the conscript

¹⁷³LSM+ (Latvian Public Media) “120 volunteers start compulsory military service in Latvia”, 17th January 2024. (<https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/defense/17.01.2024-120-volunteers-start-compulsory-military-service-in-latvia.a539215/>)

¹⁷⁴Andzans, M. “The first year of conscription in Latvia”, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Baltic Bulletin, 20th May, 2024, (<https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/05/the-first-year-of-conscription-in-latvia/>)

¹⁷⁵Website of the Latvian Ministry of Defence, <https://www.mod.gov.lv/en/national-defence-service>, consulted on 20th May 2025.



fails to do so, shall be ensured by the Military Police in accordance with the procedures laid down in the Administrative Procedure Law.” [EBCO Note: we would normally describe this as forced recruitment, which in the case of a conscientious objector constitutes arbitrary detention.]

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

The law also provides the right for conscientious objectors to replace military service by serving (likewise for 11 months) in the national defence civil service (alternative service).

“If a conscript’s beliefs, convictions or religion are incompatible with conscription service and he cannot therefore join the military service to defend Latvia, he may apply to the National Defence Service Recruitment Control Commission to perform alternative service. Applications must describe the reasons for choosing alternative service and contain supporting documentation.” Information about alternative civilian website can be found on the official website of the Ministry of Defence, but the possibility is not drawn to conscripts’ attention at the time when they receive call-up papers.

All recruits, including those who have applied for alternative service, are required to respond to NDS draft notification by completing an online form at www.klustikaravirs.lv (or by sending by e-mail a digitally signed copy of the completed form), and to attend for medical examination at the appointed date.

All decisions concerning alternative service are made by the National Defence Service Recruitment Control Commission, who are to be released on full pay from their normal employment for the purpose of performing their functions. At least half of the members of the Commission their number is not specified] must be persons not employed by the armed forces, the Ministry of Defence, or institutions subordinate thereto.

“There were a small number of applications received in recent years, but only one met the conditions set out in National Defence Service law and binding Cabinet regulations”. (Latvia’s reply to the same question posed by the UN Human Rights Committee was more specific, and slightly more encouraging: “As of now, the Conscription Control Commission has received two applications for the replacement of national defence service by alternative service. One application was approved, and in the other case, since the person was declared not valid for national defence service due to health reasons and the review was terminated.”)¹⁷⁶

Appeals may be made to the Commission itself or before a court “in accordance with the procedures laid out in the Administrative Procedures Law.”

Alternative service is subject to the same regulations regarding reporting for duty as military service and the Military Police perform the same role in the event of non-compliance. [It is not specified in either case what charges and punishments would result from persistence in refusal.]

“The alternative service shall be performed for 18 months in the civilian institutions subordinate to the Ministry of Defence [this confirming the complaint of the Jehovah’s Witnesses reported under “EBCO concerns”.] “When determining the location for the performance of the alternative service the control commission shall take into account the personal traits, education, and declared place of residence of the performer of alternative service. [Who it seems therefore does not have any personal say in the matter]

Those performing alternative service may continue to live at their normal address. They receive NDS pay in the amount of €400 [presumably per month], but are not entitled to free meals. By contrast volunteers performing military service receive €600 and “those selected on a mandatory basis” €300 [in both cases

¹⁷⁶Replies to the List of Issues on Latvia’s Fourth Periodic Report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR/C/LVA/RQ/4), 24th March 2025, para 65



presumably in addition to “free meals” - it will be noted that there is thus a strong incentive to volunteer rather than waiting to be selected for obligatory call-up].

Serving personnel of the armed forces

There are currently no provisions allowing conscripts to apply to transfer to alternative service after commencing military service, nor for “professional” members of the armed forces or who wish to be released on grounds of conscience. There have however been no cases in recent years, nor have any forces personnel been prosecuted for desertion.

On October 2024, however, an amendment to the National Defence Service Law came into force permitting reservists to make applications based on conscience.

Militarisation of education

From 1st September 2024, “State Defence Subject”, which could be seen as a preparation for military service, became an obligatory part of the secondary school curriculum. During this course, partly taught by military personnel, students have the opportunity to (voluntarily) participate in the two week SDS summer camp. The purpose is to promote “civic awareness and patriotism, as well as to provide an opportunity to learn basic military skills and abilities, providing citizens who are civically responsible. The Summer Camps “give students an opportunity to participate in practical outdoor activities that focus on survival skills.”

There is also an opportunity for youth from the 4th to the 9th grade to join the free voluntary Cadet Force, with sessions once a week after school. “According to SDS law”, instructors in the Cadet Force are professional service soldiers, national guard members, or military reservists.

Students who wish to can study at the Colonel Oskars Kalpaks Military High School, which focusses on military education, in order to obtain the “junior instructors qualification”. All (?) instructors at this institution are professional military personnel.

Military recruiters do not enjoy privileged access to schools, or to students details.

No information is given regarding the process for recruitment of “professional” military personnel.

2.26. LIECHTENSTEIN

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription never imposed. No armed forces.



2.27. LITHUANIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes	Suspended 2009. Reinstated 2015.	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1990	Law on Substitute Service of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic Constitution, 1992, Article 139 Law on National Conscription, 1996	
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	9 months	10 months (111%)	
CO release of professional soldiers	-	No specific provisions, but grounds of conscience would be considered valid. Refusal could be appealed to court.	
Minimum recruitment age	18	Conscription from 19	
Population¹⁷⁷	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	2,628,186	2.6%	13,667
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	23,000	5,850 (25.4%)	Total strength is 168.3% of cohort Conscripts are 42.8% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	2,628m (+20.3%)	\$916	3.1%

¹⁷⁷Population and armed forces figures are in principle derived from The Military Balance published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies, however the 2025 edition, apparently erroneously, gives a figure which does not accord with those for previous years or estimates from other sources – it has therefore been replaced by the figure given on the “Global Firepower” website: <https://www.globalfirepower.com/active-military-manpower.php>. Military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.28. LUXEMBOURG

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	First introduced 1944 Abolished 1967	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1963	Act of 26th July, Article 8	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions – no instances ever recorded.	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹⁷⁸	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	671,254	2.7%	3,625
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	900	–	Total strength is 24.8% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	872m (+28.2%)	\$1,303	1.0%

¹⁷⁸Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

2.29. MALTA 

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Has never existed	
Conscientious objection first recognised	No provision ever made but has co-sponsored CO resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council.		
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provision	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹⁷⁹	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	469,730	2.3%	2,161
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	1,700	–	Total strength is 78.7% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	109m (-5.6%)	\$204	0.4%

¹⁷⁹Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.30. MOLDOVA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes	Government Decision 601/2018 regarding the Programme “Professional Army 2018-2021” has not yet been implemented and currently is uncertain.		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1992	Law on Religions 979/1992		
Current provisions				
Duration	Military service		Civilian service (% of military)	
	12 months		12 months (100%)	
	6 months for graduates		6 months for graduates	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provision – would ultimately be decided by courts.		
Minimum recruitment age	18	Enrolment in military schools from 17		
Population¹⁸⁰	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18	
	3,599,528	2.9%	20,877	
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above	
	5,150	2,200 (42.7%)	Total strength is 24.7% of cohort Conscripts are 10.5% of cohort	
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP	
	111m (+9.3%)	\$36	0.6%	

Principal EBCO concerns

- Alternative service is punitive and discriminatory in terms of significantly longer duration for certain categories (those with higher education).
- Conscientious objectors are not recognised prima facie but are subjected to inquiry.
- No recognition of the right to conscientious objection for conscripts or professional soldiers.

¹⁸⁰Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



- Military-themed activities take place in schools, albeit optional.

Based on the replies of the Ministry of Defence of Moldova to EBCO's questionnaire:

Developments

No developments were reported for 2024.

Conscription provisions and procedures

Conscription is mandatory for male citizens aged 18-27 and lasts 12 months with a reduced term of 3 months for those with higher education.

It is regulated by the Law on the Preparation of Citizens for Homeland Defense (No. 1245-XV of 2002) and regulations issued by the Ministry of Defence, while Article 57 of the Constitution also reads: "the defence of the country is a sacred right and duty of each citizen."

Deferment is available in cases like pursuing higher education or having family obligations.

About 14% of those who complete mandatory military service choose to continue with voluntary service.

Draft evasion

Those who do not report to the military centre when summoned, are subject to the issuance of contravention reports, resulting in fines. In 2024, approximately 8,700 contravention reports were issued.

Reserve service

Reserve service is primarily regulated by the Law on the Status of Military

Personnel. The call-up procedure involves an official notice issued by the Ministry of Defence in the case of annual trainings or in the case of mobilisation during a national emergency.

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

Conscientious objectors can apply to perform the alternative civilian service, as regulated by Law No. 156/2007. According to the Ministry of Defence, eligible persons are those who:

- 1) do not qualify for deferment from conscription due to health reasons, family circumstances, or continued studies, and
- 2) are members of pacifist associations.

Applications must include a statement of motivation and be submitted within 2 months before the current conscription period for compulsory military service, reduced-term service, or civil service. The recruitment-conscription commissions are responsible for assessing applications.

In 2024, approximately 200 applications were submitted, of which around 50% were rejected. Reasons for rejection include, according to the Ministry, failure to "demonstrate sufficient grounds for conscientious objection, such as not providing credible or compelling reasons for refusing to perform the service". Other purported reasons include "legal technicalities or procedural issues".

Rejections can be appealed to the State Commission for Conscription or in court, within 10 days of notification. Those who refuse to perform alternative service are subject to fines.¹⁸¹

The duration of alternative service is 12 months. The reduced term for those with higher education is 6 months (compared to 3 months in military service).

Remuneration is set to 75% of the net income for the work performed.

¹⁸¹Article 370 of the Contraventions Code of the Republic of Moldova, No. 218/2008.



"Civil service is performed in public institutions or commercial companies carrying out activities on national territory, in the fields of social and medical assistance, industrial construction, civil construction, road and railway construction, environmental protection, agricultural associations, enterprises processing agricultural production, communal services, and special civil service formations (search and rescue, firefighting, construction, etc.)."¹⁸²

Arrangements for the alternative service are administered by the Civil Service Center of the Republic of Moldova, which coordinates with the National Employment Agency for available positions and assignments of conscientious objectors.¹⁸³ Assignment at the place of residence is possible.

Voluntary recruitment

Voluntary military service is available as contract-based military service. The initial duration of contract military service can be 3 years or 5 years, depending on the decision of the individual candidate.¹⁸⁴

The minimum age for recruitment is 18 years old.

Incentives used by the Armed Forces to attract recruits include:

- Financial Incentives: Competitive salaries and benefits to those joining voluntarily, including additional allowances for specific roles or deployments.
- Career Prospects: Career development opportunities, including specialized training and the chance to advance through ranks.
- Advertising and Campaigns: Regular advertising campaigns conducted by the Ministry of Defence to promote the benefits of a military career. These often include participation in events such as job fairs.
- Other Benefits: In addition to financial incentives, recruits may receive health insurance, housing support, and other social benefits.

Approximately 50% of recruits sign up for a subsequent contract.

Conscientious objection during and after military service

According to the Ministry of Defence, the legislation does not explicitly provide for the recognition of conscientious objection after the enlistment or completion of mandatory military service. The status of conscientious objector is considered only before enlistment.

Moreover, after completing military service, reservists remain subject to mobilisation obligations, and the legislation does not offer a clear mechanism for invoking conscientious objection at that stage.

Militarisation of the education system

According to the Ministry, no military-themed activities form part of the obligatory education curriculum. However, the Armed Forces organise introductory activities which can take place in schools and may include "visits to military units, meetings with military personnel, or presentations on various fields of activities in the army" as well as themes around "defence education, or values related to discipline and responsibility in the military." Those are not "structured educational programmes or mandatory for individuals under 18."

Additionally, the Ministry of Defence has access to the personal data of male students aged 16 and above, through the State Registry of Defence Resources.

¹⁸²Point 4 of the "Regulation on the organisation and execution of civil service", Government Decision of the Republic of Moldova No. 865/2008.

¹⁸³<https://csc.md>

¹⁸⁴Government Decision No. 941/2006 "on the approval of the Regulation regarding the fulfillment of military service in the Armed Forces," and Law No. 162/2005 regarding the status of military personnel.



2.31. MONACO

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription never existed. No regular military forces. Defence is the responsibility of France.

2.32. MONTENEGRO

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed? No

Abolished 2006 (on independence) by Presidential decree.

May be reinstated in time of war (see below)

Conscientious objection first recognised	1992	Constitution of Serbia and Montenegro, Article 58 (preserved in Article 48 of the 2007 Montenegro Constitution)	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not known		
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹⁸⁵	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	599,849	3.1%	3,719
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	2,710	–	Total strength is 72.9% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	150m (+25.9%)	\$235	1.8%

¹⁸⁵Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.33. NETHERLANDS

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 1997. Could be reinstated in war; military registration still enforced.		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1922	Constitutional amendment		
CO release of professional soldiers	–	May apply under general Act on Conscientious Objection to Military Service. Legal appeal possible in case of refusal.		
Minimum recruitment age	17	Voluntary recruitment		
Population¹⁸⁶	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18	
	17,772,378	2.8%	99,525	
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above	
	33,650	–	Total strength is 33.8% of cohort	
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP	
	23,179m (+35.0%)	\$1,276	1.9%	

¹⁸⁶Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.34. NORTH MACEDONIA 🇲🇰

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 2007	
Conscientious objection first recognised	2001	Defence Act, Article 8.	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions.	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹⁸⁷	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	2,135,622	2.7%	11,532
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	8,000	–	Total strength is 69.4% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	354m (+28.2%)	\$194	2.1%

¹⁸⁷Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



2.35. NORWAY

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1903	Internal military regulations 1922 Amendment to Military Penal Code	
Current provisions	Act on Military Service		
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	12 months (up to 19 months in some posts)	Abolished in 2012	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions Termination of contract possible	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹⁸⁸	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	5,509,733	3.1%	34,160
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	25,400	10,000 (39.4%)	Total strength is 74.4% of cohort Conscripts are 29.3% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	10,435m (+16.9%)	\$1,880	2.1%

Principal EBCO concerns

In general, the situation in Norway is good. In particular Norway set an example by completely abolishing the requirement that conscientious objectors perform alternative civilian service. However, we are concerned that some objectors may be required to serve in civil defence, particularly in a time of national emergency - as a potential part of the “war effort” this may not be compatible with the reasons for the objection in an individual case.

¹⁸⁸Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



We also regret the lack of specific provisions consistent with Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)4 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to allow for the prompt release without penalty of serving professional members of the armed forces who develop conscientious objections.

We are furthermore extremely disturbed by the recruitment of children as young as fifteen-and-a-half into the Youth Wing of the Home Guard, which forms a crucial part of Norway's defence structure.

Developments

On 3rd April 2024, Norway announced plans to increase conscript numbers by 50% to 13,500 by 2036, which would represent about 25% of those liable as opposed to some 15% at present. "The Defence Forces Recruit Training Centre in Terningmoen, 140 kilometres north of Oslo, will be modernised and expanded to train about 1,800 recruits four times a year, up from about 300 today. To facilitate a rapid increase in training capacity, the Norwegian Armed Forces will lease civilian infrastructure until Terningmoen is fully developed, scheduled for 2036."¹⁸⁹

In November 2024, in the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council, Norway received a recommendation from Costa Rica that it "Provide for conscientious objection to military service for professional soldiers and reservists in accordance with international human rights standards and process asylum applications from objectors in accordance with the Guidelines on International Protection No. 10 of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees". (See Universal periodic Review in the International Section, above, and the relevant headings in the analysis below.)

The following sections are based on information supplied in response to the EBCO Questionnaires in 2023 and 2024 by the Norwegian Ministry of Defence, and the Parliamentary Ombudsman (Sivilombudet), with our added commentary in brackets.

Conscription provisions and procedures

Conscription into obligatory military service is imposed in Norway. Under Article 119 of the Constitution: "As a general rule every citizen of the State is equally bound to serve in the defence of the country for a specific period, irrespective of birth or fortune. The application of this principle, and the restrictions to which it shall be subject, shall be determined by law", and is governed by the procedures stated in the Act on military service (Lov om verneplikt og tjeneste i Forsvaret m.m), Article 6 of which describes in further detail the obligation to serve in the Norwegian Armed Forces for all Norwegian citizen from the year they reach 19 years, and the regulations for conscription (Forskrift om verneplikt og heimevernstjeneste).

(Initially, the requirement was in practice, as in most other countries, restricted to men. However, from the beginning of 2015 it was extended also to women, who had long been able to serve voluntarily, a precedent which has subsequently been followed in Sweden and Denmark. Only a small proportion of those eligible, both men and women, are however selected for military service; many of the others are allocated to the Home guard reserve force. A smaller proportion of women than men sign up for a military career following the initial period of service. It is not clear whether, since first conscripted in 1897, the indigenous Sami people have ever benefited from an exemption, as they have in neighbouring Sweden; certainly there is a proud tradition of Sami - and reindeer - participation in the Narvik campaign in 1940, where experience in Arctic conditions was invaluable.)

The initial duration of service for a conscript ranges from 6 to 16 months, with 12 months being the duration most practised by the Armed Forces. The total length of conscription in peace time is 19 months. Reservists can be ordered to serve in the Norwegian Home Guard and armed forces until the year they turn

¹⁸⁹Czumski, C. "Norway wants to increase the number of conscripts by 50% each year", Euractiv, 3rd April 2024 (<https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/norway-wants-to-increase-the-number-of-conscripts-by-50-each-year/>)



44/45. The Home Guard is the largest department for reserve service consisting of approximately 40,000 soldiers. The reserve call up procedure differs between the different service branches.

First time recruitment in recent years was as follows:

Year	% female	Approximate total number
2017	25.3%	8,000–10,000
2018	26.3%	8,000–10,000
2019	28.7%	8,000–10,000
2020	30.5%	8,000–10,000
2021	32.0%	11,000
2022	36.0%	11,000
2023	33.0%	11,000
2024	31.5%	11,000

The numbers above are the total number of persons conscripted for first-time military service, not number who completed the required duration. Some are discharged early for medical or other reasons.

In 2024 there were no prosecutions for evasion of military service.

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

Chapter 4 of the Act on Military Service states the rights and duties of conscientious objectors. Article 35 states that “conscripts shall be exempted from military service if there is reason to believe that they cannot serve unless [if?] serving will be in violation with [of?] their fundamental belief and values that are of fundamental importance to them.” (It is reported that a previous Act, in 1965, explicitly included beliefs “related to the use of weapons of mass destruction as they might be expected to be used in the present day defence”¹⁹⁰ - as far as is known such objections would still be accepted although there is no record of how often they have been put forward.)

According to Article 36 of the Act, conscripts may apply at the earliest when they meet with the draft board. [It should be noted that the meeting with the draft board is not the same as the appearance before a Committee in order to “justify” the objection, which procedure was abolished in 2001.¹⁹¹] A standard application form, available only in Norwegian, is provided; a copy was attached to the 2023 response from the Parliamentary Ombudsman and may be consulted on the Norway page of the EBCO website. The application is considered by the Ministry of Justice.

Article 37, as reported by the Parliamentary Ombudsman in 2023, exempts the conscript from service while his application is being processed. However the Ministry of Defence claims that the conscript must continue to serve, but while the application is pending may serve without arms

The procedures are further elaborated in chapter 12 of the Regulations for Conscription.

Information about conscientious objection and exemption may be found on the Norwegian Armed Forces’ official website. Further information is given in person if the question arises during the selection process. The Norwegian Armed Forces Human Resources and Conscriptions Centre (FPVS) is responsible for handling applications for exemption. Each application is considered on individual grounds.

¹⁹⁰Stolwijk, M. The Right to Conscientious Objection in Europe, Quaker Council for European Affairs, Brussels, 2005, p51.

¹⁹¹Ibid



Between 2021 and 2023, inclusive, 577 conscientious objectors were exempted, 107 applications were rejected, 79 were withdrawn, and 53 were still pending at the end 2023. In 2024 176 applications were accepted and 35 rejected; no figures were given for applications pending or withdrawn.

According to the Ministry of Defence, a written appeal against rejection can be sent to the armed forces for a second evaluation; the Parliamentary Ombudsman states that [presumably subsequently], an objector whose application is rejected may complain to the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. In the last resort, the conscript may file his case with the courts under Article 39 of the Law on Conscription.

(No information has been received regarding the number of rejections which were appealed, or the outcome of any appeals; there is no mention of any possibility of appeal to an independent body.)

As reported in 2022 by the Parliamentary Ombudsman, there is no alternative service for conscientious objectors – it was abolished in 2012. (The background, as explained in 2005, is that many objectors were

in practice not finding alternative service, the government having limited the number of places available to 1,490 per annum, well below the number of objectors being exempted. However, it is not clear what lay behind that decision, nor why by the time alternative service was abolished the number of applicants had fallen towards the current level, about a tenth of that in the past.¹⁹² The result was however that as with the historic recognition of objections based on the use of a nuclear deterrent Norway has set a welcome precedent.)

Those whose applications for exemption have been approved may however be ordered to serve in the Civil Defence (Sivlforsvaret) until the year they turn 55. They get a three week start-up course, then serve two days per annum as training. If there is a crisis, they will be called in for service.

The Parliamentary Ombudsman points out that he is authorised to investigate complaints regarding military service, but in recent years has received no complaints from conscientious objectors. By contrast, a number of complaints have been received from persons who are motivated to serve but had not been selected!

Voluntary recruitment

Voluntary recruitment into military service is also regulated by the Act on Military Service. Professional members of the military are also subject to other Acts regarding State employees, together with the collective agreements between the State and the national labour unions.

Conscientious objection during and after military service

According to the Parliamentary Ombudsman in 2022, "If professional military personnel become conscientious objectors during their service, and thus wish to end their service contract, they are free to terminate their contract based on the regular rules of contract law and labour law. (This was also exactly the language in which Norway "noted" the UPR recommendation - see Section 1.3.2.3 - that it recognise the right for professional soldiers and reservists). It might be noted (see Section 3.6) that the provisions in labour law regarding early termination of contracts do not ensure prompt release without any penalty, financial of other, and contain no safeguards such as those which allow new conscripts to serve without arms while their applications are being considered.

¹⁹²Ibid, p52. and "Norway: end of substitute service for conscientious objectors", War Resisters' International, 10th August 2011 (<https://wri-irg.org/en/story/2011/norway-end-substitute-service-conscientious-objectors>)



Asylum for conscientious objectors

As reported in the International Section under the Universal Periodic Review, Norway in November 2024 “partially accepted” a recommendation from Costa Rica that it “process asylum applications from objectors in accordance with the Guidelines on International Protection No. 10 of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees”, noting that the Guidelines were not legally binding, but that they would be given “due weight” along with “relevant international jurisprudence”.

Norway’s past record on asylum for persons fleeing situations of armed conflict, has been questionable. See for instance Bailliet’s scathing comments on the handling of applications from female former soldiers from Eritrea,¹⁹³

During the current crisis, we have received a report that in August 2024 37-year-old conscientious objector from Russia used a Finnish temporary work permit to travel to Norway in order to seek asylum, but that by the end of the year he had been returned to Finland under the “Dublin rules”. We have no news of his subsequent fate.

Militarisation of the education system

The Norwegian Armed Forces regularly visit secondary schools to inform students about upcoming selection procedures and career opportunities in the Armed Forces. This is not part of the curriculum and more often a part of the schools’ vocational opportunity orientations. The Ministry of Defence has no information of whether student participation during these orientations is mandatory or not. The armed forces have access to some information shared by the education authorities, for instance on grades and degrees. No members of the armed forces are involved in teaching classes within the education system. To supplement recruitment, the armed forces also run public information campaigns such as advertising on TV or social media platforms.

Juvenile recruitment

Although conscripts are generally aged 19 before beginning military service, Norway accepts recruits into the “Home Guard Youth” from the age of fifteen years and six months.¹⁹⁴

The Government argues that “this organisation has no affiliation with the Norwegian defence structure as such. Membership in the youth organisation does not affect the likelihood of being conscripted for compulsory military service at the age of 19.”¹⁹⁵ (Contradicting an earlier statement that members of the Home Guard Youth were not liable for military service, implying that it served, impermissibly, as a substitute for obligatory military service.) However, in time of war or national emergency the Home Guard is a crucial part of the national defence structure, and it is clearly inappropriate for children to be involved, even in a youth wing.

In 2017, Norway reported a change in the Military Service Act, to specify, that “people under 18 who serve in the Armed Forces will not be provided with training in, or participate in, combat related activities and that they will immediately be excused from service in situations where Norway is at war or when war threatens, or when the Armed Forces have commenced force generation (...) Furthermore, it has been clarified that people under 18 are not subject to the military punishment and disciplinary system because they cannot be called up as conscripts.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³Bailliet, C.M., “Examining Sexual Violence in the Military Within the Context of Eritrean Asylum Claims Presented in Norway” *International Journal of Refugee Law*, Volume 19, Issue 3, October 2007, Pages 471–510

¹⁹⁴Seventh Periodic Report of Norway under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC/C/NOR/7), 20th August 2024, para 278.

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

¹⁹⁶Combined Fifth and Sixth Periodic Reports (CRC/C/NOR/5-6), 27th July 2017, para 361.



This seems to accept that for some purposes at least members of the Home Guard Youth are members of the armed forces - there is no one else aged under 18 to whom this might apply; such provisions to guard against the danger that juvenile recruits might be drawn into hostilities are necessary to comply with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. (OPAC)

When it examined Norway's Report under OPAC, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that "in order to fully respect the spirit of the Optional Protocol and to provide full protection for children in all circumstances...", observing 'that these kinds of activities with "a military element" for children are not in full conformity with the spirit of the Optional Protocol which emphasizes that conditions of peace and security are indispensable for the full protection of children'.¹⁹⁷ Norway increase the recruitment age for the Home Guard Youth to 18. It repeated this recommendation when Norway reported under the Convention itself in 2018.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷CRC/C/OPAC/NOR/CO/1, 6th July, 2007, paras 10,11.

¹⁹⁸CRC/C/NOR/CO/5-6, 1st June, 2018, para 37a.



2.36. POLAND

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 2009 by constitutional amendments Could be reinstated in mobilisation or war.	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1988	Constitution, Article 85£	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not permitted	No specific provisions. Repayment of training and accommodation costs would be required, perhaps in advance.	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population¹⁹⁹	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	38,746,310	2.6%	201,481
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	164,100	–	Total strength is 81.4% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	38,001m (+30.9%)	\$982	4.2%

Principal EBCO concerns

- Although conscription is suspended, Poland has provisions whereby civilians may be allocated to perform “personal services for defence,” under the direction of the military in the event of war or general mobilisation.
- There are no explicit provisions for the release of serving military personnel who develop conscientious objections, which means that it is possible that penalties may apply, and there are no provisions for the recognition of reservists as conscientious objectors - prosecutions may result from refusing on grounds of conscience to comply with call-up to reserve service.
- “Security education” is a compulsory part of the secondary school curriculum, and from the 2024-25 academic year includes marksmanship as an obligatory element.
- From 2024 a six-week course on “Education with the Army”, presented by military personnel, is offered in schools, including primary schools.

¹⁹⁹Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



Despite these concerns, EBCO salutes the continuing work of Poland on conscientious objection to military service at the international level as, together with Costa Rica and Croatia, one of the core sponsors of the quadrennial resolution on the issue at the UN Human Rights Committee.

Developments

The Jehovah's Witnesses report in a submission to the UN Human Rights Committee²⁰⁰ changes introduced in 2022 to the curriculum of the "safety education" course in the core curriculum for primary and secondary schools, which now "includes marksmanship skills and weapons handling as well as practical training on the firing range." Depending on local circumstances, training on the firing range will be introduced by the vast majority of schools in the academic year starting September 2024."

Furthermore, they report that the Homeland Defence Act of 11th March 2022 authorises the imposition of a reserve drill requirement on "individuals with prior military training who took the military oath." This presumably applies to former members of the armed forces who volunteered, but also to former conscripts who are of a relevant age. It may also be imposed on persons with no military background whose professional skills are relevant - "such as doctors, translators, IT specialists, electrical technicians and drivers." A number of persons

who became Jehovah's Witnesses since their military service have faced prosecution for their refusal to participate in such military drills. In one case the court had refused to acquit the objector, but did not impose a penalty; both parts of the decision were upheld on appeal on 12th June 2024. Another case had been terminated by the Courts "because of the socially negligible nature of the act."; however the objector was again summoned to take part in military drill, and a prosecution in his case is pending.

Conscription provisions and procedures

The rules on obligatory basic military service continue to be suspended.

The legislative provision under which it might be reintroduced is the Act of 11 March 2022 on the defence of the homeland (Dz.U. z 2024 r. poz. 248 ze zm.) "Obligatory basic military service shall be performed with regard to the needs of the Armed Forces. The President of the Republic of Poland, on the proposal of the Council of Ministers, introduces, through a regulation, obligatory military service, specifying the date of its beginning and termination, taking into account the needs of the Armed Forces" (art. 152 of the Act on the Defence of the Homeland).

The minimum age for conscription is 18 years.

The duration of service is 9 months.

Military registration is still conducted, and registration cannot be refused on grounds of conscience. Registration is required from the age of 18.

However, in the submission to the UN Human Rights Committee already quoted under "developments", the Jehovah's Witnesses reveal that civilians may be allocated to perform "personal services for defence," under the direction of the military in the event of war or general mobilisation. Two individual cases where Jehovah's Witnesses had appealed to the courts against such allocations on the grounds of their conscientious objection to military service - one, "a professional motor vehicle diagnostician" had been assigned "to assist in securing the activities of the Point of Acceptance and Distribution of Means of Transport in the town of Drawsko Pomorskie in case of military mobilisation or war.", the other was in

²⁰⁰INT/CCPR/ICS/POL/59325, September 2024 (for Human Rights Committee, 142nd Session). https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FICS%2FPOL%2F59325&Lang=en



such a situation to serve as “a traffic manager for the Economic Military Division stationed in the town of Oleszno.”

Even if these placements do not amount to recruitment into the armed forces as such, the services to be performed are so clearly part of the military defence structure that the right of conscientious objection as interpreted by international bodies clearly ought to apply; however in both cases the courts had ruled otherwise; in the first case an appeal to the Supreme Administrative Court had been rejected on 28th September 2022; at the date of the document (September 2024) the second case was pending before the Supreme Administrative Court.

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

Conscientious objection is recognised under Article 85(3) of the Polish Constitution

An individual interested may apply for alternative service at the military qualification stage or pending receipt of a mobilisation card. Persons who have performed alternative service in the entity are transferred to the passive reserve force (PR). Persons who are exempted from the obligation to perform military service in the event of a declaration of mobilisation and in wartime or who have been assigned to or have performed substitute service (Article 248(5)(5) of the Homeland Defence Act) shall not be called up for military training of PR soldiers.

The provincial commission for alternative service in the entity, hereinafter referred to as the ‘voivodship commission’, shall issue a decision on assignment to alternative service. The voivodship commission shall be appointed and dismissed by the Voivodship Marshall. The voivodship commission shall be composed of the chairman of the voivodship commission and members of the voivodship commission, in the number of 5 persons. The decisions of the voivodship commission shall be made in the presence of at least 3 of its members. A person subject to military qualification shall submit an application for assignment to alternative service in the entity in writing to the competent voivodship commission, through the head of the military recruitment centre, no later than on the day of delivery of his/her card of appointment to compulsory basic military service. The head of the military recruitment centre sends the application referred to in paragraph 1 to the voivodship commission within 3 days of its submission by the person subject to military qualification. The voivodship commission issues a ruling within 30 days from the date of submission of the application. The person subject to military qualification and the head of the military recruitment centre within 14 days from the date of receipt of the decision of the voivodship commission may appeal to the commission for alternative service, hereinafter referred to as ‘the commission’. The application of a person subject to military qualification for assignment to alternative service in an entity shall be considered by the voivodship commission in the presence of the person subject to military qualification, at a time and place determined by the chairman of the voivodship commission. The decision of the voivodship commission, together with its justification, shall be delivered in paper or electronically to the person subject to military qualification and to the head of the military recruitment centre. More extensively: Articles 559 - 599 of the Homeland Defence Act.

We have no data on information is provided to conscripts regarding the possibility of applying for recognition.

In the event of refusal to perform alternative service military conscription is suspended but there is criminal liability.

Alternative service is administered by the Ministry of National Defence. It shall be carried out in state and local government units, therapeutic organisations that are not commercial entities, as defined by



regulations on therapeutic activities, and public benefit organisations (service in such entities). Substitute service may also be performed in armed formations that are not part of the Armed Forces.

The duration of alternative service in civilian entities is 9 months for university graduates, 18 months for others. In armed formations the duration is 12 months.

Depending on need and availability, those who refuse military service are directed to establishments where they can perform civilian service. However, they may declare a preference for the place of service, although the final decision rests with the authorities responsible for the assignment.

People carrying out alternative service can generally remain in their permanent place of residence as long as the service is not jeopardised.

A person performing alternative service in the entity shall be entitled, for performing such service, to a monetary benefit in the amount of the minimum remuneration for work established pursuant to the provisions of the Act of 10 October 2002 on the minimum remuneration for work, as in force during the period of performing alternative service in the entity

Soldiers performing obligatory basic military service shall be entitled to emoluments in the amount of 50% of the lowest basic emolument of a professional soldier, in accordance with the principles specified in the regulations issued pursuant to Art. 437(4), however, in an amount not lower than the amount of the minimum remuneration for work established pursuant to the provisions of the Act of 10 October 2002 on the minimum remuneration for work.

Voluntary recruitment

Voluntary military service is governed by the Homeland Defence Act - Chapter 4 Division 1.

There is a diversity of forms of service:

- Professional military service: Designed for those planning a long-term military career.
- Territorial military service: Allows a combination of civilian life and military duties, which is attractive to those wishing to serve locally.
- Voluntary basic military service: Aimed at those who want military training without a long-term commitment.

The benefits for volunteers are:

- Salary: Those doing voluntary basic military service receive an allowance equal to the lowest basic salary of a professional soldier, which is from 4560 PLN.
- Priority in employment: Upon completion of their service, volunteers have priority for employment in public administration offices.
- Development opportunities: Military service offers numerous training courses and courses that improve professional qualifications and skills that are also useful in civilian life.
- Job stability: The military provides stable working conditions and numerous social benefits.

The minimum age for recruitment is 18; the initial term of service is 12 months.

We have no data on recruitment numbers or retention rates.

The number of persons who may be called up for active military service in 2025 and who may perform military service in reserve under:

1. professional military service - up to 16 000;



2. military exercises - up to 200 000;
3. active reserve - up to 30,000;
4. voluntary basic military service - up to 39,700, including for training purposes - up to 4,700;
5. territorial military service - up to 44 000.

We have no data on the number actually performing reserve service in a particular year or the duration of such service.

Conscientious objection during and after military service

In all forms of active military service where it is voluntary, it is possible to be dismissed at one's own request. In the case of compulsory basic military service, there is no such possibility.

The procedures for dismissal at the request of a soldier are specific to the form of active military service.

We have no information as to what information may be available to serving military personnel regarding the possibility for release on the grounds of conscientious objection; no such applications have been submitted to the Commissioner for Human Rights.

The current legislation does not provide for the possibility of a reservist applying for recognition as a conscientious objector. The Commissioner for Human Rights was approached by a Jehovah's Witness who had changed his religion after military training at university. When he was called for military training he appealed the Military Recruitment Centre's ruling to the Central Military Recruitment Centre (no complaint to the court), and also tried to ask the MRC to delete/change his military record, unfortunately without success. [See under "Developments" above for the Jehovah's Witnesses own account of such cases.]

The Commissioner for Human Rights addressed the Ministry of National Defence on these issues. The problem continues to be of interest to the Commissioner for Human Rights. More broadly:

1. Lack of provisions allowing conscientious objectors to opt out of military exercises: <https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-swiadek-jehowy-cwiczenia-wojskowe-odmowa-mon-odpowiedz>
2. Right to court: <https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-sluzba-wojskowa-powolanie-sad-niemoznosc-skargi-mon-replika-odpowiedz>

We await the response of the Ministry of Defence.

Asylum for conscientious objectors

We have no information on asylum requests from conscientious objectors; the Office for Foreigners will be competent for this request.

Militarisation of the education system

Defence education for high school, technical high school and upper secondary industrial school including requirements in: 1) responding to the threat of warfare, 2) cyber security with a military dimension and 3) shooting training. As of the 2024/2025 school year, shooting training has become a compulsory component of the security education curriculum in all secondary schools. [Confirming the information from the Jehovah's Witnesses quoted under "Developments" above.]

Volunteer military training of students and graduates of higher education institutions is carried out either concurrently with their education at a higher education institution or after graduation from a higher education institution, respectively. The training is provided in theoretical form at universities and in practical form at training centres, training centres and military units. The service is voluntary, which means that the Armed Forces should only have access to the volunteers concerned.



‘Education with the Army’ is a 6-week educational and defence programme that was prepared and implemented in cooperation between the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of National Defence. It consisted of specially prepared training sessions conducted by Polish Army soldiers in Polish primary and secondary schools.

Schools could enrol through their local governments. The programme was implemented throughout Poland - each municipality could register its school. The first training sessions started on 6 May 2024.

The primary objective of the programme was to raise awareness of children and young people in the area of security and defence and to develop basic habits and skills in defence and civil protection and behaviour in emergency situations. This is in response to contemporary security needs, challenges and threats.

The three-lesson training courses combined theory and practice. They included content from the areas of military, defence, security, medical assistance and civil defence. Among other things, students were introduced to key principles such as alerting, seeking and offering help, basic evacuation and shelter procedures, and how to provide support to others. Military trainers led these sessions in various school settings—classrooms, sports fields, and schoolyards. The primary aim was to deliver knowledge and practical skills in an engaging, age-appropriate, and approachable manner.



2.37. PORTUGAL

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 1999 (Military Service Law 174/99). Last conscripts demobilised 2004. Could be reinstated in emergency under articles 34 and 36. Military registration still enforced		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1976	Constitution, Articles 41(6) and 276 Military Service Law (No. 174/99) Law on Conscientious Objection, 7/92		
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions, but should be authorised under constitutional recognition of right		
Minimum recruitment age	18			
Population²⁰¹	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18	
	10,207,177	2.6%	53,077	
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above	
	21,500	–	Total strength is 40.5% of cohort	
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP	
	4,642m (+6.8%)	\$445	1.5%	

Principal EBCO concerns

- It is unclear if there is recognition of the right to conscientious objection for reservists or professional soldiers.

Based on replies to EBCO's questionnaire by the Ministry of Defence. We report developments or updates to previously reported information. Refer to the 2023/24 Annual Report, p. 118 for more information.²⁰²

²⁰¹Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

²⁰²https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2024-05-15-EBCO_Annual_Report_2023-24.pdf#page=118



Voluntary recruitment

Total first-time military recruitment for the three branches of the Armed Forces that started the initial military training period (all volunteers).

Year	# of recruits
2020	3054
2021	3132
2022	2539
2023	2192
2024	2327

The duration of service initially required is 12 months for volunteers, while for professionals with contracts, it can be up to 6 years. In this case, the period for contract renewal is variable (in some services/military specialties the initial contract period is 2 years, but in others it lasts 3, 4 or even 6 years, depending on the initial training length). There is also the special contract regime, which can last up to a maximum of 18 years, but currently it is only in force for 28 functional areas of a more technical nature. The period for contract renewal is also variable.

Incentives are provided for military service (Decree-Law No.78/2018, October 11), classified into four main areas:

- Acquisition of educational and professional qualifications;
- Financial and material benefits;
- Support the transition to the labor market;
- And social and family benefits.

Beginning with the acquisition of educational and professional qualifications, there is a special quota for Portuguese Public Higher Education, meaning that military personnel who have rendered military service under legally defined conditions, may apply for access in 2.5% of the vacancies set annually by universities. Also associated with the pursuit of higher studies, there is a tuition fees subsidy, for which the contracted military can apply.

In what concerns the more material or financial incentives, the legislation provides unemployment protection, since after military service, those who have served the Armed Forces in a contract regime, are entitled to unemployment benefit for the same period of service, up to a maximum of thirty months.

At the end of the military contract, and as compensation for its temporary nature and the impossibility of renewal of contract, military personnel are entitled to a financial compensation, which varies according to the number of years of service.

Vacancies are also reserved for military and ex-military personnel for becoming permanent staff of the Armed Forces, as well as in organisations such as the Police Forces, the National Republican Guard, Prison Guard Forces, the Judiciary Police, the Forest Rangers.

Children of contracted military personnel are entitled to a contingent of 5% of the existing vacancies in the public and private establishments of registered networks of pre-school education.

Military personnel and their families are entitled to medical care and auxiliary diagnostic assistance, similar to permanent military staff.



Conscientious objection during and after military service

It is unclear if the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers is recognised, apart from the usual termination clauses (see Section 3.6).

According to the Ministry of Defence, there is “no record of serving member of the Armed Forces having developed conscientious objections” in recent years.

Asylum for conscientious objectors

No information was available.

Militarisation of the education system

There are no preparatory military recruitment programmes that constitute obligatory components of the secondary education curriculum in Portugal.

However, the Armed Forces organise programs which “try to introduce young people to the professional reality of the Armed Forces.” Some of these programs and initiatives (e.g. "Defence+Youth", "Citizenship and the Armed Forces") include contact with the different activities and professions that exist in the various military units and bases of the Navy, Army and Air Force.

Additionally, at the age of 18/19, all Portuguese citizens are summoned to attend National Defence Day (military duty), that lasts for a day. According to the Ministry of Defence, “if conscientious objection is recognized, the citizen is released from that military duty.” however no statistics were available on such applications.



2.38. ROMANIA 🇷🇴

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended under Article 2 of Act 395/2005. Last conscripts demobilised 2007. Could be reinstated in time of war (see details below).
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Conscientious objection first recognised	1996	Act 46/1996, Art 4 “on governing preparation of the population for defence”	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions (see below)	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population²⁰³	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	18,148,155	2.8%	101,630
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	69,900	–	Total strength is 68.8% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	8,716m (+43.3%)	\$457	2.3%

Principal EBCO concerns

- Romania lacks a law to provide for alternative service and guarantee the rights of conscientious objectors during mobilisation.

From the answer to EBCO’s Questionnaire received from the People’s Advocate of Romania (National Human Rights Institution):

Developments

An amendment to Law 446/2006 “on the preparation of the population for defence” is currently under review and approval.

Conscription provisions and procedures

Since January 1, 2007, compulsory military service is suspended by law.²⁰⁴

²⁰³Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

²⁰⁴Article 2, para. 1 of Law no. 395/2005, as amended.



Compulsory military service can be reinstated “during the state of war, a state of mobilisation, or a state of siege”,²⁰⁵ which would oblige all male citizens aged between 20 and 35 years who meet the criteria to perform military service to enlist.²⁰⁶

The law exempts:

- those classified as unfit for military service, who are removed from the record according to medical criteria.
- ordained personnel belonging to religious cults recognised by law, personnel officially recognised as servants of such a cult, as well as monks who have been in a monastery for at least two years.
- persons sentenced to custodial sentences, for the duration of the sentence, as well as those remanded in custody or sent to court, until the date of finality of the judgement for the criminal case.²⁰⁷

Mobilisation or demobilisation is declared by the President through a presidential decree. The decree requires prior parliamentary approval and must be countersigned by the Prime Minister. In exceptional cases, it can be issued without prior approval, but must be submitted to Parliament for ratification within five days of its implementation.²⁰⁸

Romanian male citizens are currently required to present to military centres for registration within 6 months of reaching the age of 18, to declare the manner of performing the military service and receive a registration certificate, or else they face fines.²⁰⁹

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

Romanian law stipulates that “citizens who, for religious or conscientious reasons, refuse to perform military service under arms shall perform alternative service”. However, since a 2012 amendment, such an alternative service can only be introduced by new legislation.²¹⁰

The absence of such a law leaves all alternative service provisions and thus the rights of conscientious objections unregulated in the event of mobilisation.

Voluntary recruitment

Romanian citizens, men and women, between the ages of 18 and 45,²¹¹ can voluntarily be recruited into the military as soldiers and enlisted ranks. After completing a specialised training module, they sign an initial contract that lasts 4 years.²¹²

Voluntary reserve service is also available with initial contracts of 4 years and subsequent of up to 3 years.²¹³

Military personnel positions are available to people who are admitted into educational institutions for training and can enter into contracts with the Ministry of National Defence for a period of 8 years from their appointment to their first position, according to the norms established by the orders of the Ministry.²¹⁴

According to the reply, “most recruits and reservists” extend their contracts after the initial period, however no information was available regarding numbers of recruits, age, gender, and retention statistics.

²⁰⁵ibid. Article 3.

²⁰⁶Article 3, para. 5 of Law no. 446/2006, as amended.

²⁰⁷ibid. Article 6.

²⁰⁸Article 7 of Law no. 355/2009, as amended.

²⁰⁹Article 4, para. 1 of Law no. 395/2005, as amended.

²¹⁰Article 4 of Law no. 446/2006, as amended by Law no. 128/2012, point 6.

²¹¹Article 2, para. 2 of Law no. 384/2006, as amended.

²¹²ibid. Article 32.

²¹³Article 19 of Law no. 270/2015.

²¹⁴Article 41, para. 1 of Law no. 80/1995, as amended.



Incentives for voluntary reservists include an installation allowance granted upon signing each contract with a minimum duration of 3 years, equipment, food, social protection, medical care and medicines, reimbursement of travel expenses during call-ups, recovery plans after military missions, pensions, and compensation, in case of disability or death, as a result of events occurring during and due to the activities carried out during the periods of preparation, concentration and mobilisation.

During periods in which they do not participate in training or missions, they benefit from a monthly allowance of 30% of the salary of the position in which they are employed plus the salary of the rank held.²¹⁵

Incentives provided to military personnel include free accommodation, reductions or exemptions from income tax and rent and, upon retirement, access to military clubs, rest homes, and other wellness and recreational facilities.

Family members of active military personnel benefit from free medical care and medicines and survivor's pension. Children of active military personnel, deceased during and due to service, may be transferred to military educational institutions. Spouses that interrupted their activities to move together with active military personnel are entitled to a monthly allowance of 50% of the military personnel's salary.²¹⁶

Conscientious objection during and after military service

No specific provisions exist for reservists, soldiers or military personnel who invoke grounds of conscientious objection during or after their service. As mentioned in the 2023 report, this would fall under the right to freedom of thought, opinion, and religious beliefs, as enshrined in Article 29 of the Constitution.^t

The law also provides for a possibility of transfer to reserve or direct retirement of military personnel upon their request for well founded reasons or by resignation.²¹⁷

Asylum for conscientious objectors

No information was available.

Militarisation of the education system

According to the reply, military personnel is not involved in teaching classes in schools and no preparatory programmes of military nature exist as obligatory parts of education curriculum.

Every year, the Ministry of Education and Research and school inspectorates transmit to military centres the nominal tables of citizens aged between 18 and 35 who have attended courses in special schools, special vocational schools and re-education centers, accompanied by the results of the examinations carried out by the medical expert committees of disabled persons for adults within the public social welfare service.²¹⁸

²¹⁵Section 2 of Law no. 270/2015.

²¹⁶Section 2 of Law no. 80/1995.

²¹⁷ibid. Article 85.

²¹⁸Article 48 of Law no. 446/2006, as amended.



2.39. RUSSIAN FEDERATION (FORMER MEMBER STATE)

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed? Yes

Conscientious objection first recognised	1993	Constitution, Article 59.3 Law on Conscription Obligation and Military Service, 1998 Effective only from 1st January 2004 under Law on Alternative Civilian Service	
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	12 months	21 months (175%) Unarmed military service 18 months	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not permitted		
Minimum recruitment age	18	Admission to some military schools from 16	
Population²¹⁹	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	140,820,810	2.9%	816,761
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	1,134,000	550,000 (48.5%)	Total strength is 138.8% of cohort Conscripts are 67.3% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	148,967m (+37.8%)	\$1,026	7.0%

²¹⁹Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



As reported by EBCO's Russian member, the Movement of Conscientious Objectors:²²⁰

Developments

The conscription age for compulsory military service has been raised from 27 to 30 years. The maximum age for remaining in reserve and the maximum age for remaining in the mobilisation human reserve of the Armed Forces of Russia has been raised from 50 to 55 years.

Since August 2024, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia is required to electronically provide information on individuals who have obtained Russian citizenship and are scheduled to take the oath. This is done to quickly register these citizens for military service.

Since September 2024, it has become possible to discharge from military service under contract when a citizen transitions to positions in the prosecutor's office, investigative bodies, and the criminal-executive system with special ranks. These individuals are now exempt from military reserve training.

The Russian Parliament is developing initiatives to change the procedure for the validity of old conscription decisions. It is planned to establish at the legislative level that decisions made during completed conscription campaigns, for example, in the spring, will remain valid for one year. Currently, conscription commission decisions are automatically canceled after the end of the conscription campaign on July 16 or January 1.

This initiative also suggests creating unified municipal conscription commissions at the level of several municipal districts, cities of federal significance, and large regions. This would centralise the work of the commissions and make it similar to the Unified Conscription Point in Moscow, where since 2024, instead of hundreds of conscription commissions, there is one.

Finally, the authorities plan changes to the procedure for medical examinations of conscripts. A draft government resolution aims to complicate medical examinations for people with syphilis, asthma, hypertension, and other diseases. This is the first attempt since the start of the war to change the medical examination procedure, according to which a significant number of individuals with various conditions are still eligible for exemption from military service.

Conscription provisions and procedures

Conscription into mandatory military service is regulated by the Federal Law "On Military Duty and Military Service" (March 28, 1998, No. 53-FZ) and various subordinate acts. Key regulations include:

- Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 719 (November 27, 2006) "On the Approval of the Regulation on Military Registration";
- Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 663 (November 11, 2006) "On the Approval of the Regulation on the Conscription of Citizens of the Russian Federation for Military Service";
- Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 565 (July 4, 2013) "On the Approval of the Regulation on Military Medical Examination";
- Presidential Decree No. 1609 (December 7, 2012) "On the Approval of the Regulation on Military Commissariats";
- Order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation No. 700 (November 22, 2021) "On the Approval of the Instruction on Organizing Work to Ensure the Functioning of the Military Registration System".

²²⁰More info about the organisation at: <https://stoparmy.org/en/>



It is important to note that these are only a fraction of the officially published regulations governing conscription. The Russian Federation also enforces classified (secret) instructions, mainly issued by the Ministry of Defence, which are not publicly available but are used in judicial proceedings.

Contract service

The percentage of conscripts transitioning to contract service in Russia is not publicly disclosed. However, according to the Ministry of Defence, approximately 200,000 people signed contracts for military service from the beginning of 2024. This information was reported by former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. It should be noted that these figures are linked to the ongoing mobilisation campaign and increased financial incentives for contract signing.

Reservists in the Russian armed forces reserve may be called up for military training lasting from two to four weeks in a military unit. The summoning process includes:

- Official call-up notices, including electronic summons.
- Mandatory medical examinations before deployment to training camps.
- Reservists undergoing training acquire the status of active-duty military personnel, subject to additional obligations and legal responsibilities.

As of 2024, failure to attend reserve training is punishable by an administrative fine ranging from 10,000 rubles (€100) to 30,000 rubles (€300).

However, from 2025, additional restrictions will be imposed on reservists who fail to appear within 20 days of receiving a summons, including:

- Travel bans prevent them from leaving Russia.
- Property restrictions, including bans on registering real estate transactions.
- Driving bans and prohibitions on registering vehicles.
- Credit restrictions, preventing them from taking out loans.
- Business activity bans, prohibiting them from registering as self-employed or individual entrepreneurs.

Draft evasion and conscientious objectors

In 2024, there was a high number of prosecutions for evasion of military service:

In the first half of 2024, 427 people were convicted under Article 328 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation for draft evasion. Three received suspended sentences, while the rest were fined. Only five individuals received fines exceeding 100,000 rubles. The total amount of fines collected was 16.4 million rubles.

For comparison, in 2023, a total of 958 people were convicted for draft evasion, but none received actual prison sentences.

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

Article 59(3) of the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the Federal Law "On Alternative Civilian Service" (July 25, 2002, No. 113-FZ) provide the right for citizens whose beliefs or religious convictions are incompatible with military service to substitute military service with alternative civilian service.



Citizens whose beliefs or religion prevent them from serving in the military have the right to alternative civilian service (ACS). The process:

- The applicant must submit a request to the military commissariat at least six months before the draft starts.
- The draft board evaluates the application based on the applicant's personal statements, testimonies from supporting individuals and documents or additional materials submitted.

Government agencies, schools, and the media do not actively inform conscripts about ACS. Information is mainly limited to official local government websites. In some regions, detailed informational booklets were printed, mainly in opposition-controlled municipalities before September 2022. However, alternative service information is negligible compared to the aggressive military contract recruitment campaign.

Applications for the substitution of military service with alternative civilian service are reviewed by the draft commissions, which are formed in military registration and enlistment offices based on territorial criteria: one or more draft commissions for each municipal area. An exception to this rule was made starting from March 2024 in Moscow, where district draft commissions were abolished and replaced by a single unified municipal draft commission, which covers all districts of the Russian capital.

According to Article 27 of the Federal Law "On Military Duty and Military Service," the draft commission consists of a local government official heading the local administration (the executive and administrative body of the municipal area) or their deputy, who is the chairperson of the draft commission; a military commissariat official – the deputy chairperson of the commission; the secretary of the commission; a doctor responsible for medical examinations of citizens subject to military service; a representative of the relevant internal affairs authority; a representative of the relevant authority responsible for education; a representative of the relevant employment service authority (in matters related to alternative civilian service). The commission may also include representatives from other bodies and organisations.

This legal provision is effectively ignored in Moscow, where the unified municipal draft commission includes individuals holding positions in the Moscow Government, i.e., regional rather than local authorities.

In 2024, Russia saw a significant increase in the number of citizens undergoing alternative civilian service (ACS). In the first half of 2024, the number of "alternativists" reached 2022 people, which is double the number for the same period in 2023. Previously, in the second half of 2023, 1645 people were serving ACS, which is a 37% increase compared to the first half of the same year, when the number was 1199 conscripts.

A commission may reject an application for alternative civilian service (ACS) under the following circumstances:

- Insufficient evidence of beliefs: If the submitted documents and testimony do not sufficiently support the applicant's claim of conscientious objection.
- False information: If the applicant provides false information in their documents.
- Failure to appear: If the applicant fails to attend commission hearings twice without a valid reason.

The most common reason for rejection is missing the six-month deadline for submitting the application (see Question 20). While Russian courts have ruled that missed deadlines can be reinstated, draft boards and courts frequently ignore this Constitutional Court ruling.

Additionally, arbitrary rejections occur when commissions claim that applicants have not "proven" their beliefs, which is an illegal basis for rejection. However, courts sometimes uphold these decisions despite their illegality.



There are two ways to appeal a rejection:

- Administrative appeal: To the higher-level draft commission at the regional level (e.g., the Saratov Regional Draft Commission).
- Judicial appeal: In the district court located in either the jurisdiction of the draft commission or the applicant's residence.

Refusing to perform alternative civilian service (ACS) leads to criminal liability under Article 328(2) of the Russian Criminal Code. Potential punishments include:

- A fine of up to 80,000 rubles (€800), or the equivalent of six months' salary;
- Compulsory labor for up to 480 hours;
- Arrest for up to six months.

Importantly, criminal prosecution does not exempt the person from still having to complete ACS.

Alternative civilian service (ACS) is overseen by the Federal Service for Labor and Employment (Rostrud). Rostrud is a government body subordinate to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection.

The duration of ACS is generally 21 months. If assigned to an institution affiliated with the military or other security forces it is reduced to 18 months. In contrast, compulsory military service lasts 12 months.

ACS participants receive salaries according to the wage system of the institution where they are assigned. The minimum wage in Russia, as of January 1, 2024, is 19,242 rubles (€193.98) per month.

Military conscripts receive 2,000 rubles (€20.16) per month for the first 11 months and 4,000 rubles (€40.32) per month for the final month of service. This means ACS participants earn significantly more than conscripts, whose payments are below the minimum wage.

ACS placements include hospitals, elderly care homes, educational institutions (schools, universities), museums and theaters, regional government departments. As of 2024, the official list includes 239 job positions and 1,439 organisations authorised to host ACS participants.

Objectors do not have full freedom of choice regarding their ACS placements. The Federal Labor Service (Rostrud) assigns placements based on an officially approved annual list. However, individual preferences may influence the assignment process through:

- Personal written requests submitted to Rostrud;
- Requests from hiring organisations advocating for specific applicants;
- Informal intervention by draft commissions recommending particular placements.

The default rule requires ACS to be performed outside the applicant's home region. However, this is not strictly enforced, as most ACS participants serve in their region of residence due to logistical and financial considerations. Relocation may still be required within the region, which can be problematic in large territories like Komi Republic, Krasnoyarsk Krai, or Sakha Republic (Yakutia).

Voluntary recruitment

The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation use a variety of incentives to encourage voluntary military service, including financial incentives: monthly salaries for contract servicemen, including rank-based pay, position-based pay, and additional bonuses.

In the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, extra one-time payments are provided for signing military contracts and for completing specific combat missions.



Social Benefits: Medical care in military hospitals. Free or subsidised housing, or compensation for rental costs. Early retirement benefits after a set period of service. Additional benefits for war participants, such as combat veteran status, which grants extra privileges. War participants are exempt from paying loan interest during their military service, and their loan obligations are canceled after the preferential period ends.

Recruitment Campaigns: Promotional events, including open house days, meetings with military personnel, and demonstrations of military equipment. Advertising campaigns across TV, social media, and outdoor advertising promoting contract military service. In Tatarstan, a 12-hour televised marathon was held, featuring guests and hosts promoting contract military service.

Under Russian law, the first military service contract can be signed by citizens of the Russian Federation and foreign nationals aged 18 and above.

In 2024, there were two conscription campaigns for men aged 18–30:

Spring conscription (April 1 – July 15): 150,000 recruits.

Autumn conscription (October 1 – December 31): 133,000 recruits.

Exact data on volunteers who signed contracts in 2024 is not publicly available. However, former President Dmitry Medvedev claimed that 200,000 people signed military contracts in 2024. Contract service is available for men and women aged 18–70.

Voluntary military recruitment is regulated by:

- Federal Law "On Military Duty and Military Service" (March 28, 1998, No. 53-FZ);
- Federal Law "On Defence" (May 31, 1996, No. 61-FZ);
- Presidential Decree No. 1237 (September 16, 1999) "On Military Service Regulations";
- Government Decree No. 1441 (December 31, 1999) "On Training Citizens for Military Service".

Since 2023, no minimum conscription period or trial service requirements apply. Contracts can be signed immediately at age 18, both for Russian citizens and foreign nationals.

Exact figures on reservists called up annually are classified and not publicly disclosed. According to TASS, information on the number of reservists and their distribution across military districts is confidential. The maximum duration of reserve training in Russia is 60 days per year, as per Article 55 of the Federal Law "On Military Duty and Military Service".

Conscientious objection during and after military service

Servicemen, whether performing compulsory conscription service or serving under a contract, including those mobilised for the war in Russia and Ukraine, cannot ask for release on grounds of having developed conscientious objection due to lack of legislation, and such applications will be denied.

In 2024, Russian military courts received 10,308 criminal cases related to refusal of service — nearly twice as many as the previous year (5,517).²²¹

Asylum for conscientious objectors

In Russia, official statistics on the approvals and rejections of asylum applications based on conscientious objection to military service are not publicly available. Russian authorities rarely grant asylum to foreign nationals, especially on such grounds. If we are talking about internal protection mechanisms (such as refugee status or temporary asylum in the Russian Federation), such cases are extremely rare, and the

²²¹<https://zona.media/news/2024/12/27/500-itog>



procedure itself is opaque. Most applications are rejected, especially if the applicants come from countries that the Russian authorities consider "safe."

Militarisation of the education system

Military training is a mandatory part of education in Russian schools. Previously, 10th-grade students attended military training sessions as part of the "Basics of Life Safety" (OBZh) course.

From September 1, 2024, this subject has been replaced by "Fundamentals of Security and Homeland Defence", which includes expanded initial military training. Students are now required to study:

- Military statutes of the Russian Armed Forces.
- Rules for handling firearms.
- Fundamentals of drone operation.
- Military structure, symbols, and functions of the army.

The program is designed to instill military knowledge and promote the armed forces as a career option, making military preparation an integral part of the school curriculum.

The Russian Ministry of Defence, through military commissariats, has extensive access to students' personal data.

Legal provisions regulate the transfer of information to the Ministry of Defence, including:

- Mandatory registration of students in military records at age 17.
- Automatic notifications to military offices when students enroll in colleges or universities.

Failure to provide required data to the military commissariat or other relevant authorities is punishable by fines under Article 21.1 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (CAO RF). Educational institutions may face fines of 350,000–400,000 rubles (€3,500–4,000). School and university administrators may be fined 40,000–50,000 rubles (€400–500) for failing to submit mandatory student data.

Separate penalties apply for not providing essential student records for military registration, further reinforcing government control over student military data.

Military-Patriotic Camps and Training Sessions: Specialised camps are organised where school students undergo intensive courses on security and national defence. The program includes firearms training, tactical drills, first aid, and other military-related skills. In 2024, reports indicated that such camps trained children in handling weapons, using protective equipment, and other military disciplines.

The nationwide "Yunarmiya" (Young Army) Movement, supported by the Russian Ministry of Defence, aims to instill patriotism and military readiness among young people. Members participate in military training camps, exercises, and visits to military units. As of late 2024, the movement had approximately 1.3 million members.

Various regions in Russia operate military-sports training centres for youth aged 14–35 to provide military-applied training. Programs include drone operation, firearms training, tactical exercises, and engineering skills.

In Russia, military personnel are involved in teaching in schools both temporarily and permanently.

On September 1, 2024, Russian schools introduced a new subject, "Fundamentals of Security and Homeland Defence" (OBZhR), replacing the previous "Basics of Life Safety" (OBZh). The course is planned to be taught by veterans of the Special Military Operation (SMO) with relevant education. According to



Deputy Minister of Education Alexander Bugaev, these veterans will share their practical experience and military knowledge with students.

Additionally, during training camps for 10th-grade students, military officers from various units conduct firearms, drill, tactical, and physical training sessions. Military personnel thus actively participate in the education system, fostering patriotic upbringing and military preparedness among youth.

2.40. SAN MARINO

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription never existed. There are no regular military forces and defence is the responsibility of Italy. However, there are some Military Corps, such a Military Ceremonial and a Military Band.²²²

²²²<https://esteri.sm/pub2/EsteriSM/Corpi-Militari/Corpi-militari.html#blocco2>



2.41. SERBIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended in 2011.	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1992	Constitution of Serbia and Montenegro, Article 58 (guaranteed unarmed military service only) Regulation on Civilian Service 37/2003	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions beyond constitutional guarantees (see below)	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population²²³	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	6,652,212	2.7%	35,922
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	28,150	–	Total strength is 78.4% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	2,323m (+23.5%)	\$344	2.6%

* The figures above do not include Kosovo. The situation there is covered in Section 2.24.

Principal EBCO concerns

- It is unclear if and how the law on alternative service would apply to an event of reintroduction of conscription or emergency mobilisation.
- The law on alternative service lacks basic guarantees to the rights of conscientious objectors, such as accessibility to all without discrimination, full control of civilian authorities.

Developments

On January 4, 2024, the General Staff of the Armed Forces submitted a proposal for the reintroduction of obligatory military service for four months,²²⁴ following up on previous plans.²²⁵ The Ministry of Defence described the proposal as aimed at increasing “the defence capabilities of the Serbian Armed Forces,

²²³Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

²²⁴<https://www.mod.gov.rs/cir/20848/predlog-generalstaba-vojske-srbije-za-ponovno-uvodjenje-obaveze-sluzenja-vojnog-roka20848>

²²⁵War Resisters' International, “WiB Belgrade Statement: On possible reintroduction of military service in Serbia”, 28 May 2021.



through the rejuvenation and improvement in the training of the active and reserve forces” and that it came after "a detailed consideration of the general security situation and current challenges faced by the Republic of Serbia as a militarily neutral country."

On September 14, 2024, the President stated that he signed his consent to a military term of 75 days.²²⁶ No legislation was passed in 2024 that would implement those changes.

Other notes

Compulsory military service is suspended since January 1, 2011.²²⁷

Since our last coverage in 2023, we are not aware of any updates to the provisions around voluntary recruitment, conscientious objection of military personnel and reservists, or militarisation of the education system.

We could not find data on military recruitment numbers or asylum applications filed by foreign nationals on the grounds of fear of persecution as conscientious objectors.

²²⁶ <https://www.predsednik.rs/lat/pres-centar/vesti/svecanost-povodom-promocije-najmladjih-oficira-vojske-srbije>

²²⁷ Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 95/10.



2.42. SLOVAKIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 2005 (Act 569/2005) Could be reinstated in time of war or emergency	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1992	Civilian Service Act (of Czechoslovakia) No. 18/1992	
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population²²⁸	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	5,563,649	2.5%	27,818
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	12,800	–	Total strength is 46.0% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	2,849m (+13.4%)	\$516	2.0%

Principal EBCO concerns

- It is unclear if and how the law on alternative service would apply to an event of emergency mobilisation.
- No recognition of the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers.
- Military-themed activities take place in schools with the involvement of the Armed Forces.

Developments

In 2024, the government introduced military themed training in primary schools and initiated a “dual education” project with the secondary vocational school of Sečovce. See “Militarisation of the education system” below for details.

In recent years, tens of thousands have submitted applications for recognition as conscientious objectors following the Russian invasion in Ukraine in 2022 and false reportings about imminent mobilisation in Slovakia.²²⁹ Opinion polling has shown low willingness of the population to take up arms in the event of a mobilisation.²³⁰

²²⁸Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

²²⁹<https://dennikn.sk/3504095/boj-so-zbranou-odmietol-potom-to-odvolal-na-vyhlaseni-trva-50-tisic-muzov-stat-im-teraz-posiela-listy/>

²³⁰<https://dennikn.sk/4076566/prieskum-pri-napadnuti-by-slovensko-branila-len-stvrtina-obyvatelov-najmenej-volici-sns/>



The Defence Minister has stated that the Government doesn't wish to reintroduce conscription or compulsory military service.²³¹

Conscription provisions and procedures

Conscription was abolished in 2005. However, Article 25 paragraph 1 of the constitution still reads "The defence of the Slovak Republic is a duty and a matter of honour for citizens. The law shall lay down the scope of the compulsory military service".²³² Conscription in times of crisis or war is regulated by Law 570/2005.²³³

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

The right to conscientious objection is recognised in Article 25 paragraph 2 of the Constitution, "No one shall be forced to perform military service if it is contrary to his or her conscience or religion. A law shall lay down the details."²³⁴

Recognition for conscientious objectors and alternative service are regulated by Law 569/2005. Citizens can apply for recognition as conscientious objectors but not during periods of crisis (para. 4, point 2).²³⁵

Voluntary recruitment

Slovak citizens aged 18 or over can voluntarily be recruited into the Armed Forces.²³⁶

Conscientious objection during and after military service

Military personnel can file requests for release but no specific guarantees are provided when requested on grounds of conscientious objection.²³⁷

Asylum for conscientious objectors

No information was available.

Militarisation of the education system

On September 18, 2024, the Ministry of Defence and the Slovak Towns and Municipalities Association signed a Memorandum of Understanding on "encouraging advancement of military themed training and sporting activities in primary schools".²³⁸ This would involve "education programmes, workshops, military themed training and sporting activities to develop pupils' physical fitness, teamwork, and basic life protection skills". The Ministry of Defence representative stated that "while encouraging playful learning, we will introduce them to the Armed Services environment and the specifics of the military profession". Primary schools in Slovakia are typically attended by students of ages 6-15.

On October 4, 2024, a "dual education" project was announced to be implemented in the Personal and Property Security Study Programme of the secondary vocational school of Sečovce with the involvement of Ministry of Defence. According to the announcement, the aim of the cooperation would be to "increase the number of those interested in studying in this field and subsequently in serving in the Armed Forces".²³⁹ The students attending secondary education in Slovakia are typically of ages 15-19.

²³¹ <https://enrsi.stvr.sk/articles/news/374600/monitor-defence-ministry-wants-to-make-active-reserves-available-to-volunteers>

²³² <https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1992/460/>

²³³ <https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2005/570/>

²³⁴ <https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1992/460/>

²³⁵ <https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2005/569/>

²³⁶ <https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2015/281/>

²³⁷ <https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2015/281/>

²³⁸ <https://www.mosr.sk/54819-en/podpora-a-rozvoj-branno-sportovych-aktivit-na-zakladnych-skolach/>

²³⁹ <https://budemvojak.sk/spolupraca-so-strednou-skolou-v-secovciach-dostala-nove-rozmary/> (in Slovak)



2.43. SLOVENIA

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended 2003. Could be reinstated in war time.		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1991	Military Service Act, No. 18/1991		
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions		
Minimum recruitment age	18			
Population²⁴⁰	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18	
	2,097,893	2.5%	10,489	
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above	
	6,200	–	Total strength is 59.1% of cohort	
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP	
	952m (+2.1%)	\$449	1.3%	

Principal EBCO concerns

- It is unclear whether Slovenia recognises the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers.
- Military-themed summer camps are organised by the Armed Forces for underage pupils and students.

Developments

In February 2024, then Defence Minister Marjan Šarec described talks about reintroduction of conscription as “absolutely premature” even though he confirmed that it was an option under discussion.²⁴¹ In October his successor, Borut Sajovic, similarly stated that “for the time being”, military service should primarily be a “voluntary personal decision”.²⁴²

Conscription provisions and procedures

Conscription was abolished in 2003. Article 123 paragraph 1 of the Constitution reads “Participation in the national defence is compulsory for citizens within the limits and in the manner provided by law”.²⁴³

²⁴⁰Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

²⁴¹<https://sloveniatimes.com/40234/slovenia-not-considering-conscription-for-now>

²⁴²<https://www.metropolitan.si/novice/slovenija/borut-sajovic-vinko-logaj-minister-obramba-solstvo-izobrazevanje/>

²⁴³https://www.dz-rs.si/wps/portal/en/Home/AboutNA/PoliticalSystem/Constitution/?urile=wcm%3Apath%3A%2Fd%2Bdocuments_en%2Bv2.0%2Fhome%2Fabout%2Bthe%2Bnational%2Bassembly%2Fpolitical%2Bsystem%2Fconstitution%2Fconstitution-text



Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

The right to conscientious objection is recognised in Article 46 of the Constitution, “Conscientious objection shall be permissible in cases provided by law where this does not limit the rights and freedoms of others” and Article 123 paragraph 2 “Citizens who due to their religious, philosophical, or humanitarian convictions are not willing to perform military duties, must be given the opportunity to participate in the national defence in some other manner”.²⁴⁴

Voluntary recruitment

Citizens aged under 30 can take up voluntary military service which lasts 13 weeks. It comprises three stages: a 5-week boot camp, after which individuals will qualify for strategic army reserve, followed by 6 weeks of follow-up training for reserve forces, and a final training for those wishing to become professional soldiers.²⁴⁵

Conscientious objection during and after military service

It is unclear whether Slovenia recognises the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers.

Asylum for conscientious objectors

No information was available.

Militarisation of the education system

Since 2005, the Armed Forces have been organising the military-themed summer camp “MORS in mladi” which can be attended by underage students, or pupils who are finishing primary school in the current year. In Slovenia, primary schools are typically attended by ages 6-15, while secondary schools by ages 15-19.

The activities in the summer camp include learning the “soldier's movement on the battlefield”, “weapons demonstration” and shooting with “laser pistol and rifles”, “air rifles” and “small calibre rifles”.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴Ibid.

²⁴⁵<https://sloveniatimes.com/24607/new-basic-training-concept-for-military-service>

²⁴⁶<https://postanivojak.si/kako-lahko-sodelujem/tabor-mors-in-mladi/>



2.44. SPAIN

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Suspended with effect from 2002 (Royal Decree 247/2001)		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1978	Constitutional amendment.		
CO release of professional soldiers	–	No specific provisions. Training expenses would have to be repaid.		
Minimum recruitment age	18			
Population²⁴⁷	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18	
	47,280,433	2.8%	264,770	
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above	
	122,200	–	Total strength is 46.2% of cohort	
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP	
	24,615m (+0.4%)	\$514	1.4%	

Principal EBCO concerns

- No recognition of the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers.

As reported by the organisation Alternativa Antimilitarista:²⁴⁸

Conscription provisions and procedures

Compulsory military service was suspended by Law 17/1999 “Armed Forces Personnel Act”.

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

Article 30.2 of the Constitution reads “the law shall determine the military obligations of Spaniards and shall regulate, with all due guarantees, conscientious objection as well as other grounds for exemption from compulsory military service; it may also, when appropriate, impose a community service in place of military service.”

²⁴⁷Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

²⁴⁸More info about the organisation at: <https://antimilitaristas.org/>



Voluntary recruitment

Spain maintains a fully professional army. In 2024, the Ministry of Defence offered 8,062 new positions, which are open to Spanish or Latin American nationals of ages 18-28.²⁴⁹

The length of service initially required is between two and five years, with the possibility of extensions.

There is also a voluntary reserve force with a commitment of three years and possibility of extensions. 350 places were published for voluntary reservists in 2024, 50 more than the previous year.²⁵⁰

Conscientious objection during and after military service

There is no recognition of the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers. The only option is to submit a request for voluntary discharge.

Asylum for conscientious objectors

No information was available.

²⁴⁹<https://www.infodefensa.com/texto-diario/mostrar/4861324/estos-requisitos-acceder-nuevas-plazas-tropa-marineria-fuerzas-armadas>

²⁵⁰<https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2024/10/28/pdfs/BOE-A-2024-22160.pdf>



2.45. SWEDEN

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes	Suspended 2010 Reinstated from 1st January 2018	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1920	Alternative Service Schemes Act, 21st May	
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	11 months	11 months (100%)	
CO release of professional soldiers	-	No specific provisions.	
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population²⁵¹	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	10,589,835	3.0%	63,539
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	14,850	4,000 (26.9%)	Total strength is 23.4% of cohort Conscripts are 6.3% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	12,040m (+33.9%)	\$1,138	2.0%

As reported by EBCO's Swedish member, the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society.²⁵²

In 2024, discussion about military conscription increased in the media. This was mainly because of Sweden joining NATO and how this would affect military service and obligations for missions abroad. For the first time, the military began calling people who had declared no motivation or positive attitude towards serving. Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society (SPAS) has been a strong voice in the debate and received significantly more questions about conscription and weapon-free status than previous years. These trends and statistics are further elaborated below.

The conscription law remains the same. Citizens turning 18 are obliged to provide the Swedish Defence Recruitment Agency (Plikt- och prövningsverket) with information as well as enlist and undergo military

²⁵¹Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

²⁵²More info about the organisation at: <https://www.svenskafreds.se/>



training if called to do so.²⁵³ In 2024, 7,426 individuals enrolled for military service, which is an increase of 114 individuals compared to the previous year. Out of the 7,426 individuals, 87% were called up in accordance with the conscription law, while 13% applied for enrollment themselves.²⁵⁴ Of the total of 106,990 18 year-olds who responded to the 2024 enlistment document, 38,763 were eligible and could be called up (35%).²⁵⁵

According to the Swedish Defence Recruitment Agency, 100 conscripts have been reported to the prosecutor's office for breaking the general law of compulsory military service in 2024.²⁵⁶ The reason for this was invalid absence when they were called to enlist, i.e. military selection tryouts.²⁵⁷

Applications for weapon-free status ²⁵⁸			
	2022	2023	2024
Total	107	106	145
– Before military service	–	–	106
– During military service	–	–	24
– After military service	–	–	15

Those who receive weapon free status can be called for civil conscription, meaning that they can be placed within the civil defence. The civil conscription has not been active since 2010, but as of 21 December 2023, the government decided to activate civil service obligations for municipal emergency services and to the electricity supply sector. During 2024, 300 individuals (for example within the emergency services), received training. MSB plans to initiate civil defence duty training for around 1,000 people within the rescue service during 2025. In addition, more people are expected to be targets for investigation prior to mandatory enrollment and initiating training by MSB. Svenska kraftnät is now responsible for enrollment within the electricity supply sector, which is now activated for civil duty. The government aims to initiate training for a total of 3,000 individuals "within a few years"²⁵⁹ and is open to the possibility that youth may be selected for civilian duty within the civil defence after mustering.²⁶⁰ The government allocated a total of 60 million Swedish SEK for civil service obligations in 2024.²⁶¹

Around 30,000 individuals born in 2007 will be summoned to muster 2025 and the number of youths called for conscription will increase to 8,500 by 2026.²⁶² However, there is political consensus that this is not enough as both the previous and current government have expressed that more youths should be

²⁵³The law of conscription, Lagen (1994:1809) om totalförsvarsplikt. <https://rkrattsbaser.gov.se/sfst?bet=1994:1809>

²⁵⁴The Swedish Defence Recruitment Agency (Plikt- och prövningsverket), Press release

<https://via.tt.se/pressmeddelande/3389399/sa-har-manga-inskrivna-till-varnplikt-kommer-fran-din-kommun?publisherId=3235997>

²⁵⁵The Swedish Defence Recruitment Agency (Plikt- och prövningsverket), Mönstring och prövning till grundutbildning med värnplikt 2006, Ö2024/4524:3

²⁵⁶Ibid.

²⁵⁷The Swedish Defence Recruitment Agency (Plikt- och prövningsverket), E-mail contact.

²⁵⁸Ibid.

²⁵⁹Dagens Nyheter, news article, 2025. "Regeringen vill utöka civilplikten": <https://www.dn.se/direkt/2025-01-13/regeringen-vill-utoka-civilplikten/>

²⁶⁰Omni news article, 2025. "Fler ska bli civilpliktiga: "Det krävs ett större vi": <https://omni.se/fler-ska-bli-civilpliktiga-det-kravs-ett-storre-vi/a/25JQRa>

²⁶¹The Ministry of Defence, Press release

<https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2023/12/regeringen-aktiverar-delar-av-civilplikten/>

²⁶²Radio Sweden, 2025. "Alla platser kommer att fyllas": <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/pliktverket-alla-platser-kommer-fyllas>



prepared to do military service. For example, the government has argued that the number called for conscription each year should increase to 10,000 individuals,²⁶³ and possibly to 12,000 individuals after that.²⁶⁴ As the enrollment volumes increase, relying solely on those who have expressed a positive attitude towards undergoing military training with conscription will no longer be sufficient to meet the demand. This implies that in the future, an increasing number of individuals who may not be motivated to serve will need to be called for conscription. A selection process is conducted to identify individuals with the best prerequisites for completing basic training with conscription. Those individuals who are deemed to have the optimal conditions will be called. Therefore, the Swedish Defence Recruitment Agency will give less consideration to the individual's will and motivation in order to meet the demand.²⁶⁵ 2024 stands out as the first year, since the conscription law was reinforced in 2017, that youths were called to enlist against their will. This regards individuals who answered that they are negative towards doing military service, but in other ways meet the demands. Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society (SPAS) continues to take this very seriously and stands up for the right to refuse participation in the military system. Media reported in the beginning of 2024, that the number of youths being forced to enlist is increasing.²⁶⁶ In 2024, 6,139 youth were called to enlist against their will²⁶⁷ and considering the expected increase of individuals summoned to enlist, this trend is expected to continue.²⁶⁸

Sweden became a member of NATO on 7 March 2024, which raises new questions about conscription, and if and how conscripts can be used for military operations outside of Sweden in the future. Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society investigated the issue in a report, launched in January 2024, and concludes that conscripts could be affected by NATO membership and be sent abroad for three reasons:

1. To a greater extent participate in exercises and training within the framework of military cooperation (which the current law already allows for);
2. To participate in NATO troop deployments for the purpose of guarding NATO territory in peacetime and thus be a part of NATO's deterrence strategy; and
3. To fight for NATO in a war situation when and if article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is invoked.

Currently, the law states that conscripts are to be used to defend Sweden. There are uncertainties as to whether it is possible to force people to participate in military operations abroad on behalf of NATO within the current legislation. Based on the investigation, it seems that conscripts will be used if article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is invoked as the Swedish military units within the armed forces rely on conscripts.²⁶⁹

The fact that those who have already enlisted or been deployed have not been able to consider the risk of being sent abroad on behalf of NATO at the time of enlistment/conscription raises questions about the democratic basis and transparency of the process. Investigations also indicate that youth are less motivated to defend NATO countries compared to defending Sweden. In an investigation completed by

²⁶³SVT, Newspaper, 2022. "Regeringen vill att fler gör lumpen": <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/regeringen-vill-att-fler-gor-lumpen-kan-bli-10-000-varnpliktiga-om-aret>

²⁶⁴The Swedish Government. Prop. 2024/25:34 Totalförsvaret 2025-2030: <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/5c98b885c2cc40d58aa3693d34d915d3/totalforsvaret-20252030-prop.-20242534.pdf>

²⁶⁵The Swedish Defence Recruitment Agency (Plikt- och provningsverket), Mönstring och provning till grundutbildning med värnplikt 2006, Ö2024/4524:3

²⁶⁶Radio Sweden, 2024. "Tusentals ungdomar tvingas mönstra mon sin vilja" <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/fler-kommer-att-tvingas-monstra-mot-sin-vilja>

²⁶⁷The Swedish Defence Recruitment Agency (Plikt- och provningsverket), Mönstring och provning till grundutbildning med värnplikt 2006, Ö2024/4524:3

²⁶⁸Ibid.

²⁶⁹The Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society (Svenska Freds- och Skiljedomsföreningen), NATO report <https://www.svenskafreds.se/app/uploads/2023/10/sverige-i-nato-del-1-1.pdf>



the Swedish Defence Recruitment Agency, 57 percent of the youth asked were willing to defend Sweden but only 37 percent were willing to militarily defend NATO.²⁷⁰ It becomes evident that there is a pressing need for broader public debate surrounding the implications of sending conscripts abroad within the NATO framework.²⁷¹ SPAS is pushing for such a debate and demands that it should be stated that no one can be sent abroad to participate in NATO missions against their will.

²⁷⁰Omni news article, 2025. "Svalt intresse bland unga att strida för Natoländer": <https://omni.se/sval-installning-till-strid-for-natolander-bland-unga/a/xmymKn>

²⁷¹The Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society (Svenska Freds- och Skiljedomsföreningen), NATO report <https://www.svenskafreds.se/app/uploads/2023/10/sverige-i-nato-del-1-1.pdf>



2.46. SWITZERLAND

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed? Yes

Conscientious objection first recognised			
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service		Civilian service (% of military)
	245 days Or longer depending on rank		368 days (150%)
CO release of professional soldiers	Covered under the general law on alternative civilian service.		
Minimum recruitment age	18		
Population²⁷²	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	8,860,574	2.4%	42,531
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	21,300	18,200 (85.4%)	Total strength is 50.1% of cohort Conscripts are 42.8% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	6,722m (+3.1%)	\$756	0.7%

Principal EBCO concerns

As reported by EBCO's Swiss member CIVIVA:²⁷³

Developments

At the request of the far right-wing political party SVP, the Swiss Federal Council has yet again decided on several adaptations to the civilian alternative service (Zivildienst) laws in 2023, in order to restrict access to, and worsen the conditions of serving in alternative civilian service. This is only three years after it had proposed a package of restrictions in 2019. The declared intention of the adaptations is to prevent young men from accessing their right to Conscientious Objector status.

²⁷²Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.

²⁷³More info about the organisation at: <https://www.servicecivil.ch/civiva>



One change is to undermine the independence of the civilian service from the military by placing it under the command of the civil defence authority.

In 2024, a further package of six measures was proposed which has yet to be decided by all chambers:

1. a minimum number of 150 days of alternative service (irrespective of the number of days already served in the military prior to application for CO status)
2. the application of the 1.5 ratio of the duration of alternative service to that of military service to officers and NCOs, whose periods of military service are longer than those of the rank and file.
3. no placements that require a degree in human, dental or veterinary medicine
4. no admission of members of the armed forces with 0 remaining days of military service
5. a tightening of the rules regarding the timing of alternative civilian service, requiring that a placement be taken up within the year of admission.
6. likewise, in the case where the application was submitted during military basic training period (recruit school), an obligation to complete the long period of service within the calendar year following the legally binding admission.

The new minimum number of days to be served in civilian alternative service (item 1), and the new conditions for officers (item 2) will result in an increase in the relative duration of alternative service to up to 200% of that of military service, or more depending on the time of application. Moreover, it is once again being suggested that the individual examination of claims of conscientious objection should be reinstated, despite the claim that the increased duration of alternative service serves to test the sincerity of the objection. CIVIVA points out, furthermore, that even if no applications are formally rejected, by no means all lead to acceptances; in fact figures quoted in our 2022 report indicated that about a quarter of all applications, and a greater proportion of applications lodged after military service had begun, were for one reason or another not proceeded with (although in some cases a later application might have been lodged by the same person). In total, less than a quarter of those passed as fit for military service are admitted to the alternative service.

Conscription provisions and procedures

Based on the state responses in our 2023 Report:

Obligatory military service is imposed on all male Swiss citizens. After a first information day, they have to report to a recruitment assessment that lasts three days and after which is determined whether or not they are apt to serve in the Armed forces or not. If they are, they then have to accomplish their military service. If they are not deemed apt for military service, they may serve in the Civil protection. If they are not apt for either service, they pay an exemption tax. The compulsory conscription is stipulated in the Federal Constitution. The ensuing procedures are stipulated in the Law on the Armed forces and the respective ordinances. Preparation for military service does not feature in the secondary education curriculum.

For conscripts (privates and lance corporals), the initial duration of service is at the most 280, but currently 245 days to be served in the period of 10 years. They are composed of a basic training of 5 months followed by yearly refresher-courses of 3-4 weeks.

In the last years, in average 35,000 male citizens go through the recruiting assessment. Around 7,000 declare as unfit for both military service and civil protection. Around 3,000 declare as unfit for military service and apt for civil protection. The remaining 25,000 declare as fit for military service.



Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

Conscripts can – at any time after declared fit for military service – stipulate a conflict of conscience and demand to serve in the Alternative Civilian Service instead. This is also guaranteed by the Federal Constitution. Conscripts are informed about the possibilities of a conscientious objection during the first information day and during the recruitment assessment.

Applications do not undergo any scrutiny. Conscripts that choose to serve in the Alternative Civilian Service prove their conscientious objection by accepting the longer duration of civil service (1.5 times the duration of the military service). The Federal Office for Alternative Civilian service (Bundesamt für Zivildienst ZIVI (admin.ch)) is responsible for alternative service arrangements.

The remuneration for alternative service is the same with the other branches (Armed Forces, Civil Protection, Alternative Civilian Service). They are entitled to 80% of their salary before their service. If this is not applicable (i.e. for students), a basic remuneration is paid. Added to that, all conscripts receive a daily pay (per diem). The remuneration in relation to the salary prior to service is administered by the Federal Department of Finance. Per diems are administered by the Armed Forces for military conscripts and by the cantonal civil protection authorities for Civil Protection conscripts. Conscripts in the Alternative Civilian Service receive their per diems by the institutions they are serving in (i.e. hospitals, care centres, etc.).

In the last years, of those 25,000 declaring fit for military service in average, 3,000 declare a conflict of conscience and are consequently transferred to the Alternative Civilian Service. Another 3,000 choose to transfer to the Alternative Civilian Service during their military service.

Voluntary recruitment

Voluntary recruitment into military service is possible for female Swiss citizens. It is not possible for residents of other nationalities. Voluntary military service is governed in the law on the Armed Forces.



2.47. TÜRKIYE

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	Never recognised		
Current provisions			
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	6 months	Not available	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not permitted		
Minimum recruitment age	19		
Population²⁷⁴	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	84,119,531	3.9%	656,132
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	355,200	Not known	Total strength is 54.1% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	24,979m (+11.8%)	\$292	1.9%

Principal EBCO concerns

- No recognition of the right to conscientious objection. Prolonged violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, the ICCPR, and relevant rulings.
- Prosecution and punishment of conscientious objectors with interference to a wide range of human rights amounting to civil death, and repeated punishments in violation of *ne bis in idem*.
- Criminalisation of acts deemed to “alienate the public from military service.”

²⁷⁴Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



As reported by EBCO's Turkish member, the Conscientious Objection Watch:²⁷⁵

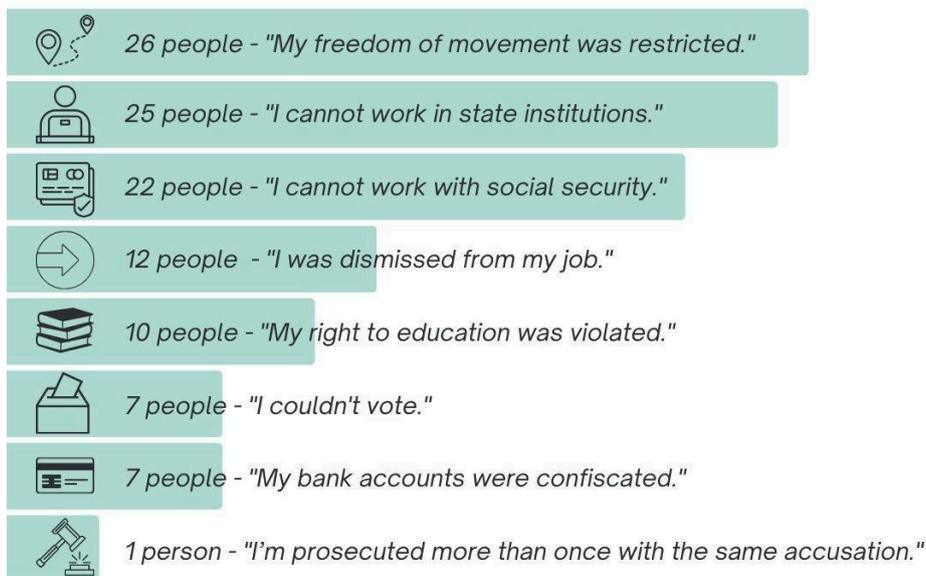
Developments

In 2024, conscientious objectors in Türkiye continued to face criminal cases. According to the database of the Conscientious Objection Watch, here are some examples about it:

Kamil Murat Demir was sentenced to 2 months in prison on a charge of being a "draft evader"; Mahmut Elkuş was sentenced to 1 year in prison, which had acquitted him twice before, on a charge of being an "evader"; Güney Akgün was sentenced to 2 months in prison twice on a charge of being a "draft evader", Oğuzhan Şahin was sentenced to 8 months in prison on a charge of being an "evader", Osman Görkem Eryılmaz was sentenced to 2 months in prison on the charge of being a "draft evader".

All violations and restrictions experienced in 2024 were also scrutinised by international human rights mechanisms. In the interim decision taken by the Committee of Ministers in June and the concluding observations of the United Nations Human Rights Committee in October, Türkiye's insistence on not recognising the right to conscientious objection was emphasised and the government was called to take urgent action regarding the right to conscientious objection.

Between January 2024-December 2024: 47 responses on the types of restrictions experienced by applicants:



**The violations of rights reported by the 47 people who filled in the form between January-December 2024.*

**People who filled in the form reported that they were subjected to multiple rights violations.*

Interim Resolution by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Violations of the Right to Conscientious Objection in Türkiye

Eighteen years after the European Court of Human Rights issued its first judgment in favor of conscientious objector Osman Murat Ülke, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe added a new one to

²⁷⁵More info about the organisation at: <https://vicdaniret.org>



its interim decisions²⁷⁶ on violations of the right to conscientious objection in Türkiye. In its resolution of 13.06.2024, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe recalled that the Turkish authorities continue to violate **Articles 3 and 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights**, together with their persistence in not recognising the right to conscientious objection. In its resolution The Committee mentioned that deeply regrets “that three of the applicants in these cases (Osman Murat Ülke, Yunus Erçep and Ersin Ölgün) are still considered draft evaders and continue to face the threat of criminal and administrative proceedings as well as numerous restrictions on their daily lives that amounts to a situation of “civil death”.

In its interim decision, the Committee recalled that all necessary measures should be taken to ensure that all negative consequences of the violations faced by the Ülke Group applicants are swiftly remedied. It stated that it should be ensured that the applicants are no longer subjected to any prosecution as draft evaders and called on the Turkish authorities to take action in this regard.

Recalling that the Turkish authorities continued to refer to “paid military service” and the shortening of the duration of compulsory military service in their briefings to the Committee of Ministers, the Committee emphasised in its interim decision that paid military service is not an alternative to compulsory military service. Stating that domestic law is insufficient to deal with situations arising from the refusal of individuals to fulfill their military service for reasons of conscience, the Committee stated that the persistence of violations experienced by conscientious objectors shows the seriousness of the situation.

With its interim decision, the Committee of Ministers called on the Turkish authorities to provide information on the issues addressed in the Ülke Group of Cases by the end of March 2025.

UN Human Rights Committee Calls on Türkiye: Recognise the Right to Conscientious Objection

*In August 2024 Conscientious Objection Watch submitted a comprehensive report for the 142nd session of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.*²⁷⁷

The UN Human Rights Committee considered Türkiye's second periodic report and reports from different civil society organisations during its meetings in October and issued its concluding observations in a document on 7 November 2024.²⁷⁸

The Committee requested Türkiye to provide information by 8 November 2027 on the implementation of the recommendations made, particularly on the independence of the judiciary, the right to a fair trial in anti-terrorism procedures and freedom of association.

Conscientious Objection Watch sent a submission to the Human Rights Committee in October. The report provided comprehensive information on the violation of the right to conscientious objection and the current situation of conscientious objectors in Türkiye.

The submission of Conscientious Objection Watch, in particular the lack of any limitations on the number of sanctions imposed on conscientious objectors, the deprivation of some civil and political rights of conscientious objectors, and the abolition of Article 318 of the Penal Code, which criminalises ‘discouraging people from performing military service’, were included in paragraphs 49 and 50 of the concluding observations published by the Committee.

²⁷⁶Ministers’ Deputies, Interim Resolution CM/ResDH(2024)126. June 13, 2024. Ülke group v. Türkiye (Application n° 39437/98), <https://search.coe.int/cm/eng?i=0900001680b05d3e>

²⁷⁷https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aVZVP_bWrIQ1t1PGG1jvLPTHKMSrWEwbK/view

²⁷⁸<http://undocs.org/CCPR/C/TUR/CO/2>



Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review

Conscientious Objection Watch also prepared a submission for the 4th cycle of the Universal Periodic Review in October 2024.²⁷⁹ The report provides comprehensive information on the situation of conscientious objectors in Türkiye and includes recommendations to the government to recognise the right to conscientious objection and to eliminate violations of the rights of conscientious objectors.

Joint Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

In October 2024 Conscientious Objection Watch, in collaboration with İnanç Özgürlüğü Girişimi and Norwegian Helsinki Committee submitted a report to the Special Rapporteur.²⁸⁰

Conscription provisions and procedures

Türkiye maintains a system of obligatory military service. According to Law No. 7179 (Law on Conscription²⁸¹), all citizens defined as male at birth are obliged to serve from the beginning of the calendar year following their 20th birthday. The duration of military service is six months for cadets and twelve months for reserve officers and officers. According to the law, military service is compulsory for all men between the ages of 20 and 41, but for men who do not fulfill their military service before the age of 41, their obligation continues until they do so.

Since 2019, with the adoption of the Law on Conscription, shortened military service through payment of a sum of money has become permanently possible under the Turkish military service system. The amount to be paid for shortened military service varies each year.²⁸² Under Article 9 of the Law on Conscription those who pay a certain sum that is determined by the Ministry of Defence and complete one month of basic military training will be considered to have completed their military service. However, shortened military service through payment is not an option in times of war and mobilisation. It is important to underline that everyone who opts for military service by payment must still perform basic military training for one month. This requires wearing of the uniform, obedience to orders, and all routine aspects of ordinary military service.

Conscientious objection provisions and procedures

Since the right to conscientious objection to military service is still not recognised, there is no mechanism to which conscientious objectors can apply, nor is there alternative civilian service. There are no mechanisms for conscientious objectors to seek recognition and there is no domestic remedy to seek redress and an end to the human rights violations they have been suffering. As the conscientious objectors are accepted as liable to compulsory military service and perceived as criminals, they are subjected to severe restrictions/deprivations of liberties and freedoms.

In the "Conscientious Objection To Military Service In Türkiye" report published by the Association for Conscientious Objection in 2021,²⁸³ a comprehensive database on administrative and legal proceedings against conscientious objectors in Türkiye was shared.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁹<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kVp8VZr9Tbp2tdOxbMyjFc6lbvkljv0J/view>

²⁸⁰https://drive.google.com/file/d/11Sycd4PW6knE8pp-YBLa1qiyj_hp0pRk/view

²⁸¹Law on Conscription [Askeralma Kanunu] No. 7179, 25 June, 2019 Official Gazette 30813, 26

June 2019. <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.7179.pdf>

²⁸²The amount is redetermined based on civil servant increases and inflation data. For 2025, the latest amount set by the Ministry of National Defence was 243,13 TL (approximately 6000 EUR). <https://www.msb.gov.tr/Askeralma/Duyuru/6ae6bc60928847aa925b61cc1b21adcd>

²⁸³https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OgQUzIHIEhMWZ_RfLfZRVnoniOo5_aIw/view

²⁸⁴Ibid. pp. 72-75.



When conscientious objectors send a letter of application to the military branches stating that they cannot fulfil their military service obligations on account of being conscientious objectors they are sent a letter stating that under current legislation exemption from military service is not an option.

In a 2021 application for information to the Ministry of National Defence requesting information on how many persons applied to the Ministry seeking exemption as conscientious objectors between 2016-2020, the Ministry's response was that "there is no legal possibility to fulfil your request."²⁸⁵

In addition, in 2020, in the lawsuit filed by conscientious objector Şendoğan Yazıcı against the rejection of his conscientious objection petition, it was revealed that the Ministry of National Defence General Directorate of Military Recruitment sent an order to all military recruitment regional directorates on June 17, 2020, stating that "Conscientious objection applications shall be answered negatively."²⁸⁶

Voluntary recruitment

There is no voluntary recruitment into military service in Türkiye.

Conscientious objection during and after military service

According to the Law on Conscription, those who have left their unit or place where they were sent for duty without permission for more than six days are determined as "deserter". If a conscripted soldier decides to declare his conscientious objection and leaves his military unit, he will be charged with "desertion". According to the Military Penal Code, the penalty for desertion is imprisonment from 1 year to 3 years.²⁸⁷

Asylum for conscientious objectors

No information is available on the treatment of asylum seekers invoking fear of persecution on grounds of conscientious objection by the Turkish state.

On the other hand, there has been a marked increase in recent years in asylum applications from conscientious objectors from Türkiye to various European countries. One of the negative developments is related to conscientious objector Onur Erden. In 2006, while doing his military service, Erden deserted from the military. After, he was arrested several times, was subjected to torture in military prisons, following which he left Türkiye. In 2020, Onur Erden went to Germany and sought asylum there, but his asylum application was rejected by the administrative court in February 2024.²⁸⁸

Apart from this negative development, another conscientious objector, who was forced to leave Türkiye due to his circumstances of "civil death", got asylum in France in February 2024 (requested to not be named due to security concerns). This is the second positive decision for a conscientious objector who applied for asylum in France due to the persecution he faced as a conscientious objector in Türkiye. Sidar Akdemir, another conscientious objector from Türkiye, got asylum from France last year.

Militarisation of the education system

In Türkiye, until 2012, "national security" lectures were taught by military officers from high school onwards. The soldiers, who sometimes came to schools in uniform, taught students on national security. However, in 2012, the national security lectures were abolished by a Council of Ministers Decree.²⁸⁹ Since

²⁸⁵ Application for information made by the author Mine Yildirim on 26 March 2021 request number 2101413343 and response sent on 30 March 2021.

²⁸⁶ <https://medyascope.tv/2020/12/08/yasa-cikmadi-milli-savunma-bakanligi-emirle-cozdu-vicdani-ret-dilekcelerine-olumsuz-cevap-verin/>

²⁸⁷ <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuatmetin/1.3.1632.pdf>

²⁸⁸ <https://de.connection-ev.org/article-4075>

²⁸⁹ <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2012/01/20120125-6.htm>



the abolition of the lectures, some of the content of the course has been included in the "citizenship" course.

Following the coup attempt in Türkiye in 2015, military high schools were closed down with the Decree Law No. 669 published on 31 July 2016.²⁹⁰ Following this decision, it was decided to establish a new university under the Ministry of National Defence under the name of National Defence University.

In Türkiye, there are currently no national security lectures or courses taught by military professionals in the compulsory education curriculum. However, during the 12 years of compulsory education, it is possible to talk about practices aimed at raising "military awareness" or preparing children and young people for the military. For example, gendarmerie command trips organised for primary school students^{291,292} or "military profession introduction events" organised by army personnel in high schools.

²⁹⁰ <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2016/07/20160731-5.htm>

²⁹¹ https://petrolilkokulu.meb.k12.tr/icerikler/il-jandarma-komutanligi-gezisi_15106145.html

²⁹² <https://gaziemir.meb.gov.tr/www/fatih-ilkokulundan-sarnic-hava-teknik-okullar-komutanligi-ziyareti/icerik/2368>

2.48. UKRAINE 

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	Yes		
Conscientious objection first recognised	1991	Alternative (Non-Military) Service Law No. 1975-XII of 12th December 1991	
Current provisions	Not recognised	Alternative service was suspended under martial law, attempts to reintroduce it were blocked by MoD.	
Duration	Military service	Civilian service (% of military)	
	Indefinite (under martial law)	None	
CO release of professional soldiers	Not permitted		
Minimum recruitment age	18 (voluntary), 25 (compulsory)	Admission to the state military HEIs from 17 (considered military service), to military lyceums from 6-7	
Population²⁹³	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	35,661,826	2.6%	185,441
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	730,000	650,000 (89.0%)	Total strength is 393.7% of cohort Conscripts are 350.5% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$ (% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	64,705m (+2.9%)	\$1,728	34.5%

²⁹³Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



Principal EBCO concerns

- There are prisoners of conscience such as Mykhailo Adamovych, Vladyslav Bezsonov, Taras Bratchenko, Tymur Chyzhov, Serhii Ivanushchenko, Andrii Khomenko, Andrii Kliuka, Vitalii Kryushenko, Serhii Nechayuk, Ihor Nosenko, Oleksandr Radashko, Serhy Semchuk, Andrii Skliar, Oleksandr Solonets, Vasyl Volosheniuk and it is urgent their immediate release, as much as the release of all conscientious objectors imprisoned in penal institutions or detained in military units, convicted or held in pre-trial detention; it is also concerning that some conscientious objectors are indicted in various crimes, where these persecutions are imposed solely for their religion or belief.
- Imposition on society of the ideology of everyone's duty to fight defensive war in the army or supporting the army with intolerance to and suppression of the pacifist dissent, that undermines pluralism of religions and beliefs and democratic civilian control. Lack of serious consideration of offers of conscientious objectors to contribute by nonviolent action and peaceful work to the resilience of democratic civil society suffering from attacks of the Russian army.
- Withdrawal during the current state of war of all recognition, and prior lack of full recognition, of the right to conscientious objection to military service, before, during, or after military service, irrespective of the beliefs on which the objection is based, or belonging to churches or other organisations. Lack of efforts to introduce legislation on alternative nonmilitary service in times of war in parliament and interdepartmental working group tasked to draft the amendments.
- Punishment of conscientious objectors continues through persecution, discrimination, or even torture and inhumane treatment, as well as hostile media campaigns. In accordance with a dictum of the Supreme Court, conscientious objection is treated as draft evasion punishable by the law.
- Forced conscription and compulsory military registration practices ("busification") continue, leading to cases of beating and deaths in military recruitment centers. Those lacking military registration are blocked from access to work, education (higher education institutions), or public services (such as consular services abroad).
- Russia imposes military registration and conscription, pushes military indoctrination of children at schools, propagates and pressures for enlistment at the illegally occupied territories of Ukraine contrary to Article 51 of the IV Geneva Convention. Among 183 Jehovah's Witnesses detained by Russia for their beliefs, including conscientious objection, 14 of the prisoners of conscience are detained in Crimea.²⁹⁴
- Complaints of unconstitutionality of legislation allowing punishment for conscientious objection, discriminating objectors and denying in alternative service in wartime are stalled at the Constitutional Court, which is currently not able to decide cases on the merits due to delays in appointing new judges.
- Ukrainian refugee males of conscription age are facing attempts to force them to return to Ukraine or be deported by denial in consular services for not updated military registration and absence of Reserve+ military app on their smartphones, without exceptions for conscientious objectors. That might require European states to recognize expired Ukrainian passports.

Developments

- Despite harsh mobilisation measures introduced in 2024, tens of thousands managed to cross the border illegally, and more than 6 millions did not undergo mandatory military registration.
- As covered in the International Section, above the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights reported imprisonments, intimidation and torture of conscientious objectors.²⁹⁵ Under

²⁹⁴ <https://jw-russia.org/en/prisoners.html> ; <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/global/jehovahs-witnesses-in-prison-crimea/>



the Special Procedures, a request of information was made on the persecution of **Vitalii Alekseienco**, of **Andrii Vyshnevetskyi** for refusing to perform military service and **Yurii Sheliazhenko** for advocating for the right to conscientious objection, and was met with a contradictory reply.²⁹⁶

- War Resisters' International in cooperation with Connection e.V. and the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement reported compulsion for military registration and service in the Russian army at occupied territories of Ukraine, arbitrary detentions, tortures, and executions, militarisation of minors contrary to Article 51 of the IV Geneva Convention.
- New mobilisation laws adopted on 11 April and 9 May 2024 enforce mandatory registration for military recruitment of all males 18 to 60 years of age, under penalty of sanctions, fines, and civil rights restrictions; in addition, the ban on leave the country continues for males in this age group; The public space is dominated with a stigma against those refusing to engage in war, and shame on "draft evaders"; conscientious objectors continue to be labelled as "evaders" in the media; protests against human rights violations related to mobilisation are regularly portrayed as "Russian propaganda". People who criticise such violations are in many cases accused of dissemination of national security sensitive information about mobilisation practices and locations of forceful street recruitment, charged under Article 114-1 of the Criminal Code (interference with legal activities of Armed Forces of Ukraine), punishable with a prison term from 5 to 8 years; protests against abuses by military recruiters, such as happened in June-August 2024 in Odessa, Kovel and Vorokhta, ended with criminal charges against protesters, administrative arrests, and fines;
- EBCO Board member **Yurii Sheliazhenko** - held under house arrest in August 2023 - February 2024 - continues to live under threat of imprisonment, while trial continues where he is falsely accused in "justification of Russian aggression" in a public statement in September 2022 where the invasion was condemned with a call to nonviolent resistance. Amnesty International reports that such charges are extensively used to disproportionately restrict freedom of expression. His communications related to human rights defending consultations to conscientious objectors were surveilled. His computer and smartphone, seized without any legal reasons during a search in his house, were not returned contrary to a court order, and another dubious order was obtained to circumvent the first one. Regarding these events and house arrest, he complained to the European Court of Human Rights. It is also of concern the reporting that there is an attempt to prohibit and dissolve the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, and that the national media regulator refused to register **Sheliazhenko's** website "Free Civilians. Herald of Peace and Conscientious Objection".²⁹⁷
- While according to official statistics in 2023 one of ten sentenced for draft evasion received a real prison sentence and the rest suspended sentences, in 2024 the number of prison sentences increased twice and proportion changed to one of three. 618 were sentenced for draft evasion, 737 for disobedience, 63 for draft evasion by self-harm (the number increased twice from previous year), 928 for absence without leave, 171 for desertion; it is unknown what proportion of sentences for draft evasion and other crimes related to refusal of military service might be related to conscientious objectors.²⁹⁸
- New legislation was adopted regarding lowering the mobilisation age from 27 to 25 years and harsh enforcement of military registration and conscription, including fines and other sanctions, giving the military right to check IDs and requirement to all men in age 18-60 to bear military IDs, etc.

²⁹⁵<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/41st-periodic-report-human-rights-situation-ukraine-1-september-30>

²⁹⁶<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/56/30>

²⁹⁷<https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/57/NGO/308>

²⁹⁸<https://youtu.be/2sFoVBHLuBA>



According to the Ukrainian Parliament Human Rights Commissioner's report of 2024, "a number of the Commissioner's recommendations were not taken into account when adopting the Bill 10449, which led to the assignment of inappropriate functions to military units and resulted in significant violations of the rights of Ukrainian citizens during mobilisation." The report also mentions 1,560 complaints on human rights violations during the mobilisation, deaths and beating at military recruitment centers, refusals of access to legal aid and human rights monitoring, non-implementation of recommendations to change legislation to ensure alternative non-military service.²⁹⁹ However, in a letter to EBCO the Secretariat of the Commissioner claimed that the Constitution of Ukraine must be changed, and that it could not be changed in wartime, to ensure the right to conscientious objection, and emphasized that advocacy of such a right is a threat to national security.

- Military registration for the purposes of conscription in young age was eased with the abolition of the requirement to undergo military medical commission in age 16-25 for military registration.
- The new law requires of Ukrainians abroad up-to-date military registration of males in age 18-60 for access to consular services, that in effect prevents reissuance of expired passports and forces the people to return to Ukraine or live abroad illegally and risk deportation. Activists filed a petition with the European Parliament asking for recognition of expired passports.³⁰⁰
- For military registration, mandatory installation of military app Reserve+ on smartphones is required; in Ukraine, it is checked during raids and in encounters with officials, and abroad it is required for consular services. Procedure for maintaining the Unified State Register of Conscripts, Military Enlisted Persons and Reservists "Oberig" (including regulations on functions of the Reserve+ app as "electronic cabinet"), adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on 10 May 2024, is classified and not published³⁰¹, raising concerns regarding safety of personal data, privacy and human rights.
- "Term-limited military service" was replaced with mandatory "basic military" "service" (for all males in age 18-24) and "training" (for students) in the law on military duty. The law on alternative service, which currently allows civilian service only in place of the "term-limited" category of service, was not similarly amended. This formalism could mean the effective abolition of alternative service even after martial law ends.
- The basic military training became mandatory for all students, and refusal to undergo it could result in expulsion.
- By the letter of the Ministry of Education, the higher education institutions were instructed to enroll students only if they renewed military registration.
- Students could be conscripted, if they are expelled or don't prolong deferral, that might happen due to problems with arbitrariness in procedure.
- Young people in age 18-24 are offered incentives to enlist voluntarily in contract military service.
- The Ukrainian government requested assistance from European states in returning Ukrainian male refugees for conscription at home. The Ministry of National Unity was established, it works on opening the Unity Hubs in European countries to convince the refugees to return. Ukraine asked Germany to

²⁹⁹<https://www.civilni.media/259/> ; https://www.ombudsman.gov.ua/storage/app/media/uploaded-files/%D0%A9%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%96%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%B0_%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%96%D0%B4%D1%8C_%D0%A3%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%B6%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE_%D1%83_2024_%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%86%D1%96.pdf

³⁰⁰<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/petition/content/1453%252F2024/html/To%2Bensure%2Bunhindered%2Baccess%2Bto%2Bidentification%2Bdocuments%2Bissuance%2528and%2Bvalidity%2Brenewal%2529%2Bfor%2Bcitizens%2Bof%2BUkraine%2Bresiding%2Bin%2BEU>

³⁰¹<https://reserveplus.mod.gov.ua/>



extradite a conscientious objector, and in this context a questionable judgment was made that, contrary to international human rights standards, claims the possibility of limiting the right to conscientious objection in wartime.³⁰²

- In response to EBCO, the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine admitted that conscientious objection is not allowed under martial law and conscientious objectors are persecuted. The Ministry also informed that the interdepartmental working group, which lacks civil society representatives, is developing a draft law to protect the constitutional right to alternative nonmilitary service in wartime. The group first met at the end of 2024, but hasn't made its activities public nor proposed any policy changes yet.
- In December 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine amended regulations of mobilisation to allow clergy members to be exempt from military service³⁰³ in an attempt to placate the churches. This was however based upon classifying clergy as "essential workers"; in no circumstances were the exemptions to be justified by reference to the perceived incompatibility with their vocation of military service³⁰⁴. The amendments did not cause any actual exemptions because the list of eligible religious organisations is not compiled yet³⁰⁵. In discussion groups of conscientious objectors, concerns were raised that this policy might incentivise clergy to refrain from advocacy of full protection of the right of regular believers to conscientious objection. They are also concerned that the Government of Ukraine does not provide any significant support to efforts aimed at nonviolent resistance to Russian aggression and attempts to subordinate it to the army, which undermines the ethical integrity and safety of nonviolent resistance.³⁰⁶
- The Constitutional Court of Ukraine found admissible a complaint of conscientious objector to military service, **Vitalii Alekseienko**, and will check alleged unconstitutionality of jailing for three to five years for draft evasion during mobilisation those citizens whose religion or beliefs are incompatible with the performance of military duty (conscientious objectors), and will check also alleged unconstitutionality of requirements for believers to prove in court their innocence in evading the draft, the absence of an alternative non-military service during the war (Alekseienko specifically insist on his right to contribute, legally equal to conscripts, without joining or supporting the army, in a nonviolent Christian way to help Ukraine resist Russian aggression) and its inaccessibility to persons who do not belong to privileged religious organisations. However, the Constitutional Court is dysfunctional and lacks judges to consider the case on the merits.³⁰⁷ Meanwhile, despite that the appellate court in 2024 and the Supreme Court in 2025 refused to jail **Alekseienko** again, as the prosecutor requested, and upheld his suspended sentence, in a new disturbing judgment the Supreme Court upheld prison sentence for Jehovah's Witness **Serhii Ivanushchenko**, opining that everyone should fight the war.³⁰⁸

In June, the Court of Cassation rejected the final appeal by Seventh-Day Adventist **Dmytro Zelinsky**, at the time the only imprisoned conscientious objector, against his conviction and imprisonment under Article 336 of the Criminal Code ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). Deputy General Prosecutor Ihor Mustetsa subsequently sent a letter interpreting the verdict to the heads of all Regional Prosecutor's Offices; it stated "no religious beliefs can be the basis for a citizen of Ukraine, recognised as fit for military

³⁰² <https://en.connection-ev.org/article-4391>

³⁰³ <https://united24media.com/latest-news/ukraine-allows-clergy-to-be-exempted-from-conscription-in-ukraine-4750>

³⁰⁴ Vovk, D., Forum 18, "Ukraine: how should government deal with conscientious objectors in wartime?", 29 April 2025. https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2974

³⁰⁵ <https://cne.news/article/4630-military-deferrals-for-clergy-in-ukraine-reality-or-illusion>

³⁰⁶ <https://dailyquaker.com/2025/05/ukrainian-quakers-react-to-the-war/>; <https://friends.org.ua/1018>

³⁰⁷ <https://freedomofbelief.net/articles/constitutional-court-of-ukraine-will-hear-conscientious-objectors-case>

³⁰⁸ <https://www.civilni.media/293/>



service, to evade mobilisation in order to fulfil his constitutional duty to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state from military aggression by a foreign country".³⁰⁹

It appears that, following this, systematic attempts were made to recruit into the military members of the minority religious denominations who had in peacetime qualified for alternative civilian service. The number of refusals prosecuted under Article 336, which stipulates a penalty of imprisonment for a period between three and five years, consequently also increased, dwarfed however by the numbers of potential recruits who were being pursued for attempted evasion of mobilisation on grounds other than of conscience.

As detailed below, at least **5 conscientious objectors were or are serving three year prison sentences under Article 336 ("draft evasion"), and at least 4 under article 402 ("disobedience") of Criminal Code of Ukraine**, in known to us and internationally publicized cases (actual number is higher and unknown; total numbers of real prison sentences under these articles in reported period were **179** and **45** respectively), similar sentences had been pronounced but not yet executed in at least twelve further cases, at least three of them confirmed on appeal, a minimum of **182** cases were ongoing in the courts and **582** further criminal investigations of Jehovah's Witnesses alone had been launched. Additionally, **at least 4 Jehovah's Witnesses and at least one Seventh-day Adventist were or are jailed in pre-trial detention.**

Many objectors were also forcibly taken to military units (contrary to the applicable regulations), **effectively detained**, where their refusal to bear arms or to don uniform sometimes resulted in prosecutions for insubordination under military law, treating them as members of the armed forces. Details of tenths of these cases are also given below and represent a small part of hundreds of such cases known in local Churches.

Legal challenges

As we reported last year, an appeal made to the Supreme Court by **Andrii Vyshnevetsky**, who had been forcibly conscripted and sent to the front line where he insisted on serving in an unarmed capacity, was rejected on 23rd February 2024. An application on his behalf (No.20802/04) was lodged by the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement with the European Court of Human Rights on 12th July 2024, alleging a violation of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Among other things, it complains of "*non-recognition of human right to conscientious objection to military service, absence of access to alternative service instead of compulsory military service under martial law, and denial of the judiciary to remedy that*".

On 13th June, the Supreme Court rejected the final appeal by **Dmytro Zelinsky** against his conviction and sentencing under Article 336. Having thus exhausted domestic remedies, he too subsequently applied to the European Court of Human Rights. Meanwhile, he has launched a challenge before the Constitutional Court to the denial of the right of conscientious objection to military service under martial law. The Court began hearing the petition on 13th October; on 4th December it requested an amicus brief from the Council of Europe's Venice Commission; this was delivered in March 2025,³¹⁰ outside the period covered by this Report while the decision of the Court is still pending.

A further application to the European Court of Human Rights has been lodged by **Mykhaylo Yavorsky**, whose sentence of imprisonment had in October 2023 been reduced to a suspended sentence. He claims that his suspended sentence punished him "for his legitimate exercise of human right to conscientious objection to military service protected by Article 9 of the Convention". **Yavorsky** had also tried to challenge

³⁰⁹Corley, F., Forum 18, "Ukraine: about 300 cases against conscientious objectors", 30 October 2024 https://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2939

³¹⁰<https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?opinion=1219&year=all>



the constitutionality of his conviction before the Constitutional Court, which however on 4th September 2024 issued a final refusal to hear the case on its merits.

Cassation appeals to the Supreme Court are also pending from imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses conscientious objectors **Vitalii Kryushenko** and **Andrii Khomenko** (see below). Both are being held in a temporary detention centre in Sumy pending the hearing of these appeals, for which no dates have yet been set.

Conscription provisions and procedures, denial in recognition, penalisation of conscientious objection

According to the response of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine to EBCO's questionnaire³¹¹, the general principles of military service in Ukraine are determined by the Law of Ukraine "On Military Duty and Military Service". According to the Decrees of the President of Ukraine dated 24 February 2022 No. 64/2022 "On the introduction of martial law in Ukraine" (as amended) and dated 24 February 2022 No. 65/2022 "On general mobilisation", martial law is in effect in Ukraine and general mobilisation measures are being carried out. Duties of Ukrainian citizens during general mobilisation events are specified in Article 22 of the Law of Ukraine "On Mobilisation Preparation and Mobilisation". The minimum age for contract service is 18 years. The minimum age for conscription is 18 years. The duration of military service is determined according to the category of service, in particular: by conscription during mobilisation - until the end of the special period; according to the contract, the term is determined in accordance with the signed contract. The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, by Resolution No. 560 dated 16 May 2024, approved the Procedure for conscripting citizens into military service during mobilisation, for a special period. **Conscientious objectors are not exempted from military duty during mobilisation. Evasion from military service is punishable**, including, by criminal liability stipulated by the Criminal Code of Ukraine, in particular: Article 336 - evasion of conscription for military service during mobilisation, for a special period, for military service by conscription of reservists in a special period. Replacement of military service with alternative (non-military) service during martial law is not provided for by Ukrainian legislation; in particular, Article 23 of the Law of Ukraine "On Mobilisation Training and Mobilisation" does not provide for the religious beliefs of citizens as grounds for exemption from conscription for military service during mobilisation. Currently, the issue of amending the legislation regarding alternative service in wartime is under consideration. Taking into account the repeated appeals regarding the citizens of Ukraine who according to their religious beliefs cannot take up arms, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine mandated the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience (hereinafter - DESS) to organize a working group to work out issues related to the development of a separate legal act with the aim of bringing the Law of Ukraine "On Alternative (Non-Military) Service" into compliance with the requirements of Article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine regarding the performance of military duty by conscripts in wartime, if it conflicts with their religious beliefs. Such a working group of DESS was created, and it includes specialists from the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, the Secretariat of the Commissioner of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine for Human Rights, the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, the Ministry of Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine, the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, the State Emergency Service of Ukraine and the State Agency for Reconstruction and Development of Infrastructure of Ukraine. Consultations and development of legislative proposals regarding alternative (non-military) service during martial law, for a special period, are underway.

³¹¹Letter signed by the Head of the personnel department of the headquarters of the Ground Forces Command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Colonel Mykola Kachanenko, dated 15.02.2025.



Military registration and measures of enforcement, such as forced transportation to military recruitment centers, usually carried out by a group of soldiers forcibly taking a person to a bus ("busification")³¹², are applicable to all men in age 18-60. Despite the MoD's letter quoted above says that the minimum age for conscription is 18 years, and cases of conscription in age 18-24 in 2024 are known (including a case where the court ruled that conscription of 19 years old man was illegal³¹³), it should be noted that as a rule, after changes of legislation and internal directives issued in 2024, males in age 18-24 could be conscripted only when they agree, and, differently to older conscripts, they are allowed to choose time of mandatory basic military service; furthermore, if for older conscripts the basic service usually is prelude to mobilisation, in age 18-24 it is prohibited to conscript after mandatory basic military service without the person's consent.

All males in age 16-17 are subject to military registration for the purposes of conscription, and in age 18-60 are required to bear military registration documents that might be checked by police, border guard, military patrols or at checkpoints, as well as by agencies providing public services; the law places on employers, enterprises, educational institutions, etc., duties related to ensure total military registration. In 2024, all males of 18-60 cohort were obliged by the law to update their military registration, and 6 out of 11 millions failed to do so³¹⁴, thus became subject to fines; however, only 21 336 were fined³¹⁵. Military registration update includes actualisation of personal data and medical examination, after which those in age 25-60 who found fit and don't claim deferral might be immediately, or later, to be summoned to depart, or forcibly transported, or arbitrarily detained pending forcible transportation to military unit (usually, training center) and start compulsory military service by mobilisation. In many cases medical examination is formality or illegally not conducted. When recruiters assign conscript servicemen status, it is almost impossible to be discharged. Freedom of movement and communication at military recruitment centers and other units is limited, thus people (including conscientious objectors) could be held effectively detained and not allowed to quit at whim of officers. Complaints to commanding officers, police, and courts rarely give any effect, and it is impossible or strongly discouraged to seek legal aid. Usually, the recruiters deceive conscripts with unrealistic promises seeking their cooperation with military registration and conscription procedures; for example, conscientious objectors are usually lied to that it is possible to serve in army without bearing arms, contrary to military statutes that require to bear arms and engage in combat as commanded under threat of severe criminal punishment for disobedience.

The MoD's letter puts conscientious objection in context of the draft evasion. It is not a coincidence but a policy, currently accepted by the courts, to treat conscientious objection like draft evasion punishable by the law. Because of stigma and lack of public awareness, reported in previous EBCO annual reports, only in a small number of cases that potentially might raise issue of the right to conscientious objection to military service, this issue was raised by the defense, and even more rarely the courts mentioned or considered this seriously in judgments; only a few clear and scandalous cases are publicized and became internationally known. Reporting developments in these few cases, we must warn that, as the statistics of prosecution and courts suggests, it might be much more cases of prosecution, pretrial detention, sentencing and imprisonment for conscientious objectors; we are aware about existence of lists of names for prayers for hundreds of persecuted conscientious objectors.

³¹²"Word of the year: 'busification' as a symbol of 2024", Humanitarian Media Hub, <https://hnh.news/en/8835/word-of-the-year-busification-as-a-symbol-of-2024/> ; Thomas d'Istria, "Ukraine is employing increasingly controversial methods for mobilisation," Le Monde, 3 October 2024, <https://archive.ph/xf3RK>

³¹³<https://demobilizaciya.novyny.live/na-bukovini-mobilizovali-19-richnogo-khloptsia-rishennia-sudu-256464.html>

³¹⁴<https://ukranews.com/en/news/1020834-in-ukraine-at-least-6-million-men-subject-to-fines-for-not-updating-their-data-mp-osadchuk>

³¹⁵<https://opendatabot.ua/analytics/tck-fines-11-2024>



Regulations on compulsory military service, denial in alternative service under martial law, and related constitutional rights

Legislation	Description
Constitution of Ukraine	Article 9 says that treaties of Ukraine are part of national legislation of Ukraine; it allows conscientious objectors to invoke Art. 4, 18 of ICCPR and Art. 9, 15 of ECHR. Article 24 envisages equality before the law, in particular, on the grounds of religion or belief; it could not be limited in any circumstances, according to Article 64. Article 35 envisages freedom of worldview and religion, replacement of military duty with alternative non-military service when compliance with such contradicts religious beliefs of a citizen. Article 65 envisages a citizen's duty to defend Fatherland.
Law of Ukraine "On Military Duty and Military Service"	The law defines military duty (Article 1) setting exemptions for women and saying that it could be replaced with alternative service according to Constitution of Ukraine and Law of Ukraine "On Alternative (Non-Military) Service"; requires military patriotic upbringing of citizens (Article 8) and initial military training as a part of mandatory basic education (Article 9); regulates military registration for the purposes of conscription, mandatory basic military service of conscripts and basic military training of students, conscription during mobilisation, voluntary service by a contract, deferrals, exemptions, eligible age, term of service, dismissal, service in reserve, demobilisation, retirement (Articles 14-39). The law allows women, except for medics and pharmacists, to decide whether to agree to be registered, and allows men in age 18-24 to decide whether to agree to be conscripted and in what year before reaching 25 to undergo mandatory basic military service.
Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers No 560 of 16.05.2024	The decree sets procedure of conscription in time of mobilisation, including summoning people for military registration, detention and compulsory transportation to military recruitment centers, etc.
Law of Ukraine "On Alternative (Non-Military) Service"	The law in Article 1 allows to limit the right to alternative service in time of national emergency, including war, and defines alternative service in terms that after changes of law on military duty in 2024 became obsolete, effectively allowing no alternative service at all. Article 2 discriminates in access to alternative service by membership in particular religious organisations. Constitutionality of the provisions is contested by complaints of Zelinsky and Alexeienko pending before the Constitutional Court of Ukraine.
Law of Ukraine "On Preparation for Mobilisation and Mobilisation"	The law envisages emergency powers of the military and other governmental bodies, including enforcement of conscription during mobilisation. In Article 22 it prescribes duties of citizens, in Article 23 deferrals from conscription are described.



Legislation	Description
Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law"	The law envisages that limitations of human rights under martial law must be exhaustively listed in the presidential decree and that the UN Secretary General must be informed about derogations from the ICCPR. Article 20 says that rights listed in Article 64 (2) of the Constitution of Ukraine shall not be limited. With new amendments, the article requires that all males in age 18-60 must bear with them military ID and provide it for checking.
President's Decree № 64/2022 "On the imposition of martial law in Ukraine"	The decree declares martial law from 5.30am 24 February 2022 and limits rights of human and citizen, prescribed by Articles 30-34, 38, 39, 41-44, 53 of the Constitution of Ukraine. It was approved by the law and prolonged during all periods of the reporting according to subsequent decrees and laws.
President's Decree № 69/2022 "On general mobilisation"	The decree declares general mobilisation, including conscription. No provisions for conscientious objectors are envisioned.

Legislation related to persecution of conscientious objectors

Legislation	Description
Criminal Code of Ukraine	Mostly, conscientious objectors are punished for refusal to be conscripted under Articles 336 (evasion of conscription during mobilisation is punishable from 3 to 5 years of incarceration; constitutionality of this provision in aspect of penalizing conscientious objection is contested by complaint of Alexeienko pending before the Constitutional Court of Ukraine), 337 (evasion of military registration or gatherings, punishable by fine up to 250 Euro or correctional labor up to 2 years), 402 (disobedience, punishable by 5-10 years of prison), 407 (unauthorised absence at military unit, punishable by 5-10 years of prison), 408 (desertion, punishable by 5-12 years of prison), 409 (evasion of military service by self-harm or alike, punishable by 5-10 years of prison).
Code of Ukraine on Administrative Offences	Mostly, conscientious objectors are punished for refusal to undergo military registration under Article 210 (violation of rules of military registration) and Article 210-1 (violation of defence and mobilisation legislation), both punishable by a fine in sum of 360-540 Euro, that is a significant sum unbearable for many in Ukraine. Those who are trying to escape Ukraine could be punished under Article 204-1 (illegal crossing or attempt to cross the state border, punishable by a fine of 80-200 Euro or administrative arrest up to 15 days).
Governmental decree No 1487 of 30.12.2022	The decree requires a check of military registration documents for employment, education, etc. Non-compliance of individuals and institutions is punishable by administrative and criminal penalties.


Number of persons, sentenced by courts for crimes related to evasion of military service in Ukraine³¹⁶

Art. of Criminal Code of Ukraine / Year	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
332 (illegal smuggling of people across state border of Ukraine)	247	191	120	60	48	54	65	68	61	69	102	95	73
336 (evasion of conscription during mobilisation) – total number (incl. suspended sentences) above, <i>number of incarceration sentences below in italic</i>	618 <i>179</i>	930 <i>86</i>	186 <i>14</i>	2 <i>0</i>	1 <i>0</i>	11 <i>0</i>	13 <i>1</i>	45 <i>1</i>	220 <i>10</i>	935 <i>49</i>	139 <i>7</i>	0 <i>0</i>	0 <i>0</i>
337 (evasion of military registration or gatherings)	291	28	12	34	73	156	110	21	3	2	0	0	0
402 (disobedience)	737	689	155	9									
407 (unauthorised absence at military unit)	928	1577	1036	1407	1506	2189	2267	2128	1937	1545	153	22	29
408 (desertion)	171	113	154	220	152	239	224	381	307	171	29	2	1
409 (evasion of military service by self-harm or alike)	63	32	19	8	8	3	3	6	25	92	23	11	11

³¹⁶According to the court statistics published by the State Court Administration of Ukraine, https://court.gov.ua/inshe/sudova_statystyka/



Monthly cumulative number of criminal investigations of crimes of types, that might be alleged for penalisation of conscientious objection³¹⁷

Article of Criminal Code / Month of 2024	336	337	402	407	408	409
January	459	35	197	2159	1289	25
February	845	87	375	4697	3364	39
March	1161	138	505	7269	5507	61
April	1477	191	667	10584	7306	79
May	1875	252	866	15195	9623	100
June	2271	258	990	19607	11272	134
July	2736	310	1174	24566	13273	160
August	3218	348	1293	29148	15499	192
September	3458	382	1402	34329	18126	220
October	3805	440	1541	41950	19922	230
November	4094	480	1699	50729	21127	245
December	4147	476	1849	66240	23209	256

Prosecutions of conscientious objectors under Article 336

The table below shows the information we have been able to gather from lists published at various times,³¹⁸ of criminal cases launched against conscientious objectors under Article 336 since the Russian invasion. Proceedings often involved multiple court appearances; we have quoted, to the best of our knowledge, only the first occasion on which each case came to court. Most first instance verdicts were appealed by the defence, the prosecution, or sometimes both; even after taking effect with the rejection a final appeal sentences of imprisonment were not always implemented immediately, sometimes perhaps because of prison overcrowding. It is important to note that some cases were not included to the table because of incomplete or contradictory information about defendant's religion or beliefs, or, to our knowledge, too partial, vague or uncertain character of declared objection, where defendants just stated that they refuse to kill (or, in one case of a convicted man born in Russia, refuse to kill his own people) without references to

³¹⁷According to statistics of the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine on registered criminal offenses and the results of their pre-trial investigation, <https://gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/pro-zareyestrovani-kriminalni-pravoporushennya-ta-rezultati-yih-dosudovogo-rozsliduvannya-2>

³¹⁸The sources used from 2024 and the first part of 2025 are:

Corley, F., Forum 18, "Ukraine: two new conscientious objector jail terms", 25 April 2024. https://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2906

Corley, F., Forum 18, "Ukraine: about 300 cases against conscientious objectors", 30 October 2024. https://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2939

Corley, F., Forum 18, "Ukraine: conscientious objectors prosecuted, jailed as "disobedient" soldiers", 10 March 2025. https://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2964

Vovk, D., Forum 18, "Ukraine: how should government deal with conscientious objectors in wartime?", 29 April 2025.

Human Rights Without Frontiers, "Thousands of conscientious objectors under threat of 3-year prison terms", 2 December 2024.

Jehovah's Witnesses "Ukraine sentences Vitalii Kruyshenko to three years in prison for conscientious objection: first Witness convicted since start of war in 2022." 6 February 2025. <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/ukraine/Ukraine-Sentences-Vitalii-Kryushenko-to-Three-Years-in-Prison-for-Conscientious-Objection/>

Jehovah's Witnesses "Three imprisoned for conscientious objection during February and March 2025", 23 April 2024. <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/ukraine/Three-Imprisoned-for-Conscientious-Objection-During-February-and-March-2025-in-Ukraine/>

Jehovah's Witnesses "A list of imprisoned JW in Ukraine", 3 May 2025

Unified State Register of Court Decisions. <https://reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/>



religious or philosophical commitments, perhaps not demonstrating enough seriousness of their beliefs and not asking for alternative nonmilitary service. Media reporting and judgments might be distorted by overlooking human rights concerns, and objectors might not be aware fully about their rights, thus difficulties in finding and researching all relevant cases.

The table illustrates the rapid and accelerating deterioration in the situation in the course of 2024, which went almost unnoticed at the time. Until March the “normal” verdict had been the imposition of a suspended sentence, with a few outright acquittals. The two sentences of imprisonment handed down by the first instance courts had been changed on appeal to suspended sentences. Only **Dmytro Zelinsky**, whose acquittal had been overturned on appeal, was imprisoned.

Subsequently, all verdicts announced with just two exceptions have been of three year sentences of imprisonment. (One suspended sentence was handed down in May, and news has come in of an acquittal in March 2024.) Three years is the minimum sentence stipulated under the Article. The first Jehovah’s Witness to be imprisoned went to jail in January 2025; previously the courts, recognising their obvious sincerity, had taken pains to impose lesser penalties on Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Without a dramatic change in sentencing policy, it seems that by the end of 2025 much more than 17 conscientious objectors currently under sentence of imprisonment will be in jail; meanwhile there is no sign that the wave of investigations has yet peaked; with over 100,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses alone in Ukraine, and 500,000 members of all pacifist churches, as indicated below, it could have a long way to go, and be mirrored months later by similar waves of convictions and imprisonments.

This table reflects only rare internationally publicized cases of persecuted conscientious objectors, the real number is much higher.

Year	Month	First trials	Successful appeals		Acquittals/ Suspended sentences	Sentences of imprisonment	COs in prison
			Defence	Prosecution			
					(cumulative totals)		
2022	May	1			1		
	June	1			2		
	July	0			2		
	August	2			4		
	September	2			4	1	
	October	1			4	1	
	November	0			4	1	
	December	0			5	1	
2023	January	1			5	1	
	February	1			6	1	1
	March	1			7	1	1
	April	3			7	2	1
	May	1	1	1	7	1	0
	June	2			7	1	0
	July	1			7	1	0
	August	0		1	7	2	0
	September	1			8	2	0
	October	2	1		11	1	0
	November	0			11	1	1
	December	1			12	1	1
2024	January	1			13	1	1



Year	Month	First trials	Successful appeals		Acquittals/ Suspended sentences	Sentences of imprisonment	COs in prison
			Defence	Prosecution			
					(cumulative totals)		
	February	0			13	1	1
	March	2			13	3	1
	April	0			13	3	1
	May	3			14	4	1
	June	3			14	4	1
	July	4			14	7	1
	August	1			14	8	1
	September	2			14	10	1
	October	9			14	11	1
	November	35			14	13	1
	December	over 182			14	15	1
2025	January				14	16	2
	February				14	16	4
	March				15	17	5

In so far as we have a date when proceedings were first initiated, it seems also that cases are coming to court more rapidly, as the following table shows. (Our information may not be completely accurate; we certainly do not have dates of all court hearings.) The most rapid of which we have a record was the case of one of the two Jehovah's Witnesses identified as **Yurii S.**, against whom police instituted criminal proceedings on 10th October 2024, and who appeared for the first time in Zhmerynka District Court, Vinnitsa Province, on 5th November. Earlier, **Serhii Ivanushchenko** had been convicted by Bilopia Court, Sumy Province, on 28th March, just over a month after proceedings had been initiated against him.

Months since proceedings initiated	First coming to court		
	January–September 2024	October 2024	November 2024
1	1	2	4
2	1	2	5
3		1	14
4	1		2
5	2		3
6	2		1
7	1		1
8		2	
9			1
10			
11			
12			
13			1
TOTAL	8	8	32

By contrast two Jehovah's Witnesses cases resulting from investigations initiated in April 2023, and which had first come to court in the middle of that year (those of **Viktor M.** and **Vitalii P.**) ultimately resulted in convictions (before any appeal) in September and November 2024, respectively, and the case of a further Jehovah's Witness, **Ibrahim S.**, against whom proceedings had been initiated on 25th July 2023, and which came before Boryspil Court in Kyiv on 14th May. 2024 has, as far as we know, yet to result in a verdict. Likewise, the latest news of the case 53-year-old Baptist **Konstantyn Chovgan**, who refused a call-up order



on 17th November 2023, is that a further hearing was scheduled for 18th March 2024. And in the case of Jehovah's Witness **Viktor S.**, on 4th March 2022 one of the first conscientious objectors to be subjected to criminal proceedings after the Russian invasion, Zakarpattia Court of Appeal on 20th May 2024 overturned the original acquittal handed down by Tiachiv District Court on 20th March 2023, and ordered a retrial, which, to the best of our knowledge, is still pending. Another prosecution appeal against a verdict of Tiachiv District Court, the (four year) suspended sentence handed down on 24th October 2023 to **Volodymyr Ukhal**, the only member of the Orthodox Church to have been hitherto prosecuted as a conscientious objector, is also still ongoing; the latest news was that a hearing was scheduled for 7th April 2025.

We do not have yet have details of all cases which have come to court since November; in early March, Forum 18 reported that no fewer than 171 cases were currently in the courts against Jehovah's Witnesses, and named nine Baptists (one of whom has subsequently been acquitted), two Adventists, and one Pentecostalist against whom cases were also ongoing.

The oblasts (provinces) in which trials have taken place are shown in the table below, listed roughly from West to East.

Oblast	Population (millions)	Cases and verdicts			Cases per million	A & S%	X%
		A-acquittal / S-suspension X-imprisonment					
		2022/3	2024 Jan-Oct	2024 Nov-Dec			
Zakarpattia	1.4	6 AASS			4.3	67	0
Lviv	2.5		1 X	4	2.0	0	20
Ivano-Frankivsk	1.4	4 SSXX			2.9	50	50
Volyn	1.0		1	3 X	4.0	0	25
Ternopil	1.0	3 XX			3.0	0	67
Rivne	1.1			3	2.7	0	0
Khmelnyskyi	1.2			2	1.7	0	0
Odesa	2.4		2 S	4 X	2.5	17	17
Vinnytsia	1.5	1 S		1	1.3	50	0
Zhytomyr	1.2			5 X	4.1	0	20
Kyiv	4.8	2 A	2 X	4	1.7	12.5	12.5
Chernihiv	1.0			1	1.0	0	0
Cherkasy	1.2		1	10	9.1	0	0
Kirovohrad	0.9	1 S			1.1	100	0
Mykolaiv	1.1	1 S			0.9	100	0
Sumy	1.0		3 XXX		3.0	0	100
Poltava	1.4	1 S			0.7	100	0
Dnipropetrovsk	3.1		1	3	1.3	0	0
Kherson	1.0				—	0	0
Zaporizhzhia	1.6		1 X		0.6	0	100
Kharkiv	2.6	1	4		1.9	0	0
Donetsk	4.1		1	2 X	0.7	0	33
TOTAL		20	17	42			

It was noted that the earliest cases were all in the extreme West of the country, although no reason was suggested for this. There has subsequently continued to be a considerable variation between oblasts in the number of cases as compared with population, and also in the verdicts handed down. Apart from the tendency already noted for the earlier cases to lead to acquittals or suspended sentences. In general, the numbers are so far too small, and liable to change too rapidly, to support any conclusions except to note



that the District Court in Tiachiv, Zakarpattia, stands out as having handed down, in early cases under different judges, two acquittals and one suspended sentence.

The number of cases in Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson (where at least one trial of a Baptist is now ongoing), should not be expected to reflect total population, as much of these oblasts, and of course all of Luhansk and Crimea, are currently under Russian occupation.

The individual cases verdicts which have been reported since January 2024 are:

1. Jehovah's Witness Minister **Serhii T.**, against whom criminal proceedings had been instituted on 14th June 2023, acquitted by Boryspil Court, Kyiv Region, on 12th January. The prosecution lodged an appeal; a hearing in Kyiv Regional Appeal Court is currently scheduled for 3rd June 2025.³¹⁹
2. Protestant **Serhy Stadnitsky** (then aged 33) did not report for military service as ordered on 17th August 2023. He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment by Chernovohrad (Sheptytskyi) Town Court on 26th March. The verdict and sentence were confirmed on 24th June by Lviv Appeal Court, in a judgement stating "sentence to be executed". He applied for leave to appeal to the Court of Cassation, but the application (case no. 459/11/24) was rejected on 4th October, the Court "finding no evidence of mitigating circumstances which might under Article 69 or 75 of the Criminal Code justify a more lenient sentence."^{320,321}
3. **Serhii Ivanushchenko**, against whom proceedings had been instituted on 22nd February 2024, was tried as case no. 573/406/24 in Bilopilia Court on 28th March and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. **Ivanushchenko** had previously served in the military as a medical instructor, but he had subsequently become unable (for reasons not connected with his faith) to stand the sight of blood. He had been baptised as a Jehovah's Witness in November 2023, which the Court considered suspiciously recent, but the defence insisted had not been in order to avoid military service. The verdict and sentence were confirmed on 18th November by Sumy Appeals Court, to take immediate effect.
4. On 2nd May, the case of Jehovah's Witness **Oleksandr T.**, against whom proceedings had been instituted on 5th January, came before Ivanitsky Court. The latest news we have is that a further hearing was set for 21st October.³²²
5. A case from Dobroslav Village which came before the Kominternivskyi District Court of Odesa on 8th May, but is even less well-documented than the others, resulted in a three years' sentence suspended for one year's probation on condition that the unnamed defendant does not commit a further "crime" within that period. It is believed that the verdict was influenced by humanitarian considerations; the defendant, not himself a baptised Jehovah's Witness, but brought up in a Jehovah's Witness family, was a displaced person. It has not yet been reported whether a prosecution appeal has been lodged against the sentence.³²³
6. Jehovah's Witness **Vitalii P.**, from Chuhuiv, Kharkiv Region, against whom proceedings had been initiated on 5th April 2023, and who had first come before a court in the Summer of 2023 appeared in Dzerzhynsk District Court on 26th June and 25th September, on the latter date being sentenced to three years' imprisonment. He lodged an appeal, which was still pending at the latest report.³²⁴

³¹⁹Forum 18, 30th October 2024, 10th March 2025

³²⁰Forum 18, 25th April and 30th October 2024

³²¹Unified State Register of Court Decisions. <https://reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/120622924>

³²²Forum 18, 25th April and 30th October 2024.

³²³Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2nd December 2024

³²⁴Forum 18, 25th April and 30th October 2024



7. Jehovah's Witness, **Viktor M.**, against whom proceedings had been initiated on 13th April 2023, appeared in Court in Chortkiv on 27th June and 7th November, being sentenced on the latter occasion to the Court three years imprisonment. We have no news of any appeal.³²⁵
8. On 8th July, Jehovah's Witness **Vitalii Kruyshenko**, against whom proceedings had been initiated on 9th February, and who had been summoned in April to perform military service was sentenced to three years' imprisonment by Bilopilja Court. After two postponements his appeal was rejected on 13th January 2025. The sentence was implemented on 28th January, two weeks before the imprisonment of **Serhii Ivanuschenko**, and a few days before that of **Andrii Khomenko**. **Kruyshenko** thus became the first Jehovah's Witness to be imprisoned; He is currently serving his sentence in Sumy Detention Centre.^{326,327}
9. On 28th July, in case no. 583/3259/24 Okthyrka District Court in Sumy Region sentenced **Andrii Khomenko**, a Jehovah's Witness elder, to three years' imprisonment. As a student, before converting, the defendant had followed a military subordinate course, making him liable to priority mobilisation. The verdict and sentence were confirmed on 23rd December by Sumy Appeal Court.
10. On 30th July, in case no. 743/883/24, an unnamed defendant who was on probation for readmission to membership of the Jehovah's Witness, having been excommunicated in 2012 for alcohol abuse, was sentenced by Ripky District Court, Chernihiv, to three years' imprisonment. The defendant had been summoned to the mobilisation office on 24th April and sent for medical examination on 15th May, but having applied for alternative service was sent to repair railway tracks in a military unit, which he did not consider service of a civilian nature. The verdict and sentence were confirmed on 22nd January 2025 by Chernihiv Appeal Court, but we have had no word that it has yet been implemented.^{328,329}
11. On 27th June Jehovah's Witness **Anton N.**, against whom proceedings had been initiated on 13th December appeared in Court in Poltava. The latest news we have is that a further hearing was set for 16th December.³³⁰
12. On 2nd August, in case no. 367/2323/23, Irpin City Court, Kyiv Region sentenced **Oleksii B.**, an "unbaptised publisher" of the Jehovah's Witness, against whom proceedings had been initiated on 14th February 2023, to three years' imprisonment. The defendant had initially not responded to the recruitment summons because of the illness of his children. An appeal was filed on 30th August by attorney Natalia Petrovna. After repeated postponements, the hearing in Kyiv City Court of Appeal is currently scheduled for 19th June 2025.^{331,332}
13. On 5th September, in case no. 337/3651/24, Khortytskyi District Court, Zaporizhzhia sentenced an unnamed defendant to three years' imprisonment. The defendant had been brought up as a Catholic, but had converted to the Jehovah's Witnesses more than thirty years ago; he had avoided military service as he had been studying, and subsequently as the father of four children. He had been summoned to the military recruitment office in May 2023, but his application to perform alternative service had not been considered, instead he had been sent for medical examination at the end of that month and subsequently served with call-up papers, which he refused. The verdict and sentence were

³²⁵Forum 18, 25th April and 30th October; Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2nd December 2024

³²⁶Forum 18, 30th October 2024. Email from Yurii Sheliashenko, Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, 8th January 2025; Jehovah's Witnesses 6th February 2025 and 3rd May 2025.

³²⁷Unified State Register of Court Decisions. <https://reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/120622924>

³²⁸Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2nd December 2024

³²⁹Unified State Register of Court Decisions. <https://reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/120622924>

³³⁰Forum 18, 25th April and 30th October 2024

³³¹Forum 18, 30th October; Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2nd December 2024

³³²Kyiv Court of Appeal website. <https://www.kas.gov.ua/CourtPortal.WebSite/Home/Sprava/51208014995>



confirmed on 16th December by Zaporizhzhia Court of Appeal, but we have had no word that it has yet been implemented.³³³

14. On 25th September, in case no. 636/3461/23, Dzerzhinsky District Court of Kharkiv sentenced an unnamed Jehovah's Witness to three years' imprisonment. An appeal was to be heard in Kharkiv Court of Appeal on 22nd January 2025.³³⁴
15. On 2nd October, following an initial hearing on 20th May, the Zakarpattia Court of Appeal overturned the acquittal on 24th May 2023 by Tiachiv District Court (case no. 307/1184/22) of Jehovah's Witness **Viktor S.**, a member since 2016, who had previously performed alternative civilian service, against whom proceedings had first been initiated on 4th March 2022, and ordered a new trial before a Court with a different composition.³³⁵
16. **Serhii Nechayuk** was sentenced on 10 December 2024 by Yarmolynetskyi District Court of Khmelnytskyi Region (case no. 689/2280/23) to three years' imprisonment.
17. On 31st July, Jehovah's Witness **Dmytro Sh.**, against whom proceedings had been initiated on 9th February, appeared before Synelnykove Court, Dnipropetrovsk. The latest news we have is that a further hearing was set for 6th November.³³⁶
18. 46-year-old Baptist **Oleksy Poznyak** was sentenced to three years imprisonment by Komintern District Court in Odesa on 3 December. The latest report is that his appeal is due to be heard by Odesa Appeal Court on 7 April 2025.³³⁷
19. Jehovah's Witness **Serhy Starovoit** was sentenced on 18 December 2024 by Popilnya District Court in Zhytomyr Region. The Judge also ordered **Starovoit** to pay a fee of 4534.68 Hryvnya (about 10 days' average local wage) to cover the costs of a "forensic handwriting examination". **Starovoit** has appealed to the Zhytomyr Appeal Court. The latest report was that a hearing had been scheduled for 29th April 2025.³³⁸
20. On 3rd September, proceedings opened in Lutsk City Court, Volyn Region in case no 161/15379/24 against an unnamed Jehovah's Witness. A hearing was subsequently scheduled for 10th January 2025.³³⁹
21. Pentecostalist **Valentyn Adamchuk** (aged 38) was sentenced on 29th January 2025 by Darnitsky District Court in Kyiv to three years' imprisonment, and also placed under night time curfew pending implementation. **Adamchuk** had been summoned for mobilisation on 17th May 2024 and, three days later requested alternative civilian service based on his religious beliefs, which request was rejected by the Recruitment Office. He had then addressed a request to the Parliamentary Commissioner on Human Rights, whose office responded on 12th December "that the Constitution of Ukraine and international treaties have higher legal force and precedence over domestic legislative acts, and therefore a person's right to alternative service and his exemption from military service is absolute and cannot be limited due to the lack of regulation on this issue in Ukrainian legislation during martial law". Other aspects of this case were that the Recruitment Office had confiscated documentation he needed in order to prepare an application for exemption as an essential worker, which would reportedly have

³³³Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2nd December 2024

³³⁴Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2nd December 2024

³³⁵Forum 18, 25th April; Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2nd December 2024

³³⁶Forum 18, 25th April and 30th October 2024

³³⁷Forum 18, 10th March, 2025

³³⁸Forum 18, 10th March, 2025

³³⁹Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2nd December 2024; Email from Yurii Sheliashenko, Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, 8th January 2025



been supported by his employer, the Kyiv Metro, and that a previous health exemption had been cancelled. He has appealed to Kyiv City Appeal Court,³⁴⁰ hearings were scheduled on 23 June.

22. Jehovah's Witness **Andry Popik** had been summoned for mobilisation on 17th May 2024, and had immediately submitted a request for alternative civilian service based on his religious beliefs. Although this was rejected by the Recruitment Office, officials offered him "a service not related to carrying weapons, but another, in particular, 'working with documents'," which he refused, "since his religious beliefs are incompatible with any military service"³⁴¹, that was reported to police and criminal investigation for "draft evasion" started on 30 April 2024 and ended in the guilty verdict citing the opinion of the Supreme Court that draft evasion is a serious threat to society and suspended sentences during mobilisation are not appropriate.
23. Baptist **Oleksy Belikov** has a pending case.

Hopes that the situation will not continue to deteriorate further rest primarily on whether constitutional complaints brought by **Dmytro Zelinsky** and **Vitalii Alexeienko**, and the amicus brief supplied to the Constitutional Court by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, will result in the reinstatement of civilian alternative service and reconsideration of all court verdicts and judgments based on unconstitutional legislation allowing punishment for conscientious objection to military service. European and national advocacy efforts by civil society and human rights defenders might also convince the Supreme Court and the Prosecutor General to reconsider their radical interpretation of legislation towards a proper respect to human rights obligations of Ukraine in the context of aspirations to join the EU.

In 18 conscientious objection cases to first come before the Courts during 2024 up until the end of September, involving 16 Jehovah's Witnesses, one Baptist and one Protestant, only one, the very first, had resulted in an acquittal (that might be quashed in appellate court with immediate imprisonment, like it happened before with Zelinsky), and another early one in a suspended sentence. 9 of the cases had resulted in sentences of imprisonment, all of three years; 5 of those verdicts had been confirmed on appeal by the end of the year and a 6 in January

2025. As at the end of the year, appeals were still pending in the other

3 cases and 7 cases were still ongoing. Just after the end of the period, an acquittal from the previous year had been overturned and a retrial ordered; as of the end of the year Court hearings were yet to reopen in this case, which had been initiated 22 months previously, the earliest following the Russian invasion of which we have received a report.

Forcible recruitment³⁴²

In February 2022-August 2024, the State Bureau of investigation was investigating³⁴³ no fewer than 408 (including 224 in 2024 alone³⁴⁴) allegations of criminal behaviour, ranging from corruption to torture, in recruitment offices and military medical commissions; this also include allegations of negligence in fulfillment of recruitment plans, that put pressure on recruiters and incentivise to resort to harsh methods.

³⁴⁰Email from Yurii Sheliashenko, Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, 4th March, 2025; Forum 18, 10th March 2025; <https://friends.org.ua/907>

³⁴¹Forum 18, 10th March, 2025

³⁴²Unless otherwise specified, information in this section comes from: Corley, F. "Ukraine: Recruitment offices detain, pressure and torture conscientious objectors", Forum 18, 18th October 2024. https://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2937

³⁴³"The State Bureau of Investigation is investigating over 400 criminal proceedings on abuses by officials of territorial centers of military recruitment during mobilisation," August 2024, <https://dbr.gov.ua/news/dbr-rozslidue-ponad-400-kriminalnih-provadzhen-za-faktami-zlovzhivan-posadovciv-tck-ta-sp-pid-chas-mobilizacii>

³⁴⁴Annual Report on Activities of the State Bureau of Investigation for 2024, p. 15, <https://dbr.gov.ua/assets/files/diyalnist/zvit/zvit-eng-2024.pdf>



Among the investigations of abuses finished in 2024 with indictment of military recruiters, there was cruel beating in Vinnytsia³⁴⁵, arbitrary detention in Sambir (Lviv region)³⁴⁶, torture in Ternopil³⁴⁷, and extortion of bribes at checkpoints under a threat of arbitrary detention and mobilisation in Odesa region³⁴⁸. Further investigations have subsequently been launched following a number of deaths in recruitment offices.³⁴⁹ The military recruiters persistently prevent conscripts from seeking legal aid³⁵⁰ and reportedly pressure members of the bar in sensitive cases.³⁵¹

In September 2024, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances criticised Ukraine's arbitrary detention of conscripts, including conscientious objectors, some of whom were held incommunicado, and urged full investigation of all allegations, prosecution of perpetrators and compensation of victims (see International Section, above).

Recruitment offices have their own holding centres for mobilised men, with twenty or more beds. From there men are transferred to military units, often training units, where the only accommodation available, irrespective of the season, may be in tents. Those held are generally unable to leave the base, but there are some reports of conscripts being allowed to attend church.

Declarations of conscientious objection and requests for alternative service are usually denied, contrary to human rights obligations of Ukraine, and does not prevent arbitrary detention. For example, **Vladyslav Bezsonov**, a 28 years old Seventh-day Adventist from Poltava, completed alternative service in 2016-2018 and in 2024, after being stopped and served a draft call, wrote a request for alternative nonmilitary service instead of mobilisation. Poltava Regional Military Administration on 26 April 2024 denied the request, writing in reply that consideration of such requests is suspended for the time of martial law or to the moment of adoption of regulations of alternative service under martial law. Later he was arbitrarily detained at the street, forcibly transported to recruitment center, not allowed to make a call to relatives, subjected to pressure and threats, enlisted despite reiterated conscientious objection and refusal to take up arms or wear uniform, and since then detained in a military unit.

Conscientious objectors who were forcibly recruited described ill-treatment when they requested transfer to alternative civilian service, otherwise there seems to have been no consistency between the way different cases were handled. Sometimes they have spent months in military detention. Some who persisted in their refusal have apparently finally been released, although it is not clear how many of these are still facing prosecution; some faced prosecution under Article 402 of the Criminal Code for the military crime of disobedience, having refused to don uniform or swear the military oath – such prosecutions relied on the Courts accepting the argument of the recruitment authorities that by the act of being taken to military units they had become members of the armed forces. (If the objector had felt obliged to

³⁴⁵"The court remanded in custody an official of the Vinnytsia territorial recruitment center and her accomplice who beat a man eligible for military duty", April 2025, the State Bureau of Investigations, <https://dbr.gov.ua/news/sud-vidpraviv-pidvartu-posadovicyu-vinnickogo-tck-ta-ii-spilnika-yaki-pobili-vijskovozobovyanogo>

³⁴⁶"Two officers of the Sambir military registration and enlistment office who tortured and illegally detained citizens will respond to the court", 22 February 2024, the State Bureau of Investigations, <https://dbr.gov.ua/news/pered-sudom-postanut-dvoe-pracivnikiv-starosambirskogo-vijskkomatu-yaki-katuvali-ta-nezakonno-utrimovali-gromadyan>

³⁴⁷"Based on the materials of the State Bureau of Investigation, two officers of the Ternopil territorial recruitment center who tortured men will be tried," 8 January 2024, <https://dbr.gov.ua/news/za-materialami-dbr-suditimut-dvoh-pracivnikiv-ternopilskogo-tck-yaki-katuvali-cholovikiv>

³⁴⁸"The State Bureau of Investigation exposed officers of the Odesa recruitment center who detained men at checkpoints and demanded money for a postponement of mobilisation", 25 November 2024, <https://dbr.gov.ua/news/dbr-vikrilo-pracivnikiv-odeskogo-tck-yaki-zatrimovali-cholovikiv-na-blokpostah-ta-vimagali-groshi-za-vidstrochku-vid-mobilizacii>

³⁴⁹<https://kyivindependent.com/man-dies-at-military-enlistment-office-in-dnipropetrovsk-oblast/> ; <https://kyivindependent.com/conscript-dies-at-military-recruitment-center-following-medical-examination/>

³⁵⁰<https://en.unba.org.ua/activity/news/9432-unba-comments-on-lawyers-interference-in-mobilization-processes.html>

³⁵¹<https://en.unba.org.ua/activity/news/9134-pressure-on-lawyers-is-an-indicator-of-human-rights-violations-in-ukraine-unba.html>



accept a salary in order to support his family while he was detained this was taken as proof that he had accepted this.)

Baptists **Tymur Chyzhov** and **Vasyl Volosheniuk**, a pastor baptised in 2006 and a member of a church choir baptised in 2012 in Vifaniya Evangelical Christian Baptist Church that prohibits use of weapons, with the start of Russian invasion moved from Mariupol to Budyatichi village in Volyn region and were forcibly taken to military unit by recruiters on 29 January 2024. They were promised and agreed to serve without weapons, uniform and taking oath, but after enlistment commander ordered them to take up arms; they refused, were charged in disobedience and in May detained, then released on the bail and warned that it is their duty after the release to return to military unit and continue military service. They returned home instead, attempted to leave Ukraine without success, apprehended and detained in Lviv Penitentiary Institution No 19 in June 2024 with additional charge in desertion. On 22 November 2024, Sheptytsky City Court of Lviv Region found them not guilty in desertion but guilty in disobedience and sentenced both to 5 years of prison.

Some, including **Serhii Kulinich**, a Baptist from Odesa, who had previously from 2015 to 2017 performed military service without swearing the military oath and without bearing weapons were able to obtain unarmed service, although usually still being required to swear the military oath. **Kulinich** is reportedly serving in the vehicle repair battalion of a military unit in the Poltava Region, and reports no pressures resulting from his convictions.³⁵²

There are no institutional guarantees that partial objectors allowed for a while to undergo military service without bearing arms will not be compelled to bear arms. Military statutes contain no exceptions for a duty of all military personnel to bear arms and use force as commanded, and objectors are prosecuted for refusal to take up arms despite having been initially offered unarmed service. For example, **Taras Bratchenko**, an Evangelical, who finished a Bible college in 2015 and attended the New Beginning Evangelical Church that prohibits use of weapons, was conscripted in 2023 and allowed to perform non-combat duties in a border guard as a stoker, unloading cars, and harvesting firewood. On 11 April 2024, he was detained without a bail at Cherkasy Pre-Trial Detention Center and charged in disobedience for refusal to comply with an order to take weapons and depart to the combat zone. He was sentenced to 6 years of prison³⁵³. Another example is a case of Serhy Semchuk detailed below.

As of October 2024, five conscientious objectors were being held in one military base in Khmelnytsky Region, two of them since early May, the others since about July. At least two had been threatened with being shot if they refused to sign up.

Early in the year, it had been reported that Baptist conscientious objectors **Ernest Pavlenko**, aged 31, from Kovel and **Ilya Nikolenko**, aged 26, from Sumy were on 15th April forcibly taken from the Recruitment office in Odesa Region to a military unit in Zhytomyr Region, and continued to be held there despite their requests to be transferred to alternative civilian service.³⁵⁴

Further forcible recruitments and arbitrary detentions of conscientious objectors included:

Baptist **Mattei Sapozhiknov**, of Kaminets-Podilsky, since 1st May,

Adventist **Pavlo Halagan**, aged 49, on 11th June,

Pentecostalist **Oleksy Kamienni**, 27, of Kaminets-Podilsky, on 12th June, for 24 days,

Baptist **Kirill Berestovoi**, 36, of Khmelnytskyi, since 1st July, and

³⁵²Forum 18, 30th October

³⁵³<https://reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/124448972> ; <https://reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/121883898>

³⁵⁴Forum 18, 30th April 2024, https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2906



Halagan, who had first been apprehended on 10th January, and had on that occasion submitted a written request for transfer to alternative civilian service, was taken into detention by officers of Perechin Recruitment Office on 5th June, held for six hours, then transferred at 1am to a military unit in Rivne Region. Having again declared his conscientious objection and requested transfer to alternative civilian service, he was returned to the Zakarpattia Regional Recruitment Office at Uzhhorod, where he was refused access to a lawyer. On the night of 8th June, he was taken to a military unit in Cherkasy, where he found ten other conscientious objectors – nine Jehovah's Witnesses and a Baptist. All again wrote statements asking for alternative civilian service. On the night of 9th June they were suddenly released "alone in the middle of the night after 1 am during the curfew in a different city, without personal registration documents, without money, without warning." Once back in Uzhhorod, **Halagan** filed a complaint with the District police about officials of the Zakarpattia Regional Recruitment Office. On 11th June, he was summoned to see Ihor Tschyuk, head of the Uzhhorod Recruitment Office. He describes hearing "the frantic, inhuman screams" of a man of Hungarian origin, being beaten, tortured and mutilated by officials in order to force him to sign a document. "Throughout that day", he continues, "I received psychological and moral pressure from the employees of the Uzhhorod branch of the Recruitment Office, which led me to a nervous breakdown. After this they tied me to the bed with chains and began to physically torture, punch and beat me. (...) The inflicted blows were aimed at the body and head, beating with hands, fists and feet". Officials then forced him to sign a statement, which he did "in a state of shock and emotion after the severe physical abuse, brutal torture, mutilation, dizziness, in a state of extreme physical exhaustion, inability to assess reality in order to make the right decision, inability to see clearly what is written in a dark room due to the disease of my eyes (glaucoma)", before releasing him. He subsequently submitted written complaints to the police, the military police and the prosecutor's office, but none agreed to handle them.

Berestovoi, an internally-displaced person from Pokrovsk in Donetsk Region, reported to the Recruitment Office in Khmelnytskyi on 1st July in order to update his details. He declared his conscientious objection, provided documentation of his membership of the Council of Churches Baptists, and requested transfer to alternative civilian service. Ignoring this, the recruitment office sent him that night to a military unit in Zakarpattia, where he again repeated his request without success. At 11pm, he reports, "one commander grabbed me by the neck and dragged me out of the tent, where it was completely dark. He hit me on the head, beat me around the heart. I asked him to stop, but he continued." The torture continued for about half an hour; in the morning he was returned to the unit, not having been fed all this time. He subsequently not only refused all pay, but also food from the canteen, declaring a hunger strike; medical intervention was necessary more than once. He recorded his complaint in the form of a video, following which his mobile phone was confiscated. Eventually he was threatened with prosecution under Article 402 for refusal to wear a military uniform. The Military Police in Kyiv subsequently claimed to have investigated **Berestovoi's** complaints, but found them "not proven".

Kamennoi was abducted by officials of the Kamianets-Podilsky District Recruitment Office in Khmelnytskyi Region on 12th June, and taken to a military unit, despite his request to be transferred to alternative civilian service. After 24 days of being sent from one military unit to another he was returned to the Recruitment Office, where on the afternoon of 5th July he was beaten by two named officials before being released. "They beat me with their hands and feet on the back, body, and head," said **Kamienni** in a written statement. When he passed out, cold water was poured on him to revive him, and then the torture resumed. "The beating was accompanied by bullying and abuse of me, the people who beat me insisted that I renounce my belief in God, they constantly said that belief in God is delusional". He subsequently complained to the police, the State bureau of investigation and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights, but all denied that there was any evidence. He claims to be in fear for his life; he is currently



threatened with prosecution under Article 336 of the Criminal Code. (It is not clear why in his case Article 402 is not being used, as with other forcibly detained conscientious objectors.)

Kamennoi reports that he knows at least four other local conscientious objectors – Baptists and Pentecostals – who have been threatened and tortured with beatings, one of them twice in September. One Pentecostal had been held for five weeks at the recruitment office in August and September.

An unnamed Baptist was summoned for mobilisation by Ivano-Frankivsk Recruitment Office during the Summer. Despite his insistence that on grounds of conscience he was unable to swear the military oath or to serve with weapons he was taken to a military training camp where over about ten days attempts were made to break his will, including by withholding food. He was then transferred back to the Recruitment Office, where he was held for a further two days before being released, apparently without any prosecution envisaged.

Another Pentecostal being held in a military unit in Rivne Region – who was tortured by beating when he was first detained – described conditions in the military unit as "modern slavery". "They tried to break me: they exerted and are exerting psychological pressure, they locked me in a cold pit for three days, as well as a solitary confinement cell".

Yet another report tells of soldiers forcibly dressing a conscientious objector in a military uniform when he had refused to put it on.

On 24th September, the Svyatoshinsky Recruitment Office's Military Medical Commission found 52-year-old Council of Churches Baptist **Vitaly Humenyuk**, from Kyiv, fit for medical service. When he quoted Article 35 of the Constitution, they apparently proceeded immediately to draw up documentation for a future court case, but meanwhile released him. On the same day another Baptist, **Ruslan Korkach**, aged 28 was treated similarly at the Recruitment Office in Bucha, Kyiv Region. He likewise quoted Article 35 of the Constitution; although he was threatened with being sent to a military unit in Uchal, he was released on 25th September once a document for a future prosecution had been drawn up.

Of several attempts to launch legal challenges over forced transfers to military units, the one which has apparently proceeded farthest is by a 25-year-old Jehovah's Witness who on 26th March was forcibly taken to a unit from Varash Recruitment Office in Rivne Region despite his request to perform alternative civilian service. It appears that he was not detained there, for the same day he lodged a suit with Rivne District Administration Court, claiming that the mobilisation decision had been illegal. It was rejected on 23rd July by Judge Svitlana Dulyanytska. On 28th August he lodged a further appeal with the Eighth Administrative Appeal Court in Lviv. We have not heard whether it has yet been considered by a panel of three judges.

As reported in the "international" section, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights documented the forced recruitment of five further conscientious objectors in the period from September to November, inclusive. All had been detained by military personnel for between two and four days, threatened with violence and being sent to the front line; all had reported suffering ill-treatment and tortured, four of them by being beaten, suffocated, and dragged across the floor; one of the five was still undergoing military training at the end of the year; the other four had been released, but it is not reported whether they faced further proceedings.

To the best of our knowledge, the first conviction of a conscientious objector under Article 402 took place in the case of 32-year-old Baptist **Serhy Semchuk**, from Lviv, who was sentenced in Kharkiv's Dzerzhinsky District Court on 8th May 2024 to five years imprisonment for disobedience for his refusal to take up weapons, despite the fact that his request to serve in an unarmed capacity had initially been accepted. On 30th September, his appeal was rejected by Kharkiv Appeal Court. He was arrested at his place of



work January 2025 and taken to prison in Lviv, where he found at least one other conscientious objector, a Pentecostalist.

On 11th October, proceedings were opened against Jehovah's Witness **Volodymyr Baranov**, under the same Article 402, Part 4 ("*Disobedience committed under martial law or in a combat situation*"). On 14th October, Kyiv's Pechersky District Court ordered that he be held in pre-trial detention for 60 days. The case was passed to Darnitsky District Court on 8th January; in a preliminary hearing on 10th January, Judge Olha Prosalova rejected a defence appeal against the pre-trial detention, arguing that there was a risk of absconding because "he is aware that this crime is punishable by imprisonment for a term of up to ten years"; instead extending his detention in Kviv's Investigation Prison by a further 60 days, until 10th March. She also rejected an application that the proceedings should be public, arguing that "martial law is currently in effect in Ukraine, and the information that will be obtained during the trial may lead to the disclosure of the names of service personnel and the locations of military units, which the enemy may take advantage of". At the latest report, the trial was ongoing,

Prosecutions under Article 402 are in preparation against seven further Jehovah's Witnesses, two of whom, 40-year-old **Andrii Kliuka** and 35-year-old **Oleksandr Radashko** were reportedly being held in pre-trial detention in the detention centres of Khmelnytskyi and Ivano-Frankivsk, respectively. Eighteen further cases are being prepared under Article 407 "*Unauthorised abandonment of a military unit or place of service*", punishable by imprisonment of between five and ten years.

Awaiting their trial (first three, in pretrial detention):

	Age	Region
Mykhailo Adamovych	41	Chernihiv Region
Andrii Klyuka	40	Khmelnytskyi
Oleksandr Radashko	35	Ivano-Frankivsk
Volodymyr Baranov (detained pending trial, released on bail)		Kyiv

Pastor **Oleksandr Solonets** of the "Hram Vidnovlennya" (Restoration Temple) Church in Kherson was forcibly conscripted on a checkpoint in Chernivtsi region when he cared for a Group of children in travel for rehabilitation. He is detained in a military unit and contested in court the enlistment³⁵⁵.

Seventh-day Adventist and conscientious objector **Andrii Skliar** was subjected to torture by military recruiters and forcibly conscripted in November 2024. They pulled his nose, twisted his little finger, strangled him until he almost lost consciousness. He currently remains detained at the Desna military training center, despite repeated appeals from the Kyiv Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church requesting his release. He continues to refuse to bear arms, take the military oath, wear a uniform, or accept a soldier's salary, despite ongoing pressure.

Ihor Nosenko, a teacher in Sabbath school and head of the family ministry department in the Verkhovyna community of the Bukovina Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, former camera-man at Adventist TV channel Nadiya (Hope), was conscripted 3 December 2024 despite his conscientious objection to military service and request for alternative non-military service; the conscription is challenged in the court. He was charged in disobedience because of his refusal to take up arms, jailed in Ivano-Frankivsk

³⁵⁵<https://friends.org.ua/973> ; <https://youtu.be/gMxZm6qNI9U>



Penitentiary Institution No 12 and currently is held in pre-trial detention³⁵⁶.

The number of investigations launched has also soared; on 30th October, Forum 18 reported that “about 300 cases against conscientious objectors”, mainly Jehovah’s Witnesses, were currently ongoing; by February 2024 Jehovah’s Witnesses were reporting “over 700 of our brothers in Ukraine are currently facing similar prosecution”. The number of investigations launched has also soared; on 30th October Forum 18 reported that “about 300 cases against conscientious objectors”, mainly Jehovah’s Witnesses, were currently ongoing; by February 2024 Jehovah’s Witnesses were reporting “over 700 of our brothers in Ukraine are currently facing similar prosecution”.

In the last three months of 2024, some 51 further cases of conscientious objectors came before the Courts for the first time, one Adventist, two Baptist and the remainder Jehovah’s Witnesses, and two, those of Jehovah’s Witnesses Mykola T. (Bilopillia, 31st October), and as of 30th October, Forum 18 were aware of eleven further ongoing cases, involving an Adventist, a Baptist, a Pentecostalist and eleven Jehovah’s Witnesses, plus the retrial of **Viktor S.**, in which the date for the initial court hearing had not yet been set.

Barring a dramatic change in policy, it may be possible that by the end of 2025 all eight of the outstanding sentences will have been implemented, increasing the total number of conscientious objectors imprisoned, and that in the majority of the cases currently in the Courts, plus one or two prosecution appeals, sentences of three years or more will be pronounced at least by the court of first instance.

This was reflected also imprisonments effected; in February 2025 the Jehovah’s Witnesses reported on the first conviction of a Jehovah’s Witness since the Russian invasion; within a month three further Jehovah’s Witnesses had been jailed, together with the imprisonment of Adventist **Dmytro Zelinsky** (as of reporting period, the 2024; Zelinsky was released early on parole in May 2025) bringing the total of clearly identified and publicised imprisonments of conscientious objectors under Article 336 to five, as of 2024; current number could be much larger, especially taking into account pretrial and arbitrary detentions, as well as lack of clear criteria how to distinguish conscientious objectors from all number of convicts (for “draft evasion”, in 2024 there were 179 real prison sentences that came into legal force)³⁵⁷ and jailed suspects.

With a Jehovah’s Witness membership of some 100,000 in the country, and total number of members of religious organisations whose teachings prohibit use of weapons 500 000 (according to Head of DESS Victor Yelensky)³⁵⁸, there is every reason to fear a continuing increase in the number of cases launched.

New features have emerged in the few verdicts since December of which we have received reports. On 18th December, Popilnya District Court in Zhytomyr Region, as well as sentencing Jehovah’s Witness **Serhy Starovoit** to imprisonment fined him the equivalent of approximately ten days’ wages to cover the costs of a “forensic handwriting examination”.

Voluntary recruitment

Army’s programs of voluntary recruitment to contract military service of persons in age 18-60 target also young males in age 18-24, who had been generally spared from conscription, after changes of legislation in 2024.

In the reporting period, the army continued to advertise this offer and incentivise young people in Ukraine and abroad. For example, the International Legion for the Defense of Ukraine offers to sign contract in

³⁵⁶<https://reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/127456605>

³⁵⁷The court statistics, https://court.gov.ua/inshe/sudova_statystyka/zvit_dsau_2024

³⁵⁸Minutes of the meeting on 12.11.2024 of the Interdepartmental Working Group on the preparation of legislative proposals on alternative (non-military) service during martial law, for a special period.



“18-60 years of age,” offering payments in range of \$550-\$4,800 per month, free medical care and \$365,000 for families of fallen soldiers, and gives “lessons for teens”³⁵⁹.

It was reported that one of the 18 year old volunteers, UK citizen James Wilton, traveled to Ukraine to sign the contract in April 2024 and was killed on his first mission in July.³⁶⁰

Conscientious objection during and after military service

Conscientious objection is not allowed, and was never allowed, during the military service, not recognised as a reason for discharge. In peacetime, it was allowed, but is not allowed under current martial law, to be exempted from mandatory gatherings of reservists in case of joining a church whose teachings are not compatible with performance of military duty.

With tens of thousands fleeing from the army³⁶¹, a law was passed decriminalising the first time of unauthorised leave from military units and allowing to return without penalty³⁶².

Asylum for conscientious objectors

Ukrainians abroad

A ban on men of under 60 from leaving the country remained in place. In total, figures provided by the Ukrainian border guard indicate that since the ban was put in place indicate that some 45,000 men have been arrested attempting to cross the frontier clandestinely and a further 4,000 by trying to escape with false documents.

Applications filed in Ukraine

In 2024, two Syrian refugees claiming risks of persecution because of their conscientious objection were denied asylum and challenged the denials in courts without success.

Also, a Russian conscientious objector was denied in asylum in Ukraine despite he has a family in Ukraine and feared that if he will be forced to leave Ukraine he might not see his family again; he claimed that in Russia he could be forced to fight against Ukrainians including his own family or punished for his criticism of Russian aggression. The court rejected his complaint pointing out that in Russia he could choose alternative civilian service.

Most courts uphold denials in asylum to conscientious objectors, citing a Supreme Court judgment of 2020 in a case of Syrian refugee that draft evasion and fear of being held liable is not a reason to provide asylum. However, in a case of a Syrian deserter considered by courts for a long time, courts found that the denial in asylum violated the law and ordered the State Migration Service of Ukraine to provide him asylum. The appellate court noted in a judgment of 30 January 2024 that the deserter presented a letter from Euro-Syrian Democratic Forum in Brussels informing that the seeker of asylum risks persecution because he is a brother of a member of an oppositional political organisation.

Militarisation of the education system

Initial military training is a part of mandatory basic education according to Article 9 of the Law of Ukraine “On Military Duty and Military Service”. A model curriculum “Defense of Ukraine” for 10-11 grades of schools developed in 2024 includes studying weapons and military equipment, rifle training³⁶³.

³⁵⁹ <https://ildu.mil.gov.ua/news/preparing-future-lessons-teens-1st-international-legion>

³⁶⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy7gp341j0o>

³⁶¹ <https://www.euronews.com/2024/11/30/tens-of-thousands-of-soldiers-have-deserted-from-ukraines-army>

³⁶² <https://kyivindependent.com/parliament-passes-bill-allowing-first-time-deserters-return-to-military-service/>

³⁶³ <https://babel.ua/en/news/109264-osint-and-weapons-will-be-taught-the-ministry-of-education-has-developed-a-project-of-the-defense-of-ukraine-program-for-high-school>



Education system is tasked with military indoctrination, no exception from military courses for conscientious objectors. Military registration and regular prolongation of deferrals is required for enrollment to higher education institutions (HEIs). The HEIs are pressured to expel students for making them eligible for conscription, and the scope of deferrals for students is shrinking.

The basic military training became mandatory for all students, and refusal to undergo it could result in expulsion.

By the letter of the Ministry of Education, the higher education institutions were instructed to enroll students only if they renewed military registration. Students could be conscripted if they are expelled or not prolonged deferral, that might happen due to problems with arbitrariness in procedure.

The Russian Federation imposes systematic Russification and military indoctrination of children and mandatory military training for conscription to the aggressor's army in schools in occupied territories of Ukraine contrary to Article 51 of the IV Geneva Convention.



2.49. UNITED KINGDOM

[\[See country page on EBCO website\]](#)

Conscription currently imposed?	No	Conscription imposed 1916-1919 and again from 1939. Abolished 1960. Last conscripts demobilised 1963.	
Conscientious objection first recognised	1916	Military Service Act, 27th January.	
CO release of professional soldiers	Yes	Regulations within each of the service branches cover the handling of applications for release. An “independent” Advisory Committee on Conscientious Objection is the ultimate appeal tribunal, but has met only once this century and upheld the military decision.	
Minimum recruitment age	16	For voluntary service	
Population³⁶⁴	Total	% males 15-19	Thus approx. annual cohort reaching 18
	68,459,055	3.0%	410,754
Armed forces	Total strength	Of which conscripts	Compared to annual cohort above
	141,100	–	Total strength is 34.4% of cohort
Military expenditure	\$(% change from 2023)	Per capita	% of GDP
	81,763m (+2.8%)	\$1,186	2.3%

Principal EBCO concerns

EBCO’s principal concern regarding the United Kingdom is the continuing reliance on recruitment, particularly in the army, from the age of sixteen.

Although the proportion, particularly of the youngest recruits, has diminished over the years, as the following tables show, there are still no imminent plans to raise recruitment ages, despite a continuing campaign on the issue, highlighting in particular the adverse psychological effects of exposure at a young

³⁶⁴Population and armed forces figures are derived from The Military Balance 2025, published by the international Institute for Strategic Studies; military expenditure figures are estimates published by SIPRI (The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) in April 2025.



age to armed conflict and persistent allegations of harassment and abuse of juveniles in the course of training.

The following are Ministry of Defence figures supplied to the Child Rights International Network, UK
Intake of sixteen-year-olds, by year

Financial Year	Army	%	Royal Navy	%	Royal Air Force	%	Total	%
1999/2000	3377	20.5%	602	12.2%	158	3.9%	4137	(16.2%)
2000/1	3248	22.1%	481	10.4%	199	5.5%	3928	(17.1%)
2001/2	3400	23.0%	580	11.6%	230	6.1%	4210	(17.9%)
2002/3	3600	21.8%	585	11.2%	245	5.5%	4430	(16.9%)
2003/4	3225	21.2%	405	9.8%	265	6.4%	3895	(16.6%)
2004/5	2470	21.1%	330	8.9%	85	3.9%	2885	(16.4%)
2005/6	2445	19.3%	305	7.8%	10	0.7%	2760	(15.3%)
2006/7	2005	14.5%	250	6.7%	20	1.1%	2275	(11.8%)
2007/8	2200	15.1%	280	7.2%	95	3.3%	2575	(12.1%)
2008/9	1980	13.7%	315	7.9%	200	4.7%	2495	(11.0%)
2009/10	1795	12.7%	155	3.7%	60	1.7%	2010	(9.2%)
2010/1	1400	17.4%	60	2.7%	10	0.9%	1470	(12.9%)
2011/2	1470	14.1%	10	0.4%	10	0.8%	1490	(10.4%)
2012/3	970	10.0%	20	0.8%	10	0.9%	1000	(7.5%)
2013/4	810	12.6%	50	1.7%	10	0.7%	870	(8.0%)
2014/5	810	10.6%	30	1.2%	10	0.6%	850	(7.2%)
2015/6	920	11.5%	70	2.7%	30	1.6%	1020	(8.1%)
2016/7	980	12.9%	120	4.5%	60	3.6%	1160	(9.7%)
2017/8	920	14.1%	100	3.8%	70	4.1%	1090	(10.0%)
2018/9	1000	15.8%	140	5.0%	80	4.1%	1210	(10.9%)
2019/20	1350	14.2%	150	4.7%	100	4.4%	1600	(10.7%)
2020/1	1160	12.4%	180	5.0%	50	2.7%	1390	(9.4%)
2021/2	1040	15.3%	150	4.6%	70	3.0%	1260	(10.4%)
2022/3	890	14.0%	100	3.6%	40	2.1%	1030	(9.3%)
2023/4	1010	14.0%	130	5.2%	60	3.8%	1210	(10.7%)
TOTAL	44475	16.5%	5598	6.5%	2177	3.6%	50010	(12.7%)



Intake of seventeen-year-olds, by year

Financial Year	Army	%	Royal Navy	%	Royal Air Force	%	Total	%
1999/2000	3641	22.1%	972	19.6%	556	13.6%	5169	(20.2%)
2000/1	3136	21.3%	924	20.0%	585	16.1%	4645	(20.2%)
2001/2	3065	20.7%	970	19.4%	625	16.5%	4660	(19.8%)
2002/3	3300	20.1%	970	18.6%	735	16.5%	5035	(19.2%)
2003/4	2985	19.7%	670	16.3%	665	16.0%	4320	(18.4%)
2004/5	2385	20.4%	585	15.8%	310	14.3%	3280	(18.7%)
2005/6	2685	21.2%	600	15.3%	130	9.1%	3415	(18.9%)
2006/7	2865	20.8%	535	14.3%	135	7.4%	3535	(18.3%)
2007/8	2550	17.5%	550	14.2%	305	10.4%	3405	(16.0%)
2008/9	2155	14.9%	550	13.7%	580	13.6%	3285	(14.4%)
2009/10	1835	12.9%	435	10.5%	395	11.4%	2665	(12.2%)
2010/1	1000	12.4%	220	9.8%	80	7.0%	1300	(11.4%)
2011/2	1460	13.9%	80	3.2%	100	7.6%	1640	(11.5%)
2012/3	1330	13.8%	110	4.4%	70	6.0%	1510	(11.3%)
2013/4	960	14.9%	200	6.9%	90	6.0%	1250	(11.6%)
2014/5	1010	13.2%	210	8.2%	100	6.1%	1320	(11.1%)
2015/6	870	10.9%	230	8.8%	130	6.7%	1230	(9.8%)
2016/7	820	10.8%	270	10.0%	160	9.5%	1250	(10.4%)
2017/8	770	11.8%	260	9.7%	180	10.5%	1210	(11.1%)
2018/9	820	13.2%	290	10.4%	190	9.7%	1290	(11.7%)
2019/20	1070	11.3%	330	10.4%	260	11.5%	1660	(11.1%)
2020/1	1250	13.4%	440	12.1%	190	10.2%	1890	(12.7%)
2021/2	990	14.6%	340	10.4%	210	9.1%	1540	(12.8%)
2022/3	800	12.6%	240	8.6%	180	9.3%	1210	(10.9%)
2023/4	750	10.4%	230	9.3%	170	10.6%	1150	(10.2%)
TOTAL	44532	16.6%	11211	13.0%	7131	11.8%	60504	(15.4%)



All recruits aged under 18, by year

Financial Year	Army	%	Royal Navy / Marines	%	Royal Air Force	%	Total	%
1999/2000	7018	(42.6%)	1574	(31.8%)	714	(17.4%)	9306	(36.4%)
2000/1	6384	(43.4%)	1.405	(30.4%)	784	(21.6%)	8573	(37.3%)
2001/2	6465	(43.7%)	1550	(30.9%)	855	(22.6%)	8870	(37.6%)
2002/3	6930	(41.9%)	1555	(29.8%)	980	(22.1%)	9465	(36.1%)
2003/4	6210	(40.9%)	1075	(26.1%)	930	(22.4%)	8215	(35.0%)
2004/5	4855	(41.5%)	915	(24.8%)	395	(18.2%)	6165	(35.1%)
2005/6	5130	(40.4%)	905	(23.0%)	140	(9.8%)	6175	(34.2%)
2006/7	4870	(35.3%)	785	(20.9%)	155	(8.5%)	5810	(30.0%)
2007/8	4750	(32.7%)	830	(21.5%)	400	(13.7%)	5980	(28.0%)
2008/9	4135	(28.5%)	865	(21.6%)	780	(18.3%)	5780	(25.4%)
2009/10	3630	(25.6%)	590	(14.2%)	455	(13.1%)	4675	(21.4%)
2010/1	2400	(29.9%)	280	(12.4%)	90	(7.8%)	2770	(24.2%)
2011/2	2930	(28.0%)	90	(3.6%)	110	(8.3%)	3130	(31.9%)
2012/3	2300	(23.8%)	130	(5.2%)	80	(6.8%)	2510	(18.8%)
2013/4	1770	(27.5%)	250	(8.7%)	100	(6.7%)	2120	(19.6%)
2014/5	1820	(23.8%)	240	(9.3%)	110	(6.8%)	2170	(18.3%)
2015/6	1790	(22.3%)	300	(11.4%)	160	(8.3%)	2250	(17.9%)
2016/7	1800	(23.7%)	390	(14.5%)	220	(13.0%)	2410	(20,1%)
2017/8	1690	(25.8%)	360	(13.5%)	250	(14.5%)	2300	(21.0%)
2018/9	1820	(28.8%)	430	(15.4%)	270	(13.8%)	2500	(22.6%)
2019/20	2420	(25.5%)	480	(15.1%)	360	(15.9%)	3260	(21.8%)
2020/1	2410	(25.8%)	620	(17.1%)	240	(12.9%)	3280	(22.1%)
2021/2	2030	(29.9%)	490	(15.0%)	280	(12.1%)	2800	(23.2%)
2022/3	1690	(26.6%)	340	(12.1%)	220	(11.4%)	2240	(20.2%)
2023/4	1760	(24.4%)	360	(14.5%)	230	(14.4%)	2360	(20.9%)
TOTAL	89007	(33.1%)	6809	(19.5%)	9308	(15.5%)	110514	(28.1%)

For a very brief period, 2006/7 to 2010/11, figures for drop-out before completing training are also given. For those aged under 18, the proportion declined over the period from 43.7% to 26.9%, but reached a peak of no less than 49.5% in 2007/8. For those aged 18 or 19, they fell from 42.8% to 23.1%. For the 20-24 age group, from 26.3% to 15.3%, for those aged 25-29, from 21.1% to 13.2% for those aged 30-34, from 14.3% to 13.9%, for those aged over 35, from 19.6% to 8.1%. Over all years, there is a consistent decline in the drop-out rate with age, with only a slight variation in the figures for the over-30's, who must represent a very small proportion of the total.



3. THEMATIC ISSUES

3.1. HISTORICAL TIMELINE: CONSCRIPTION AND RECOGNITION OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION



Table 22: Historical timeline: Conscription and recognition of conscientious objection

Year	Conscription imposed	Suspended	Conscientious objection recognised
1903			Norway
1908	Portugal		
1916	UK		UK
1917			Denmark
1919		UK	
1920			Sweden
1922			Netherlands
1931			Finland
1935	Germany		
1938	Austria Hungary		
1939	UK		
1944	Luxembourg		
1945		Austria Germany	
1949			German Federal Republic



Year	Conscription imposed	Suspended	Conscientious objection recognised
1956	Austria		Austria
1959	German Federal Republic		
1963	Cyprus	UK	France Luxembourg
1964			Belgium German Democratic Republic
1967		Luxembourg	
1972			Italy
1976			Portugal
1978			Spain
1988			Poland
1989			Hungary
1990			Croatia Latvia Lithuania
1991			Bulgaria Slovenia Ukraine
1992		Belgium	Cyprus Czechoslovakia Estonia Georgia Moldova Switzerland Yugoslavia
1993			Russia
1994			Belarus
1995			Azerbaijan
1996			Bosnia-Herzegovina Romania
1997		France Netherlands	Greece
1998			Albania
2001			North Macedonia (at the time FYROM)
2002		Spain	
2003		Slovenia	Armenia
2004		Czechia Portugal	
2005		Bosnia-Herzegovina Hungary Italy	



Year	Conscription imposed	Suspended	Conscientious objection recognised
2006		Montenegro Slovakia	
2007		Latvia North Macedonia (FYROM) Romania	
2008		Bulgaria Croatia Kosovo	
2009		Poland	
2010		Albania Lithuania Sweden	
2011		Germany Serbia	
2014		Ukraine	
2015	Lithuania Ukraine		
2017	Georgia	Georgia	
2018	Sweden		
2024	Latvia		



3.2. CONSCRIPTS AND CONTRACT OR PROFESSIONAL SOLDIERS

Table 23: Number and percentage of conscripts in government armed forces

Country	Total active strength of armed forces	Of which conscripts	% (descending order)	Date of estimate
Ukraine	730,000	650,000	89.0%	2024
Switzerland	21,300	18,200	85.4%	2024
Türkiye	355,200	?	(72.5%)	2024
Austria	22,800	15,544	68.2%	2024
Finland	23,850	16,050	67.3%	2024
Cyprus	12,000	?	(59.4%)	2024
Estonia	7,100	3,500	49.3%	2024
Russia	1,134,000	550,000	48.5%	2024
Armenia	42,900	18,950	44.2%	2024
Moldova	5,150	2,200	42.7%	2024
Norway	25,400	10,000	39.4%	2024
Greece	132,000	50,400	38.2%	2024
Denmark	13,100	4,700	35.9%	2024
Sweden	14,850	4,000	26.9%	2024
Lithuania	23,000	5,850	25.4%	2024
Georgia	20,650	4,350	21.1%	2024

We have no estimates of the number of conscripts serving in Azerbaijan or Belarus. The dated estimate of the proportion of conscripts in the Turkish armed forces must also be treated with caution; since then the duration of obligatory military service has been twice halved, correspondingly reducing the number of conscripts who are in uniform at any one time.

In the current situation of wartime mobilisation, all figures for Ukraine and Russia must be rough estimates only. For the purposes of this table, we have used in each case the number of conscripts (including all mobilised personnel, even though in individual cases in Ukraine mobilisation may have been voluntary) estimated in last year's Report even though this is rather circular, those figures having been based on the estimated numbers of professional service personnel carried forward. No attempt has been made to factor in losses in action (for which no reliable figures are available) or the number of Russian conscripts or mobilised personnel who have subsequently agreed to sign long-term service contracts. It is possible that the figures are underestimates, but that is also true of the overall size of the armed forces. The figures should be taken as indicative only of general level and proportions involved.

Conscription is also enforced by the internationally-unrecognised de facto authorities in North Cyprus, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia) and Transdniestria (Moldova) – the last named also has alternative service for conscientious objectors. However in none of these do we know the number of conscripts.

Taking into account the caveat above regarding Russia and Ukraine, changes since last year in the situation shown by this table are insignificant.

In the second table, the overall size of the armed forces is compared to the population of young males, who furnish the overwhelming majority of recruits. The detailed population calculations, including allowances



made for any part of the national territory which is outside effective government control, may be found in the individual country entries in Section 2.

In this table, the most significant change since last year concerns Poland, where the figures quoted by the IISS indicate a 64% increase in the size of the armed forces. Other sources confirm this, indeed a recent BBC report³⁶⁵ refers to a current strength of 216,000 and a planned expansion to half a million over the next few years. The precise year-on-year increase indicated here may or may not be accurate, but the trend is unmistakable. Perhaps most noteworthy is that elsewhere the general response in increased military expenditure (see relevant Section below) to the deteriorating strategic situation has not hitherto been mirrored by a corresponding increase in manpower. (An apparent increase of the same order as the Polish in the size of the Albanian armed forces in fact represents a return to more or less the 2022 figure, implying that the figure quoted last year was erroneous.)

Table 24: Armed forces compared to potential number of recruits

Country	Annual cohort of males reaching 18	Armed forces active strength	As % (descending order)
Ukraine	185,441	730,000	393.7%
Armenia	17,265	42,900	248.5%
Cyprus	5,180	12,000	231.7%
("TRNC")	2,145	3,000	139.9%
Greece	60,674	132,000	217.6%
Lithuania	13,667	23,000	168.3%
Russia	816,761	1,134,000	138.8%
Estonia	6,924	7,100	102.5%
Bulgaria	37,983	36,950	97.3%
Belarus	51,308	48,600	94.7%
Azerbaijan	83,072	68,200	82.1%
Poland	201,481	164,100	81.4%
Malta	2,161	1,700	78.7%
Serbia	35,922	28,150	78.4%
Croatia	21,581	16,800	77.8%
Finland	31,508	23,850	75.7%
Norway	34,160	25,400	74.4%
Montenegro	3,719	2,710	72.9%
Georgia	28,426	20,650	72.6%
North Macedonia	11,532	8,000	69.4%
Romania	101,630	69,900	68.8%
Latvia	10,087	6,600	65.4%
Bosnia-Herzegovina	17,474	10,650	60.9%
Slovenia	10,489	6,200	59.1%

³⁶⁵Vernon, W. "How ordinary poles are preparing for a Russian invasion", BBC, 2nd May 2016 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj9exj0nn0ko>)



Country	Annual cohort of males reaching 18	Armed forces active strength	As % (descending order)
Hungary	59,134	32,150	54.4%
Türkiye	656,132	355,200	54.1%
Italy	304,825	161,850	53.1%
Austria	43,046	22,800	53.0%
Switzerland	42,531	21,300	50.1%
France	423,922	202,200	47.7%
Germany	386,948	179,850	46.5%
Spain	264,770	122,200	46.2%
Slovakia	27,818	12,800	46.0%
Czechia	58,525	26,600	45.5%
Albania	17,400	7,500	43.1%
Portugal	53,077	21,500	40.5%
Denmark	35,839	13,100	36.6%
United Kingdom	410,754	141,100	34.4%
Netherlands	99,525	33,650	33.8%
Belgium	71,866	23,500	32.7%
Luxembourg	3,625	900	24.8%
Moldova	20,877	5,150	24.7%
Sweden	63,539	14,850	23.4%
Ireland	34,541	7,400	21.4%
Kosovo	17,003	3,000	17.6%
Iceland	2,403	0	0.0%



3.3. COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE AND CIVILIAN SERVICE

For the countries which retain conscription, the relative durations of military and alternative civilian service are shown in the following table. What is compared here is the normal basic durations of military and alternative civilian service, before any of the adjustments to reflect rank, educational qualifications, etc. details of which are given in the individual country entries in Section 2.

Often, the duration of alternative service is set proportionally to the military service which would otherwise have been required, but sometimes the reductions in respect of personal circumstances are less generous. Likewise, some persons performing alternative service might in fact have found themselves faced with a longer duration of military service, but to quote the shortest possible discrepancy is misleading.

The table also indicates whether conscription currently applies to men only, or to both men and women, or whether women can volunteer to perform the normal conscript service (quite apart from the possibility of volunteering for a professional military career). Often they are freer to leave early than are men.

Table 25: Duration of military and civilian service (in months)

Country	Military service duration	Civilian service duration	Ratio to military service duration (ascending order)	Gender
Norway	12	<i>No alternative service required</i>		Both men and women
Denmark	4	4	1.00	Women can volunteer
Latvia	11	11	1.00	Men only
Sweden	11	11	1.00	Both men and women
Moldova	12	12	1.00	Men only
Lithuania	9	10	1.11	Men only
Greece	12	15	1.25	Men only
Cyprus	14	19	1.36	Men only
Austria	6	9	1.50	Men only
Estonia	8	12	1.50	Women can volunteer
Georgia	12	18	1.50	Men only
Armenia	24	36	1.50	Men only
Switzerland	8	12	1.50	Women can volunteer
Russia	12	21	1.75	Men only
Belarus	18	36	2.00	Men only
Finland	6	12	2.10	Women can volunteer
Türkiye	6	<i>No alternative service available</i>		Men only
Azerbaijan	18	<i>No alternative service available</i>		Men only
Ukraine	Indefinite	<i>No alternative service available</i>		Women can volunteer



3.4. MILITARY EXPENDITURE

The main feature of the military expenditure figures for 2024, as reported in April 2025 by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI),³⁶⁶ given in Table 26 is the almost universal rise. Of the countries in our region, only tiny Malta recorded a small drop in military expenditure since 2023.

In the three countries most closely implicated in the Ukraine war –Ukraine, Russia and Belarus– aggregate expenditure rose from just over \$175bn to just over \$215bn, an increase of just under 23%, mainly accounted for by Russia. Presumably at over 35% of GDP military expenditure in Ukraine, even in the context of the wartime economy, has reached at least a temporary ceiling.

In recently warring Armenia and Azerbaijan, aggregate expenditure rose from \$4.9bn to \$5.2bn, just over 6%, despite the end of active hostilities.

The aggregate military expenditure in the 39 other countries rose from \$407.4bn to \$496.7bn, an increase of just under 23%. Perhaps ominously, the increase was generally greater in the countries with the largest militaries, whose contribution to any European war would be most significant; the median increase was little over 10%. The exceptionally large proportional increases recorded in 2023 in Poland, Moldova, Finland and Denmark were not repeated; the biggest increase in 2024, surpassing even Russia's, was 43.3% in Romania; it was followed by the Netherlands, Sweden and Czechia. Since 2018, the largest advances in the rankings have been in Poland, from 21st place to 10th with a whopping 328% increase from \$11.6bn to 38bn and neighbouring Lithuania, from 18th place to 13th with a 262% increase to \$2.6bn; the biggest fall that of France, from second to twelfth place, with a mere aggregate 1% increase in (inflation-adjusted) expenditure over the six years. In Poland in 2024, military expenditure climbed over the symbolic threshold of 4% of GDP –twice the agreed NATO target– and the only country in the region except currently or recently warring Russia, Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan to reach this level. At the other extreme, military expenditure remained below 1% of GDP in Ireland, Malta, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Moldova and (although much greater) in Switzerland, which relies principally on manpower for its defence. In Luxembourg and still-neutral Austria it reached the symbolic level of 1% for the first time in 2024.

Table 26: Military expenditure: European States 2024

Country	Military expenditure US\$million 2024	% change from 2023 (inflation adjusted)	US\$ per capita	% of GDP
Norway	10,435	+16.9%	\$1,880	2.1%
Ukraine	64,705	+2.9%	\$1,728	34.5%
Denmark	9,959	+20.3%	\$1,670	2.4%
Luxembourg	872	+28.2%	\$1,303	1.0%
Netherlands	23,179	+35.0%	\$1,276	1.9%
Finland	6,988	+16.3%	\$1,245	2.3%
United Kingdom	81,763	+2.8%	\$1,186	2.3%
Sweden	12,040	+33.9%	\$1,138	2.0%
Estonia	1,442	+12.7%	\$1,055	3.4%
Germany	88,459	+28.3%	\$1,044	1.9%
Russia	148,967	+37.8%	\$1,026	7.0%

³⁶⁶Figures derived from the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. Available at: <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>



Country	Military expenditure US\$million 2024	% change from 2023 (inflation adjusted)	US\$ per capita	% of GDP
Poland	38,001	+30.9%	\$982	4.2%
France	64,675	+6.1%	\$973	2.0%
Lithuania	2,628	+20.3%	\$916	3.1%
Greece	8,022	+11.0%	\$791	3.1%
Latvia	1,426	+12.0%	\$758	3.3%
Switzerland	6,722	+3.1%	\$756	0.7%
Belgium	8,562	+7.4%	\$730	1.3%
Italy	37,965	+1.4%	\$639	1.6%
Czechia	6,525	+32.0%	\$605	1.9%
Austria	5,259	+14.5%	\$576	1.0%
Slovakia	2,849	+13.4%	\$516	2.0%
Spain	24,615	+0.4%	\$514	1.4%
Hungary	4,735	+8.3%	\$489	2.2%
Armenia	1,418	+6.8%	\$475	5.5%
Romania	8,716	+43.3%	\$457	2.3%
Slovenia	952	+2.1%	\$449	1.3%
Portugal	4,642	+6.8%	\$445	1.5%
Cyprus	598	+4.6%	\$442	1.6%
Croatia	1,629	+8.7%	\$419	1.8%
Azerbaijan	3,777	+3.9%	\$366	5.0%
Bulgaria	2,330	+13.8%	\$344	2.2%
Serbia	2,323	+23.5%	\$344	2.6%
Türkiye	24,979	+11.8%	\$292	1.9%
Ireland	1,331	+3.0%	\$254	0.2%
Montenegro	150	+25.9%	\$235	1.8%
Malta	109	-5.6%	\$204	0.4%
North Macedonia	354	+28.2%	\$194	2.1%
Albania	536	+21.1%	\$191	2.0%
Belarus	1,491	+9.3%	\$164	2.1%
Georgia	616	+24.4%	\$162	1.9%
Kosovo	166	+21.6%	\$98	1.5%
Bosnia-Herzegovina	216	+7.0%	\$68	0.8%
Moldova	111	+9.3%	\$36	0.6%



3.5. JUVENILE RECRUITMENT

Under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC), to which all our States are party, conscription, but not voluntary recruitment, of persons aged under eighteen is banned.

Austria and **Cyprus**, however, have provisions which permit conscripts to opt for personal convenience to perform their obligatory military service up to a year early, subject to parental consent. We would argue that such recruitment cannot truly count as “voluntary”, given that the service itself is compulsory, and urge these States to repeal this exception.

In Cyprus, this is compounded by the fact that in the relevant legislation liability is not from the eighteenth birthday, but from 1st January of the year of the eighteenth birthday – in other words while still aged seventeen.

The legislation in Greece is similarly worded, but there it is specified that actual call-up will be from 1st January of the year of the 19th birthday. In fact in many States the conscription process is started by a requirement to register, sometimes from the age of sixteen; in Russia and Armenia such procedures mean that call-up papers may be sent out immediately after the eighteenth birthday.

Of at least equal concern to EBCO are those States which continue to accept volunteers into professional or contract military service below the age of eighteen. These are **Germany**, the **Netherlands**, and the **UK**.

In the Netherlands, men or women may, with the written consent of their legal representatives, enlist at the age of seventeen as military trainees thus minimising any gap after the end of obligatory education. (In fact, in neighbouring Belgium, as the report in Section 2 above shows, the minimum age of military recruitment is technically defined as the completion of obligatory education, which usually means 18, but leaves a loophole enabling a small number of volunteers each year to be initially enlisted before their eighteenth birthday.) The trainee status is kept completely separate - they cannot be deployed in any capacity – and can be converted into full membership of the armed forces only by personal application once the age of eighteen has been reached. Figures presented to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child indicated that in 2009 there were 7,999 such enlistments, in 2010, 5,013; figures for the first part of 2011 indicated a continued steep decline.³⁶⁷ We do not have more recent figures to show whether this encouraging trend has continued, or whether this exception still accounts for a significant proportion of recruitment.

In Germany, a record 10.9% of new recruits in 2024 were seventeen-year-olds, generally volunteering for initial service periods of between seven and twenty-three months.³⁶⁸

In the UK, the situation is even more egregious. The minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces is 16. As in the Netherlands this is explained by the desirability of avoiding a gap after the end of obligatory education – it might be argued that this is more for the benefit of the recruiters than of the potential recruits.

As the table in Section 2.49. shows, juveniles have consistently accounted for a significant proportion of military recruitment in the UK; in 2001/2 they were no less than 37.6% of all recruits, with 43.7% (no less than 23% aged 16) in the army; before the minimum age was raised following ratification of OPAC the proportion of very young recruits into the army, particularly the infantry, had been even higher, including a substantial number of fifteen-year-olds. Although juvenile recruitment overall had halved by 2014/5, it

³⁶⁷CRC/C/OPAC/NLD/1, 3rd March, 2024, para 17.

³⁶⁸<https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article255263676/Bundeswehr-Zahl-minderjaehriger-Rekruten-steigt-auf-Rekordhoch-Jetzt-wird-eine-Warnung-laut.html>



has, disturbingly, subsequently once again risen, reaching over 23%, and just under 30%, more than half of them aged under 16 in the army by 2021/2 [not, as mistakenly stated in last year's Report 2022/3]. Juvenile recruitment in the financial year to the beginning of April 2024 was 2,360, 20.9% of the total, with 24.4%, including 14% aged 16, in the army.

Notoriously in the UK, those who do not take the opportunity of applying for discharge before their eighteenth birthday are thereafter committed to serve for the entire four-year initial period which applies for those recruited over the age of eighteen, so that their actual initial service period can be up to six years.

Documentation from both the UK and Germany on the disproportionate level of abuse suffered by juvenile recruits and of the long-term mental health impact is quoted at length in Section 2.6 of the EBCO Annual Report 2022/23; see also the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to both States – Germany in 2022 ([EBCO Report 2022/3, Section 1.1.3.2](#)) and the UK in 2023 (EBCO Report 2023/4, p22). In 2022 also, although not mentioned in last year's EBCO Report, the Committee "recalling its previous recommendations" recommended to the Netherlands that it "raise the minimum age of voluntary recruitment into the armed forces to 18 years"³⁶⁹

In all the other States the minimum age for military recruitment is at least 18, and in many cases recruitment does not take place until 19 or older. As a result of the recruitment procedures, **Greece**, **Lithuania** and **Türkiye** report that the effective minimum conscription age is 19. As far as we know, the situation in Ukraine is unique. In 2015, while maintaining the age range of liability for conscription as 18 to 27, it moved to a practice of generally calling up conscripts only as they reached the upper age limit. This has in practice remained the normal minimum age for call-up under the current mobilisation, reduced in early April 2024 to 25.

Considerations particularly concerning the deployment, whether deliberate or accidental, in armed conflict apply also to minors who have been subject to a very common form of "backdoor" recruitment, enrolment in military schools or colleges, which enjoys a special dispensation from the age limits specified in OPAC.

Within Europe, according to our information, persons can be enrolled in military training establishments, under a variety of titles, at the age of 17 in **Armenia**, **Azerbaijan**, **Moldova** and **Ukraine**, 16 in **Belarus**, **France** and **Russia**. In many cases, students or cadets at these institutions are formally considered members of the armed forces whatever their age; such a classification is appropriate in situations where on successful graduation they cannot without penalty refuse to pursue a military career, where they are subject to military regulations and discipline at all times, not just within school hours, or where they are issued with a personal firearm. In this context, (see Section 2.35.) we are particularly disturbed that children from the age of fifteen-and-a-half can be accepted into the youth section of **Norway's** Home Guard, which although not formally part of the armed forces would play a crucial part in the country's defence structure in the event of war or national emergency. We do not consider that the safeguards against the involvement of under-18's in hostilities in this event make it less inappropriate for that age group to members in any way of such a body.

Over and above such direct and indirect recruitment of juveniles into the armed forces, EBCO is very concerned about other aspects of the militarisation of youth, such as:

- preferential access for the armed forces to schools, whether for direct recruitment purposes or, where this is prohibited for activities generally designed to encourage pupils to contemplate military careers; also preferential access to pupils' contact details etc.

³⁶⁹CRC/C/NLD/5-6, 9th March, 2022, para 43 (a)



- the institution, as in France, Denmark and Portugal, of days of introduction to the military institutions as an obligatory part of the secondary school curriculum. At the very least, there ought to be a right of conscientious objection to participating, as in Portugal.
- voluntary activities for school-age children or a nature to prepare them for military service, such as the Combined Cadet Force in the UK, the Young Eagles programme run by the Ministry of Defence in Estonia, or the 755 “Military-Patriotic Clubs” in Belarus..
- the introduction of any form of military training as part of the ordinary curriculum in secondary schools.

We will continue to monitor all such activities, particularly as to whether they involve introducing persons aged under eighteen to weapons, which we consider completely inappropriate.

A unique concern is the move to establish a “Universal National Service” for school-aged children in France, discussed in more length in Section 2.16.



3.6. SERVING MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY

The right of conscientious objection to military service, as has been recognised in Human Rights Council Resolutions applies to all persons affected by military service, and at all stages, not only before first call-up, but during service, and subsequently, regarding reserve service liabilities.

The only significant attempt to spell out the implications for the implementation of this right has come in Recommendation CMRec(2010)4 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the human rights of members of the armed forces, the relevant part of which (paragraphs 42 to 46, inclusive):

“42. Professional members of the armed forces should be able to leave the armed forces for reasons of conscience.

43. Requests by members of the armed forces to leave the armed forces

for reasons of conscience should be examined within a reasonable time. Pending the examination of their requests they should be transferred to non-combat duties, where possible.

44. Any request to leave the armed forces for reasons of conscience

should ultimately, where denied, be examined by an independent and impartial body.

45. Members of the armed forces having legally left the armed forces for

reasons of conscience should not be subject to discrimination or to any criminal prosecution. No discrimination or prosecution should result from asking to leave the armed forces for reasons of conscience.

46. Members of the armed forces should be informed of the rights

mentioned in paragraphs 41 to 45 above and the procedures available to exercise them.”

The Council of Europe did in 2012 send out a questionnaire on State practice, the answers to which are analysed in the 2013 EBCO Report (pp52-54). To a large extent, although now dated, this remains our principal source of information regarding State attitudes on this matter, but little in the way of concrete information emerged. Subsequently, next to nothing has been done to follow up on the issue.

In 2018 EUROMIL (the European Organisation of Military Associations and Trade Unions) brought a complaint against Ireland, claiming violations of Article 1§2 (on the right of the worker to earn his living in an occupation freely entered upon) of the European Social Charter, in that there is no provision in law to allow members of the Irish Defence Force to discharge from the armed forces explicitly on the grounds of conscientious objection and to have their discharge registered as such.

In its decision, delivered on 18th March 2021, [see EBCO Report 2021, pp 9-11] the Committee noted that the Social Charter did not specifically refer to a right of conscientious objection. Nevertheless, it considered adequate the provisions in Irish military regulations, which allow for discharge at the request of the service person subject to a (usual) maximum waiting period of 90 days and subject as appropriate to the “reimbursement” of training costs, which might be assessed in an individual case at anything from €50 to €6,345. (Twenty years earlier, in a case against Greece, it had decided that the requirement to serve for twenty-five years, with no possibility of release, for those trained as officers, was not reasonable or proportionate.) Regarding the fact that “the possibility was not available at all in times of war or national emergency, the Committee found that this was consistent with the ability of the State to derogate from various provisions of the Social Charter at such times and, even without derogation, to impose limitations deemed necessary for the public interest, on grounds including those of national security.



Although Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)4 was quoted with specific reference to the extension of the right of conscientious objection to military service to professional service personnel, the decision appears to have been taken rather narrowly on the basis of the wording of the European Social Charter, without referring to the Recommendation for all the implications regarding conscientious objection. Various aspects would appear to be incompatible with full respect for the right; the notice period (which even the Committee considered “long”), the lack of any suspensory effect of an application on the receipt of subsequent orders to obey which would be inconsistent with the objection, the lack of explicit recognition of conscientious objection as the grounds for release, the requirement, which might not be feasible in all cases, to repay imputed training costs, and not least the situation in a time of war or national emergency, given that, seen as an aspect of the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, the right of conscientious objection to military service is not subject to derogation under any circumstances, and may not be limited on grounds of national security.

A tantalising reference has been found to a decision by the International Labour Office (ILO) that Albania was in breach of the ILO Convention on Forced Labour, in that its military service contracts were for a fixed period of six years, and contained no provisions allowing for early termination.³⁷⁰ Apparently under the Convention such a limitation would be permissible at a time of war or national emergency, under provisions specifically relating to members of the armed forces, but not in “peacetime”. It is not reported that the ILO has made a similar finding with regard to any other European country – the implication being that in all others some provision for early termination is incorporated in military contracts.

There are some hopes that the question of provision for conscientious objection by professional military personnel will receive more attention in coming years as Costa Rica has, for the moment at least, begun to raise the matter in recommendations in the Universal Periodic Review Working Group, beginning in November 2024 with Albania and Norway. (see Section 1.3.2.3)

The release of serving members of the military on grounds of conscience has usually been discussed with regard to conscripts. It is telling that in the Irish case EUROMIL found it necessary to contest “the statement of the Government according to which there is no need to assess conscientious objection as there is no compulsory military service in Ireland.” (para 40) The crucial issue is its extension to professional, “contract” personnel, and also for those with reservist observations.

It is clear from many States’ replies to the EBCO questionnaire that by “military service” they refer only to the short-term service required of conscripts, which increasingly is also being offered on a voluntary basis to those who do not wish to make a long-term career commitment or who may (in the case of women) not be liable for conscription. (Sometimes, indeed, conscription provisions are relegated to if necessary making up any remaining deficit in fulfilling recruitment targets once all such “volunteers” have been enlisted.) Especially in the many States where the provisions relating to conscientious objection are in fact found in a “Law of Alternative Service”, it is important to extend the principle to career members of the armed forces, for whom the question of transfer to alternative civilian service, not always relevant in other cases, is obviously inappropriate.

The degree to which States provide for, or respect the right of, conscientious objection in these circumstances varies considerably. At present, there are rarely explicit provisions, but these are desirable

³⁷⁰See: <https://euronews.al/en/modern-day-slaves-ilo-albania-does-not-allow-soldiers-to-resign/> 13th September 2022 – we have hitherto been unable to locate the text of the decision itself



for a number of reasons – specific or general conditions as prescribed in the law of contract are not adequate. The first is the official classification of the discharge. A “compassionate release for personal reasons” is not the same as “an honourable discharge for reasons of conscience”. At the most extreme, as noted in Para 45 of CM/Rec(2010)4, the objector should not be liable to criminal prosecution relating to the release! Second is the question of potential reserve obligations in a future mobilisation – while obviously inappropriate in the case of a conscientious objector, these are not automatically ruled out in the event of voluntary discharge, or of discharge for personal reasons, which may be temporary in nature. Third is the question of timing. The nature of conscientious objection demands that the release “be examined within a reasonable time” (para 43) – in fact as expeditiously as possible. As a reason for leaving, conscientious objection counts as “*force majeure*”, it is not simply a whim of the moment. The enforcement of a notice period is not applicable. Fourth, and most important is that “pending the examination of their requests they should be transferred to non-combat duties, where possible”; in fact they ought to be protected from the receipt of further orders to obey which would be contrary to the objection. Fifth, the terms of release should reflect the “*force majeure*” context – there should be no loss of benefits not directly related to the duration of service, and no requirement, as exists in the Irish case, to repay the estimated costs of training.

The only clear legislative provisions to cover “professional” soldiers are the conscientious objection laws in Germany and the Netherlands, which can be invoked by all citizens at all times. The State entry on Germany in EBCO Reports over the years (including the current one) have documented the invocation of these provisions; the patchy statistics which emerged are shown in the following table:

Year	Applications from		
	Serving personnel	Reservists	Persons not currently liable
2018	127 (acceptances)		
2019	126		
2020 (to 30 th June)	69		
2022 (to December)	223	266	593
2023 (to 31st. July except serving)	178	300	462
2024 (to 31 st October)	136	840	1,492

It will be noted that discharge on these grounds is not automatic, and contrary to the Council of Europe principles the consideration of requests may take years. In 2018 the acceptance rate was quoted as between 60% and 70%. A requirement to repay the nominal costs of training also exists, and the Bundeswehr insists that this is done as a lump sum before release; an administrative court decision in 2019 found that the amount which could be so reclaimed could not be greater than the amount of federal support for training costs which students might receive, namely €853 per month. (see EBCO Report 2020, p.15). Incomplete as they are, these figures indicate the extent of the demand for such release which potentially exists; something approaching 0.1% of all personnel each year. This proportion might seem small, but it should be borne in mind that it is from those who initially volunteered.

Another interesting feature of the German data is the recent rise in applications from persons not currently liable for military service in any capacity, but who nevertheless wish to be recorded as conscientious objectors in advance of any future mobilisation. In order to be registered, such applicants must first have voluntarily gone through the medical examination and have been passed fit for military service. The recent



rise in numbers surely reflects fears of the reinstatement of conscription in view of the current strategic situation.

Data on applications is not available from the Netherlands. The category of those not currently liable for conscription does not exist here; although obligatory registration for military service was retained when conscription was suspended, conscientious objection cannot be declared at this stage but only in the event of the receipt of an actual call-up.

In the United Kingdom, as far as is known uniquely in Europe there are longstanding provisions in internal military regulations (separate for each branch of the services) covering applications for release on the grounds of conscience, and an appeals procedure. (Similar provisions exist in the USA.) Although the express recognition of conscientious objection, and the possibility of an “honourable discharge” are welcome, in other respects the provisions fall short of the Council of Europe standards. Those affected are not made aware of the possibility of applying, or the procedures to be followed; the applicable regulations are not a public document (War Resisters’ International had to use a “Freedom of Information” application to obtain copies) and there is even some uncertainty as to whether advertising them to serving members of the armed forces might be construed as “incitement to disaffection”. Applications have no suspensive effect with regard to orders to obey which would be contrary to the objection; indeed in the last publicly-contested case, that of Michael Lyons in 2011, an order to pick up a rifle was given with official authority so as to provide the basis of a court-martial for “disobedience” which was allowed to interfere with and complicate the subsequent consideration of his application for release. The final, nominally independent, appeal tribunal, the Advisory Committee on Conscientious Objection, was convened for the first time in decades with regard to this case and on that occasion proved to be heavily biased towards the armed forces point of view. (See the detailed account in the EBCO Report 2012, pp 33,34.) No figures are published for the number of persons released under the regulations; the armed forces prefer that individual cases should receive no publicity and indeed are known on occasion to have made this a condition of release.

In all other cases, (except Switzerland, where as the armed forces are manned almost entirely by conscripts, applications for release are in practice all dealt with under the conscription provisions) no provisions explicitly relating to the release of conscientious objectors exist, and therefore by definition no information about the possibility and the procedures to be followed is made available to potential objectors.

In the 2012 survey and the replies to subsequent EBCO questionnaires, the most common response - given at one time or another by Austria, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden - has been that a conscientious objector is free to lodge an application for release at any time. Portugal, Romania and Serbia, in particular, have referred to the possibility of invoking constitutional safeguards of the freedom of conscience in support of such an application. Estonia, Latvia and Hungary state explicitly that such a release would not be permitted in time of war or national emergency, which the EUROMIL case showed to be true in Ireland; Belgium stated more broadly that it might be refused “for operational reasons”. Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Poland and Spain have referred to contractual provisions allowing early termination, by either party subject to a notice period (which is not of course compatible with release “without undue delay”);

Spain, Poland and Ireland, again as in the EUROMIL case, would require the repayment of imputed training costs. These groupings are all rather fluid – it is clear that depending on the precise information given an individual State might find itself in any one of these categories.

Finally, we have no information on the situation in Montenegro, but neighbouring Albania, having accepted the UPR recommendation on the subject (see Section 1.3.2.3) has added itself to the list of states where



release is considered possible, although as so often with no information on procedures. As it happens, Albania is the one State for which we have been given numbers of those in recent years who have been released early from military service for various personal reasons, not, as far as is known, including conscientious objection - this despite the absence of contractual provisions allowing early termination.

In the remaining nine States in our area which have armed forces, we believe that there is currently no possibility of early release for professional service personnel who develop conscientious objections. We are certain that this has never been the case in Belarus, not subject to Council of Europe standards, or Türkiye, which has never recognised the right at all, and that it is certainly completely out of the question under the current state of wartime mobilisation in Russia and Ukraine. The Albanian ILO case discussed above however raises interesting questions about the situation in the others – Armenia (which has added itself to the list in its recent replies to EBCO questionnaires, although in 2012 it had been one of those which had indicated without giving details that release was possible), Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus and Greece. Do military service contracts in these States not have clauses allowing for early termination? In which case, even if they would not grant release on application to a conscientious objector, would they be able to stop an objector who gave due notice of early termination of the contract?

Overall, it is clear that much progress remains to be made before serving professional military personnel have full access to the right of conscientious objection, and also that much clarification is required of the details of the current situation in most of the States in our area.

The situation regarding reserve service is likewise mixed. Early release from the armed forces does not necessarily affect reserve obligations; Denmark notes specifically that this is the case. Cyprus and Greece, however, which do not allow the release of serving military personnel have in recent years accepted conscientious objection applications from reservists. In other cases, new restrictions apply; former military personnel in Serbia may apply for exemption as conscientious objectors from reserve obligations only after four years - during that interval they have no access to the right. In Belarus all persons liable for military service, irrespective of whether or not they have actually performed it, are automatically placed on the reserve service list. This applies equally to those who have performed alternative civilian service as conscientious objectors, a vivid example of the potential results of legislating for conscientious objection in the form of a Law on Alternative Service. Clearly, a person recognised as a conscientious objector should be equally exempted from any military reserve service. And in Switzerland, legislation being currently proposed would have the same effect. At present there is a possibility at any time for a Swiss conscript to transfer to civilian service. However under the latest proposals (see Section 2.46.) such a transfer would not be possible once the conscript had completed the entire duration of military service required; this would mean that he would while of “military age” remain under the obligation to attend regular shooting practice and be liable for mobilisation in the event of war or national emergency. This would represent an arbitrary exclusion from the possibility of recognition as a conscientious objector, in clear violation of the International Covenant.



3.7. CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS AS REFUGEES

by Connection e.V.³⁷¹

Since February 2022, approximately 5,400 Russian men aged between 18 and 45³⁷² have applied for asylum in Germany. Only a small fraction of these applications has been granted. These individuals are fleeing an unlawful military deployment and therefore should receive protection against potential persecution.

Connection e.V. has received a number of decisions from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), primarily rejecting applications from draft evaders and conscientious objectors from Russia. A key criterion for these rejections is that recruitment for the war in Ukraine is deemed "not significantly likely", that they don't have to face a "real risk" or persecution. The implications of this for the affected individuals will be elaborated upon in the following article. We will also examine whether the decision-making practices of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) align with international law. Before doing so, we will address the contextual conditions in Russia.

We have previously provided detailed accounts regarding the situation of deserters and military service evaders from Ukraine³⁷³ and Belarus³⁷⁴ elsewhere.

3.7.1. On the Situation in the Russian Federation

3.7.1.1. Differences: Desertion, Draft Evasion and Conscientious Objection

To understand and assess the legal background and asylum options, it is important to define the terms:

Most individuals who are obligated to serve in the Russian military but refuse to do so are classified as draft evaders. They have already evaded military access prior to any potential recruitment and have not yet received a summons. They are sometimes also referred to as conscription refugees.

In contrast, deserters have received a summons and are considered soldiers from that moment onward, or they are already serving in the military and are fleeing from it.

Conscientious objection was recognized as a human right by the European Court of Human Rights in 2011³⁷⁵ and refers to a personal decision not to serve in the military, which is often communicated to the authorities or military. Both draft evaders and deserters may choose to declare their conscientious objection.

3.7.1.2. Legal Framework: Conscientious Objection and Desertion in Russia

In Russia, there is a mandatory military service obligation that applies to all men between the ages of 18 and 30.³⁷⁶ On May 25, 2022, a law was passed in Russia allowing for the recruitment of men up to the age of 65 into the army.

An application for conscientious objection can only be submitted prior to receiving a summons. Reservists and soldiers do not have the right to file an objection request. When applications are reviewed, this should ideally be conducted by an independent body; however, in Russia, the military is involved in the decision-making process. The opportunity for conscripts to submit a conscientious objection request at any time, as stipulated by international law, is not guaranteed.

³⁷¹Further information is regularly provided by Connection e.V. as part of the #ObjectWarCampaign, <https://objectwarcampaign.org>.

³⁷²<https://www.tagesschau.de/investigativ/abschiebungen-gerichtsentscheid-wehrpflichtige-russland-100.html>

³⁷³https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2937

³⁷⁴<https://www.connection-ev.org/article-4217>

³⁷⁵<https://en.connection-ev.org/article-1412>

³⁷⁶<https://en.connection-ev.org/article-3878>



Additionally, a further amendment to the law in November 2022³⁷⁷ allows for conscientious objectors who are serving in so-called alternative service to also be conscripted into the military to perform unarmed service.

Desertion is strictly prosecuted,³⁷⁸ especially during wartime. Mediazona reported on June 18, 2024, that there have been approximately 10,000 criminal proceedings in Russia since the beginning of the war.³⁷⁹ In separatist regions, forced recruitment occurs, and those who refuse are sent to the front lines or imprisoned.³⁸⁰

3.7.2. Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court

3.7.2.1. Duty to Refuse an Aggressive War

The Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court establishes individual responsibility for the commission of war crimes, particularly genocide and crimes against humanity.³⁸¹ A war always involves soldiers being ordered by superiors to, for example, target civilian objectives, thereby committing a war crime. This is even more apparent in the case of Russia's war against Ukraine, where the war itself constitutes an act of aggression and is therefore unlawful under international law. Article 25(2) of the Rome Statute states: "A person who commits a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court shall be individually responsible and liable for punishment in accordance with this Statute."

Soldiers thus have a duty to refuse unlawful orders from their superiors. However, in the context of military engagement, this is practically impossible, as being deployed to the front always means making a decision within a hierarchy and value system dictated by military force, in an environment dominated by military power, against an order issued by superiors. Those who do refuse often risk their lives. For those who do not wish to take such a risk, the only option left is to flee the military, that is, to desert. Those who want to avoid such a situation altogether can only consider conscientious objection—provided it is feasible and accepted—or to evade conscription, which is a form of military service evasion.

Thus, conscientious objection—provided it is feasible and accepted—or fleeing from a military that is waging an unlawful aggressive war is the objectively most sensible step to avoid being placed in a situation where one could be compelled to commit war crimes.

Now, in the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we are unambiguously dealing with an act of aggression that is condemned under international law. Therefore, when assessing the accountability of soldiers, it is no longer solely about the possibility of committing unlawful acts during a war. The war itself, as well as participation in it, must be considered unlawful under international law.

Conversely, it can be stated that anyone facing the threat of forced recruitment has the obligation, in light of the provisions of the Rome Statute, to refuse or evade participation in an unlawful act of aggression.

This general principle is reinforced by another provision of the Rome Statute.

3.7.2.2. Criminal Responsibility for Complicity

Article 25(3)(c) of the Rome Statute also defines criminal responsibility for complicity.³⁸² It states: "In accordance with this Statute, a person a person shall be criminally responsible and liable for punishment for a crime (if that person) (c) aids, abets or otherwise assists in its commission or its attempted

³⁷⁷ https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2797

³⁷⁸ <https://en.connection-ev.org/article-3878>

³⁷⁹ <https://zona.media/news/2024/06/18/awol-10k>

³⁸⁰ <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/zwangsmobilisierung-im-donbas-von-russland-unterstuetzte-separatisten-zwingen-maenner-zum-kaempfen-a-a909279a-da74-4244-8a1d-32c685bfe5db>

³⁸¹ <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/Rome-Statute-eng.pdf>

³⁸² <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/Rome-Statute-eng.pdf>



commission, including providing the means for its commission;” This means that not only can soldiers in combat be held accountable, but also individuals who contribute to or provide assistance that enables such a war to be conducted.

The European Court of Justice addressed this issue in the case of US deserter André Shepherd. André Shepherd, a US soldier who served as a helicopter mechanic in Iraq in 2004, evaded further deployment during a stay in Germany and applied for asylum in 2008. He based his claim on the Qualification Directive of the European Union, which protects, under Article 9, those who evade an unlawful war or unlawful acts and who face the prospect of persecution. In its ruling, the European Court of Justice concluded in paragraph 46 that “Article 9(2)(e) of Directive 2004/83 must be interpreted as meaning that it covers all military personnel, including logistical or support personnel;”³⁸³

The European Court of Justice states that for the relevance of such complicity, there must be “indispensable support”. However, it is clear that a war cannot be conducted without logistics, without the supply of weapons, ammunition, and provisions, without repair and maintenance work, without military infrastructure measures, without medical services, and much more. Furthermore, conscripts do not have the ability to decide where and how they are deployed. They cannot refuse one type of service in order to be assigned to a task that may be deemed less “indispensable supportive.” This is a fact that is often overlooked. Again, it holds true that anyone who wants to avoid being placed in a situation where they are compelled to perform work or services that contribute to an unlawful war must evade military access at an early stage.

3.7.3. Focus on Jurisprudence

In the following sections, we will examine the current jurisprudence especially in Germany, particularly regarding deserters and conscientious objectors from Russia who have refused to participate in or have evaded military service or have deserted. There are some positive developments in this area, but it is mostly observed that rejections are issued in asylum procedures.

3.7.3.1. BAMF: “Significant Probability” versus Internationally Compliant Action

In several decisions from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) that we have reviewed, persecution is excluded on the grounds that it is “not significantly probable” (not a real risk) that the applicants would be conscripted into the armed forces or sent to the war in Ukraine. Here is an excerpt from a decision dated September 24, 2024: “Due to the sheer number of potentially mobilizable reservists, a future summons of the applicant is not significantly probable. The statistical risk of conscription, given approximately 25 million reservists in Russia, of which about 5.5 million are in the age group up to 35 years (the first mobilisation priority), even in the case of a renewed mobilisation of 300,000 men, would be less than two or less than six percent.” (AZ 10114310 – 160) This text appears repeatedly and is currently a standard response to the concerns of military service evaders seeking refugee protection in Germany.

The argument is fundamentally based on probabilities. Is it likely that a person will actually be conscripted into the military and sent to war upon their return? The fact that a call-up is unlikely does not really help those affected. They left the country in light of a situation where, during the partial mobilisation in October 2022,³⁸⁴ widespread raids occurred, recruitment were made arbitrarily, and there were several thousand cases in which individuals were wrongfully recruited.³⁸⁵ Now, the decisions argue that such occurrences are not expected in the foreseeable future, and therefore are not “significantly probable”.

³⁸³ <https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?jsessionid=C31A2A36188B77C6B70E5BAEB43E2284?text=&docid=162544&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=557378>

³⁸⁴ https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54c00acde4b022a64cd0266b/t/634e6d49461e6e3e53ef33d6/1666084170488/IFOR+136+HRCttee_+formal+briefing+statement+Russia+-+public.pdf

³⁸⁵ <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/putin-teilmobilmachung-ukraine-krieg-russland-102.html>



Let us briefly consider what this concretely means. Of course, applicants have the option to appeal such decisions from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) and thereby force a hearing before an administrative court. However, it can be assumed that the administrative courts will not rule differently, as demonstrated by the Berlin Administrative Court on November 24, 2023: "The chamber is convinced, based on the evaluation of the available evidence, that at the relevant time of the court's decision, it is not significantly probable that the plaintiff will be conscripted against his will into the Russian army or drafted and sent to the front in Ukraine in the foreseeable future." (AZ 33 K 499.16 A)

After a rejection by an administrative court, there are still legal avenues available. Ultimately, however, it is to be expected that the judgment will attain final sooner or later. And then it is unambiguously stated: "The applicant is required to leave the Federal Republic of Germany within 30 days of notification of this decision; in the event of an appeal, the departure deadline ends 30 days after the final conclusion of the asylum procedure." If the asylum seeker does not comply with this requirement, they may be deported.

This process and the assessment of significant probability applied in asylum law lead to the result that individuals who do not wish to be conscripted into an unlawful war may be rejected and, in doubt, also deported. That there have already been initial deportations was reported by Tagesschau on October 1, 2024.³⁸⁶

This means, on one hand, that internationally compliant behavior, i.e., the refusal to participate in an unlawful war, is not protected. On the other hand, it means that the support for this group mentioned in various resolutions and statements by politicians is not forthcoming.³⁸⁷ The affected individuals have been and continue to be abandoned.

3.7.3.2. Recognition Generally Only in Cases of Desertion

It is fundamentally established that the persecution of conscientious objection and desertion is generally not considered a basis for asylum.³⁸⁸ Judicial rulings indicate that military service obligations are a general state duty that applies equally to all citizens (or at least to all citizens of conscription age and, in some cases, male). Therefore, prosecution and punishment for refusal are classified as legitimate state actions. Although the European Court of Human Rights recognized conscientious objection as a human right in 2011, the persecution of conscientious objectors is only regarded as a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights in individual cases, which only raises the possibility of protection against deportation.

The German Federal Ministry of the Interior, however, views the situation differently specifically for Russian deserters, as it assumes that they face persecution for political reasons.

According to a statement from the Federal Ministry of the Interior in May 2022, it can be "assumed that impending acts of persecution are generally related to a ground for persecution (§ 3b Asylum Act). Since the term 'war,' in reference to the aggression against Ukraine, can already be penalized as an oppositional political expression in the Russian Federation, desertion—as an active expression against warfare—can be viewed as a manifestation of an oppositional conviction."³⁸⁹

However, the statement from the Federal Ministry of the Interior explicitly further clarifies that Russian "conscription refugees are not included in this discussion".

³⁸⁶ <https://www.tagesschau.de/investigativ/ndr-wdr/abschiebungen-russland-krieg-100.html>

³⁸⁷ <https://en.connection-ev.org/article-4051>

³⁸⁸ <https://en.connection-ev.org/article:conscientious-objection-and-asylum-may-2021>

³⁸⁹ https://de.connection-ev.org/pdfs/2022-05-17_IM.pdf



3.7.3.3. High Rejection Rate of Asylum Applications

This practice of the BAMF clarifies why such a large percentage of asylum applications from Russian citizens are denied. Apart from cases of desertion, refugee protection is generally only granted to individuals who have been politically active and therefore face persecution. Looking at the statistics regarding decisions from 2022 to 2024, we find that only 6.3% of male applicants aged between 18 and 45 receive any form of protection, while 32.6% are rejected.

The number of "formal case closures" is also very high. This term mostly refers to decisions made under the Dublin III Regulation.³⁹⁰ This regulation determines which European country within the Schengen Area is responsible for processing an asylum application.

Many Russian military service evaders or deserters were only able to reach Germany through illegal escape routes via land through Eastern European countries or entered with a visa through another EU country. As a result of the Dublin III Regulation, that country is usually responsible for processing the asylum application, even in cases where they would receive extensive support from relatives or friends here in Germany.

To counter this, some church congregations have taken Russian conscientious objectors into church asylum.³⁹¹ This aims to prevent deportation, particularly to countries such as Lithuania, Poland, or Croatia.

3.7.3.4. Some Positive Decisions

In the asylum procedures of Russian deserters and conscientious objectors, a provision of European legislation, known as the Qualification Directive,³⁹² repeatedly plays a role. Article 9 of this directive governs who can be recognized as a refugee in the European Union.

It includes a clause stating that this applies in cases of impending prosecution for refusing to participate in unlawful wars. Russian conscientious objectors, military service evaders, and deserters face such prosecution. However, jurisprudence raises the question of under what circumstances this provision applies.

The European Court of Justice, the highest court in the European Union, has already ruled on this matter twice.³⁹³ This has defined certain conditions that, unfortunately, make it unlikely that affected individuals will actually achieve protection given the current situation.

The individuals must have previously submitted a formal application for conscientious objection in their country, which was denied, or at least must not have been protected from being sent to the war zone as part of the troops. They must demonstrate that they were indeed recruited and that deployment in the war is a serious threat. Very few will be able to meet these criteria.

However, the Administrative Court in Halle clarified how it could still be possible in a decision dated April 27, 2023.³⁹⁴ In the case of a subsequent application from a Russian national of Chechen ethnicity, it ruled: "In the case of the plaintiff, there is a subsequent flight basis because, as a 38-year-old Chechen man without health restrictions, he faces the threat of forced conscription for military service in Ukraine upon return to his home country.

Prosecution in the sense of § 3a(1) of the Asylum Act can also include prosecution or punishment for refusing military service in a conflict if the military service would involve crimes or acts that fall under the exclusion clauses of § 3(2) of the Asylum Act. [...] The war waged by Russia in Ukraine is an unlawful act of

³⁹⁰ <https://www.asyl.net/themen/asylrecht/asylverfahren/dublin-verfahren>

³⁹¹ <http://www.connection-ev.org/pdfs/BeilageFreitag.pdf>

³⁹² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2011/95/oj>

³⁹³ <https://en.connection-ev.org/article-3531>

³⁹⁴ <http://www.asyl.net/rsdb/m31630>



aggression, and according to the evidence presented in the proceedings, it appears significantly probable that the plaintiff, as a healthy Chechen man, will be conscripted against his will for a Chechen combat unit and sent to Ukraine to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity or at least act contrary to the goals and principles of the United Nations."

Another positive decision was made by the Administrative Court of Berlin on March 20, 2023,³⁹⁵ in the case of a 17-year-old Chechen: "The plaintiff faces a serious risk of inhumane and degrading treatment, as it is significantly probable that he will be conscripted into military service upon his return, and from that point, there is also a significant risk of being sent to the war in Ukraine, where the plaintiff could expect to be forced to participate in an unlawful act of aggression and in actions that violate international law and/or human rights, or to suffer serious harm to his person and life."

The Grand Chamber of the National Court of Asylum (CNDA) in France ruled on September 6, 2023,³⁹⁶ that Russian nationals who refuse partial mobilisation or forced conscription in the context of the war in Ukraine must be granted refugee status, as they would be compelled to commit war crimes directly or indirectly due to the widespread commission of such crimes by Russian armed forces. However, they must demonstrate that they are indeed at risk of recruitment for the war.

The court also noted that the partial mobilisation in September 2022 was broadly defined and that it was not possible to evade military service by performing alternative civilian service. Furthermore, the mobilisation was fraught with numerous irregularities affecting both the individuals involved and the mobilisation procedures. The CNDA also stated that the partial mobilisation is still in effect de jure and de facto, even though the Russian Minister of Defense declared that the mobilisation goal was achieved by the end of 2022. Individuals who oppose mobilisation must expect criminal prosecution and sanctions.

3.7.3.5. Higher Administrative Court Sees No Threat

On August 22, 2024, a ruling from the Higher Administrative Court of Berlin-Brandenburg overturned a similar positive ruling from the Berlin Administrative Court (AZ 12 B 17/23). This case involves a young Chechen man who has not yet completed military service in Russia. Although the court assumes that he could be conscripted for military service, it sees no threat. It concludes that he would "not be significantly likely to be deployed in Ukraine and thus in an unlawful war." Artyom Klyga, head of the legal department of the Movement for Conscientious Objection in Russia, contradicts this in a letter November 11, 2024: "No, men can be mobilized even without prior military service. (...) For example, I was personally called up for mobilisation, even though I was exempted from regular military service."

Regarding a possible deployment in the Kursk region against the Ukrainian troops that have invaded there, the court states that it "takes place on Russian territory" and serves "to defend against the Ukrainian offensive." The court concludes: "The combat deployment of conscripts does not occur to unlawfully conquer, occupy, or annex the territory of Ukraine or parts thereof." Therefore, the plaintiff faces no "entanglement in the act of aggression against Ukraine."

This ruling is indeed very sobering, as it confirms the practice of rejecting affected individuals due to "not significantly probable" circumstances. On the other hand, it demonstrates that the Higher Administrative Court of Berlin-Brandenburg recklessly divides Russia's military actions into those within Ukraine and those outside of Ukraine, completely disregarding the concept of complicity, solely to deny any protection. Unfortunately, we must assume that other courts will follow this line of reasoning.

³⁹⁵ http://www.asyl.net/fileadmin/user_upload/31617.pdf

³⁹⁶ <https://www.cnda.fr/decisions-de-justice/jurisprudence/decisions-jurisprudentielles/des-lors-qu-ils-seraient-amenes-a-commettre-des-crimes-de-guerre-les-insoumis-a-la-mobilisation-partielle-en-russie-doivent-etre-reconnus-refugies>



3.7.4. Summary: Against the Logic of Numerical Manipulations

We note that there are different legal approaches to penalizing unlawful acts, acts of aggression, and unlawful wars. There is even the approach through the Qualification Directive of the European Union that individuals who refuse to participate in such unlawful acts and fear persecution should be protected. However, legal practice views this only as an exception that must be proven by the refugee themselves. This is implemented in a particularly obvious manner through the definition of "significant probability" or "no real risk".

This is unacceptable. International law imposes an obligation—both on states and on individuals—to behave in accordance with international law, meaning they must not engage in war crimes, unlawful acts, or acts of aggression. Individuals cannot be exempted from this duty on the grounds that it is not significantly probable that they will find themselves in such a situation.

In short: if there is a duty to refuse and evade participation, then these individuals must also receive protection if they face any probability of persecution. In asylum procedures, this should mean that authorities must prove that such persecution is not only unlikely but does not exist at all. In other words: in every individual case where an administrative decision leads to an asylum seeker being forcibly recruited for an act of aggression after rejection and deportation, this should be regarded as complicity.



3.8. CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION IN TIME OF WAR AND OTHER NATIONAL EMERGENCIES

The special time when society faces existential threat is a challenge to conscientious objection both as a human right and a life position. With Russian invasion of Ukraine, an EU candidate for membership, European public is increasingly pushed by the media and mainstream politicians into preparations for war, including reintroduction of compulsory military service for men and women. When conscientious objection and alternative civilian service is mentioned in this context, – unfortunately, too rarely, – it is a result of hundreds of years of war resistance and civil disobedience reflected in political and legal institutions and culture, but short of proper mainstream commitments. Conscientious objection is presented as a marginal option for a very few individuals or groups, ambitions to drag the wide public into the war machine are strong, and there are no signs of wide-scale preparations for nonviolent resistance in case of war as alternative to “defensive” warfare. Worsening the situation, instead of preparing the public for knowledge-based and skilled nonviolent resistance to all warfare, some inconsistent activists associated with antimilitarist movements controversially deny foreign military threat, undermine credibility and legitimacy of peace movement frantically denigrating domestic security policies with all sorts of nonsensical justifications of aggressions and tyrannies, that must be nonviolently resisted, not apologized and accommodated.

In this context, European Bureau for Conscientious Objection is monitoring readiness of societies to guarantee human right to conscientious objection to military service in time of war and other national emergencies, both domestically during conscription and internationally providing asylum to refugees who risk be punished in their countries of origin for conscientious objection to military service in times of war, regardless whether it is a “legitimate” “defensive” war or illegal war of aggression.

There is a significant risk that, if peace movements will not organize nonviolent resistance to credible threats for security of the people (including not only foreign threats, but also “defense” overspending and corruption harming welfare, lack of reasonable restraint and democratic human rights based civilian control in the matters of national security at home), the military will dictate and forcibly impose their solutions as the only option, attempting to conscript everyone including even pacifists with all the cruelty army is able during the war, like it is happening in Ukraine, where conscientious objectors face torture, imprisonment, arbitrary detention, and huge fines. Though there is a hope it might change after Constitutional Court of Ukraine opened proceedings regarding a constitutional complaint of Dmytro Zelinsky, a Seventh-Day Adventist imprisoned for conscientious objection, and the head of the Court asked for an amicus curiae brief the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), a Council of Europe’s body of experts in constitutional law. An opinion quickly provided by the Venice Commission, though the hurry didn’t added to its quality, unequivocally stated that “under no circumstances may a conscientious objector to military service be obliged to bear or use arms, even in self-defence of the country.” The opinion also stresses that the incorporation of the individual into a military structure might contradict the beliefs of some conscientious objectors, and that requires of the state to “set up a system of alternative service which must be separated from the military system, shall not be of a punitive nature and remain within reasonable time limits. Access to alternative service must be non-discriminatory and submitted to fair and transparent mechanisms”. Venice Commission pointed out that “non-military service, for example by providing aid to distressed citizens or by helping endangered citizens to evacuate from war zones, is not necessarily less dangerous than military service,” and therefore “conscientious objection and the fulfilment of the duties of solidarity towards one’s co-citizens are not necessarily incompatible,” since for a conscientious objector it is a way to “share the social burden of



alternative civilian service on an equal footing with his compatriots in military service."³⁹⁷ This opinion is a first legal document of the Council of Europe explicitly recognizing human right to conscientious objection to military service in time of war, and we could expect it will influence the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and domestic jurisprudence on the continent and in neighbourhood.

European reaction to Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine from the first days included consideration of conscription with a little attention to nonviolent resistance. President of European Council Charles Michel was not alone when in 2022 after his calls on Russian soldiers to desert and promises of asylum³⁹⁸ he started to call for preparations to war in Europe and reintroduction of compulsory military service for men and women³⁹⁹. Despite France in 2024 granted visas to six Russian deserters⁴⁰⁰, the EU failed to protect those who refuse to participate in Putin's war of aggression, and they are persecuted domestically while remain unwelcomed and mostly don't get asylum in Europe⁴⁰¹. With a stunning majority in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe the resolution "Foreign interference a threat to democratic security in Europe" was passed with an amendment suggesting that antiwar movements must not be supported but treated with a suspicion in such a "foreign interference"; the amendment says that the Assembly "considers that any measures in support of so-called "anti-war movements" should be applied only in exceptional cases and to persons who have genuine and substantiated evidence of persecution and pressure from the Russian authorities for their true and sincere anti-war beliefs."⁴⁰² In Germany, the Federal Court of Justice passed a disturbing judgment allowing to extradite conscientious objectors to Ukraine where they are treated badly⁴⁰³. The decision faced serious criticism which reminds that civilians could protect their country at war without weapons⁴⁰⁴. German concept of "comprehensive defense" recognizes that the dangers posed by wars, armed conflicts and other major emergencies might be considered tasks of civil protection in order to tackle them with civilian measures.

Discussing at the France 24 news broadcast in May 2024 proposals of legislators in Italy and Germany to reintroduce mandatory military service and extend it to women after a Swedish example of reintroduction of conscription in 2017, Tony Ingesson, Assistant Professor in Political Science at Lund University, noted that conscientious objectors could do community service instead of conscription: "In a case of war, it's going to be widespread devastation of societies and there's going to be a lot of firemen, construction workers, repairment needed, that kind of thing. So, a lot of extra people are going to be needed... People who are not willing to take up arms would be able to contribute in another way."⁴⁰⁵

Sir Alex Younger, former head of UK intelligence, in the interview to a tabloid The Sun advocated reintroduction of conscription to face new international threats, defeat Putin and raise patriotism, but

³⁹⁷Ukraine - Amicus curiae brief on alternative (non-military) service, The Venice Commission, 18 March 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/ukraine-amicus-curiae-brief-on-alternative-non-military-service>

³⁹⁸EU council head suggests giving asylum to Russian deserters, AP News, 6 April 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-european-council-european-union-europe-19dac8d805d6da61d756120a1093e37f>

³⁹⁹La guerre en Ukraine et l'objection de conscience, <https://agirpouirlapaix.be/la-guerre-en-ukraine-et-l'objection-de-conscience/>

⁴⁰⁰In EU first, France grants visas to six Russian soldiers who deserted Ukraine war, France 24, 17 October 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20241017-eu-first-france-grants-visas-six-russian-soldiers-deserters-ukraine-war>

⁴⁰¹Russian deserters in limbo: Facing criminal charges and unanswered asylum claims, Euronews, 12 April 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/2024/04/12/russian-deserters-in-limbo-facing-criminal-charges-and-unanswered-asylum-claims>

⁴⁰²Foreign interference a threat to democratic security in Europe, <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/34179/compendium#amd-34226>

⁴⁰³Federal Court of Justice attacks basic right to conscientious objection. Connection e.V., <https://en.connection-ev.org/article-4391>

⁴⁰⁴Kathrin Groh, Kriegsdienstverweigerung im Kriegsfall verboten. Wenn ein Strafsenat des BGH ohne Not die Verfassung falsch auslegt, <https://verfassungsblog.de/kriegsdienstverweigerung-kriegsfall-bundesgerichtshof/>

⁴⁰⁵Compulsory military service back on the table in Europe as war rages in Ukraine. France 24 English, 28 May 2024, <https://youtu.be/pXtIYfaAJ9w>



suggested that this “national service” might include non-military duties for conscientious objectors: “In the Second World War, for instance, when we were absolutely desperate for every man and woman to fight, some conscientious objectors, who refused to fight, were punished in some form, whether it be jail, or put on arduous duties. Now we're not at the moment, absolutely not, and there must be a system to allow those people, who don't want to fight, to not fight and potentially do other things. I think, with the Swedish system it seems to work well, that if you really don't want to fight, then there are lots of jobs that you can do in support of the government, that don't necessarily lead to fighting. But I think it's a fairly small minority. I know that there's a lot of talk in this country at the moment that Gen Z and the woke generation just won't fight. I don't really hold that. Certainly, all the young people I know, they might not want to fight; in fact, none of us want to fight. I've been on the battlefield of the world for 37 years and I know that it's horrific, and you want to avoid it if at all possible. But we look at the history of this country. When the call has gone out in the WWII, the WWI and even before that, the young men and women of this country have always stepped forward, you know. And the vast majority will do that. So, those who don't want to, I think, will still be a very small percentage.”⁴⁰⁶

Among growing calls to arm Europe to the teeth, introduce conscription and intervene militarily in Ukraine, it is especially important to check how strong our legal safeguards of human right to conscientious objection to military service are and whether relevant provisions in national legislation and international law could protect under martial law or in time of other national emergency the right to refuse to kill which is especially precious and deserves special protection in such dangerous time. Human rights to peace and conscientious objection to military service are intrinsically linked.⁴⁰⁷ Freedom of conscience is an important restraint to the ability of commanders to mobilise people for bloodshed and give them cruel orders, thus preventing extreme escalations and tragedies, helping causes of human rights, humanitarianism and nonviolent resistance, strengthening the practice of peaceful conflict resolution. For example, conscientious objectors movement in the United States contributed to finishing the Vietnam war, and patriotic conscientious objectors in former Soviet Ukraine engaged the youth into the national democratic movement which facilitated the peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union and the declaration of national independence.

In this chapter, we don't intend to provide comprehensive overview of the situation in all European countries, that would be rather found in the country chapters. Our aim is to recall main authorities in international law, to identify best domestic practices today and in the past, as well as current problems and challenges.

Historical predecessors of conscientious objection, exemptions from mandatory military service for clergy and monks in case of war, existed for millennia in many countries of different cultures and religions. Introduction of conscription and recognition of human right to conscientious objection was linked to eruption of enormously lethal modern wars of mass armies.

During WWI, UK conscription law in 1916 included a provision recognizing the right of conscientious objection for members of historical peace churches, and conscription law of 1917 in the U.S. exempted members of well-recognised “religious sects or organisations” whose creed or principles prohibit any form of participation in war.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶US military back-up no longer exists - young Brits may need to be forced to fight Putin. The Sun, 7 April 2025, <https://youtu.be/DZ6H-o3wghg>

⁴⁰⁷Michael Wiener and David Fernández Puyana (eds.), *A Missing Piece for Peace: Bringing Together the Right to Peace and Freedom of Conscientious Objection to Military Service* (UPEACE Press, 2022).

⁴⁰⁸Charles Moskos and John Chambers (eds.), *The New Conscientious Objection: From Sacred to Secular Resistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).



During WWII, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, answering to a question in UK Parliament, said that “...the rights which have been granted in this war and the last to conscientious objectors are well-known, and are a definite part of British policy. Anything in the nature of persecution, victimisation, or man-hunting is odious to the British people.”

First of all it is of vital urgency to highlight that, according to international standards, as a recognised human right, conscientious objection is an universal right which applies to everyone and is non-derogable, thus it applies always and there cannot be exceptions.

In the practice, with spreading legal recognition of conscientious objection in Europe, relevant acts envisaged wartime provisions for conscientious objectors.

In Germany, the right to conscientious objection was recognised by Article 4 of the 1949 Constitution (Grundgesetz) in wording clearly applicable in time of war (“No one may be compelled against his conscience to perform war service as a combatant”).

In France, by Articles 6, 7 of the 1963 Law n°63-1255, in time of war and mobilisation conscientious objectors must be provided with unarmed service or relief missions of national interest.

According to Italian “Rules for the recognition of conscientious objection” (Marcora Law No 772/1972), Article 10: “In times of war, those admitted to unarmed military service or alternative civilian service may be assigned to non-armed services, even if these are dangerous activities.” Additionally, it is worth highlighting the Italian Constitution in its art. 11 says “Italy repudiates war as an instrument of offence against the freedom of other peoples and as a means of settling international disputes; it allows, on equal terms with other states, the limitations of sovereignty necessary for an order that ensures peace and justice among nations; it promotes and favours international organisations directed to this end.”⁴⁰⁹

Even the former systematic violators of the right to conscientious objection might conceive the necessity of wartime exemptions when they change their behaviour under international pressure. In Armenia, after a lost case (Bayatyan v. Armenia) before the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights, a law on alternative service amended in 2013 allows alternative service in time of war or national emergency. The Constitution of the Republic of Armenia in Article 76 does not directly protect alternative service envisaged by Article 41 (3) from suspension in case of emergency, but requires compliance with international commitments with respect to derogations from the state obligations. It is notable that during the 2020-2021 martial law, when notifying the Council of Europe about derogations from its obligations under European Convention on Human Rights, Armenia did not derogate from Article 9 of the Convention which protects the right to conscientious objection.

Instead of such commendable compliance to international human rights law, neighbouring Azerbaijan chose not to recognise conscientious objection despite that its 1995 Constitution allows the introduction of alternative service by a law. Such law was discussed but never adopted for decades, and many conscientious objectors were imprisoned despite that, in 2021, President Aliyev pardoned some prisoners of conscience. Usually this intentional gap in human rights legislation is explained as originating from the necessity to defend against Armenia.

Responding to the “state of war” excuse for violations of human right to conscientious objection to military service, in §97 of the judgement in the case *Mushfig Mammadov and Others v. Azerbaijan* (2019)⁴¹⁰, ECtHR ruled that a mere reference to the “necessity of defending the territorial integrity of the State” does not in itself constitute grounds capable of justifying the absence of an appropriate alternative service.

⁴⁰⁹ <https://www.senato.it/istituzione/la-costituzione/principi-fondamentali/articolo-11>

⁴¹⁰ <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-197066>



However, the same excuse is used in Ukraine where after the start of Russian full-scale invasion and the declaration of martial law on 24 February 2022, alternative service was suspended and conscientious objectors in some cases were imprisoned.

The situation in Russia is more complicated: there is no legal procedure for alternative service in time of mobilisation, but the Supreme Court in 2023 recognised it as a constitutional right. In practice, the applicability of such right is still uncertain and depends on future legislative regulation, which will hardly be sufficient for consistent conscientious objectors, since changes already adopted allow the transfer of people from alternative service to civilian jobs in the army during mobilisation.

The universally recognised citizen's duty to defend one's country, as well as a government's right to mobilise citizens for self-defence in international law, is a powerful argument usually invoked to deny conscientious objection claims. Some argue, however, that such a duty could be performed by nonviolent means and this way is even more preferable morally, because effective methods of nonviolent resistance to aggression, when prevalent and scaled to a macro level, might pave a way to the abolition of any war in the life of humankind. Humanitarian and civil protection work, democratic and human rights activism of conscientious objectors as well as their example of sticking to their moral principles, cherishing the sanctity of life, would improve resilience of the people and contribute to the survival of civil society in time of war, mitigate and remedy suffering and destruction.

It is not only beneficial but, in fact, necessary for democratic societies to respect freedom of conscience. As Harlan Stone, former Chief Justice of the United States, said when he defended the wartime exemption of conscientious objectors: "both morals and sound policy require that the state should not violate the conscience of the individual. All our history gives confirmation to the view that liberty of conscience has a moral and social value which makes it worthy of preservation at the hands of the state." Many legal scholars hold the same position, and the core of this argument is that conscientious objection is rooted in the personal sphere of inner beliefs, or the forum internum of the individual, which cannot be interfered with by the State, even in time of war or public emergency that may threaten the life of nation, thus being an absolute human right,⁴¹¹ especially since the sanctity of life as a fundamental human right explains conscientious objections to taking a human life for any "reasons."

This thinking is reflected also in the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights and in the jurisprudence of the UN Human Rights Committee.

The fundamental character of the freedoms to have or adopt a religion or belief which entails conscientious objection to military service enshrined in Article 18(1) of the Covenant is reflected in the fact that, according to Article 18(2) of the Covenant, no one shall be subject to coercion which would impair their freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of their choice,⁴¹² and these provisions could not be derogated from, even in a time of public emergency, as stated in article 4(2) of the Covenant.

In the concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Finland (CCPR/CO/82/FIN, para. 14),⁴¹³ the Human Rights Committee stated that the "State party should fully acknowledge the right to conscientious objection and, accordingly, guarantee it both in wartime and in peacetime." In the case *Petromelidis v. Greece* (CCPR/C/132/D/3065/2017)⁴¹⁴ and in other Views on individual communications the Committee also recalled that the fundamental character of the freedoms enshrined in article 18 (1) of the Covenant was

⁴¹¹Özgür Heval Çınar (2013). *Conscientious Objection to Military Service in International Human Rights Law*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

⁴¹²It is important to differentiate an absolute right to have or adopt a religion or belief, which is absolute according to Article 18(2) of the Covenant, from a freedom to manifest it, which could be limited according to Article 18(3). Denial in legal recognition of conscientious objection to military service violates the right to have or adopt religion or belief.

⁴¹³<https://undocs.org/CCPR/CO/82/FIN>

⁴¹⁴<https://undocs.org/CCPR/C/132/D/3065/2017>



reflected in the fact that the provision could not be derogated from, even in a time of public emergency, as stated in article 4 (2) of the Covenant. According to the 2022 OHCHR analytical report (A/HRC/50/43),⁴¹⁵ similarly, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and other special procedures of the Human Rights Council have strongly considered that the right to conscientious objection to military service is part of the absolutely protected right to hold a belief under article 18 (1) whose internal freedom cannot be restricted by States (forum internum approach).

Since the Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights allows derogation of State parties to the Convention from their obligations under the Convention only “provided that such measures are not inconsistent with its other obligations under international law,” and since the ICCPR is almost universally ratified in Europe, the non-derogable character of the human right to conscientious objection under ICCPR implies also its non-derogable character under ECHR. Articles 9 and 15 of the Convention are thus connected: a conscientious objector’s rooted inner beliefs, or forum internum, regarding military service is inviolable.

The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection calls on all European states to guarantee the human right to conscientious objection to military service in time of war and other public emergencies and to provide protection and asylum to all refugees in danger of being repressed for their conscientious objection in their countries, especially in wartime and if the legal recognition of conscientious objection in these countries is absent or does not comply with international human rights standards.

⁴¹⁵<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/50/43>



4. RECOMMENDATIONS

EBCO will be presenting this report to the European Parliament, to the Parliamentary Assembly and the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, and to various State authorities. In each case EBCO accompanies it with a set of targeted recommendations.

Meanwhile EBCO repeats its general recommendations, applicable to all European States:

1. if they have not already done so, to **abolish all compulsory military service**, and meanwhile refrain from prosecuting or otherwise harassing conscientious objectors, those who support them or advocate conscientious objection, with no further action required from such persons; or –secondly– providing a nonpunitive and non-discriminatory alternative service of purely civilian nature, that must be not subservient to the military system, but designed and managed with participation of conscientious objectors;
2. to **recognise in law the right to conscientious objection to military service**, including the right to conscientious objection to all forms of mandatory registration, education and training for the purposes of conscription in peacetime and in time of war, and ensure that it is possible for all conscientious objectors to avoid enlistment in the armed forces and for all serving members of the armed forces or reservists to obtain release without penalties should they develop conscientious objections, and that the civil, economic and political rights of conscientious objectors are fully protected;
3. to **recognize conscientious objection as a vital part of pluralism and freedom of religions and beliefs in democratic society**, ensure awareness of legitimacy of conscientious objection among officials and the public, and ensure non-discrimination of conscientious objectors, who should not be subjected to hate campaigns and should not be presumed guilty in crime of draft evasion, or any other crime, and compelled to prove their innocence;
4. to immediately cease any recruitment into the armed forces of **persons aged under 18** and stop any military-type training of such persons;
5. to accept **applications for asylum** from all persons seeking to escape military service in any country where there is no adequate provision for conscientious objectors, and especially where they are in danger of being otherwise forced to participate in armed conflict;
6. to **decrease military expenditure and increase social spending**, and to make available to citizens with conscientious objections means of specifying that no part of the taxes which they have personally paid is directed towards military expenditure;
7. to introduce **peace education** in all parts of the education system and prevent any form of militarisation of curricula.
8. To **make adequate arrangements for conscientious objectors and nonviolent action** in their institutional and legal preparations for any kind of emergencies and responses to perceived threats for peace, remembering that legitimate scruples of conscience might preclude significant number of civilians from subordinating to military system, and under no circumstances may a conscientious objector to military service be obliged to bear or use arms, even in self-defence of the country.



5. NEW PUBLICATIONS

New edition of QUNO pamphlet on international standards: *International Standards on Conscientious Objection to Military Service 2024*, June 2024⁴¹⁶

6. THANKS

EBCO wishes to sincerely thank all governments, national human rights institutions, as well as international and national non-governmental organisations and solidarity groups who responded to the request of EBCO for provision of information.

EBCO thanks as well all those who will contribute to the dissemination of its Report in a way that it can meet its purposes such as raising awareness and giving needed attention to violations of the human right to conscientious objection to military service.

⁴¹⁶<https://quno.org/sites/default/files/resources/CO%20International%20Standards%20June%202024%20-%20Final.pdf>