

A Break in your Biography or Career Boost? The Views of German Youth on Military Service

Exploratory qualitative research on the prospect of
re-introducing a form of military service in Germany



Annual Report 2025

Table Of Contents

Why the Topic of Military Service?	p. 3
Research Design	p. 5
Key Findings and Hypotheses	p. 7
1) General Backdrop to Military Service in Germany	p. 19
2) Main Target Audiences Who Directly Influence the Decision to Serve in the Military: Opponents and Supporters	p. 23
2.1) <u>Opponents</u> : Mothers of Young Adults (Aged 16-26)	p. 25
2.2) <u>Supporters</u> : Adult Men Who Did Military Service in Their Youth (Aged 45-60)	p. 30
2.3) <u>Supporters</u> : Military Recruits, Both Male and Female (Aged 16-30)	p. 36
3) Potential Recruits (Young Men & Women): View of Opportunities, Risks and Benefits of Military Service	p. 42
3.1) Military Service	p. 43
3.2) Voluntary Social Service (FSJ) as an Alternative to Military Service	p. 56
4) Military Service Model: Main Concepts and Its Effective Implementation	p. 60

Why the Topic of Military Service?

- ▶ The debate surrounding a possible reintroduction of compulsory military service has gained significant momentum in Germany in recent years. Geopolitical uncertainties, staff shortages in the German Armed Forces, and social debate about the common good and a sense of duty raise the question of if and how it would be possible to develop a contemporary model of compulsory military service acceptable to the broader population.
- ▶ 27 Bachelor students in Consumer Psychology & Market Research of the University of Pforzheim took on the delicate subject of military service in Germany for the summer semester 2025 (March-August 2025) in a seminar on Qualitative Analysis held by N. Dagneaud under the supervision of Professor emerita Gabriele Naderer.
- ▶ The following fundamental **research questions** were examined:
 - ▶ What are motivations and barriers to military service in 2025?
 - ▶ What do different target audiences think about military service?
 - ▶ How to design and communicate a model of compulsory military service that could be sure of broad support in Germany?
- ▶ The students had the difficult task of designing research that explored these aspects, defining the relevant target audiences, selecting respondents and conducting and analysing in-depth interviews.
- ▶ Since the university context did not permit a transversal and comparative analysis, Séissmo took on all 54 interview transcripts and scrutinized the material to make the results available to all interested readers. We would like to thank Oksana Bandurovych at this point.

Research Design

TARGET AUDIENCES

Profile 1.
(N=16)

Young men
aged 16-26



Profile 2.
(N=16)

Young women
aged 16-26



Profile 3.
(N=8)

Military recruits
aged 16-30
(current or recent,
male and female)



Profile 4.
N=6

Adult men aged 45-60
who did military service
in their youth



Profile 5.
N=8

Mothers of young
adults aged 16-26



54 participants in total

Method: **online in-depth interviews** (IDIs),
duration – approximately 60 minutes each

Location: **Germany**



Date of Fieldwork: **May 2025**

Key Findings and Hypotheses

There are significant obstacles to re-introducing a form of military service in Germany...

The topic of military service/compulsory military service **was neither on young people's radar nor popular** at the time this study was conducted. The lack of a clear position and prevailing fears and barriers imply a **'don't care' attitude**.

The image of the Bundeswehr among young people is currently far from aspirational and the forces are not a popular career choice. The value of and respect for the military (service) only becomes **apparent in retrospect**, after having experienced it first-hand.

The topic of *Wehrpflicht* (literally the "duty to defend") is only seen through the prism of "duty" – **imposed** externally and **evoking ideas of danger and urgency**. Despite recent discussions in the media, however, respondents **did not share any sense any urgency or acknowledge a threat**.

The topic is not viewed in the context of **deterrence or defence** and the related defence industry – rather, an **offensive military narrative** prevails. A re-introduction of military service is only felt to make sense when **preparing for war, not when defending peace**.

... and the general impression is that re-introducing military service is off-topic and unnecessary.

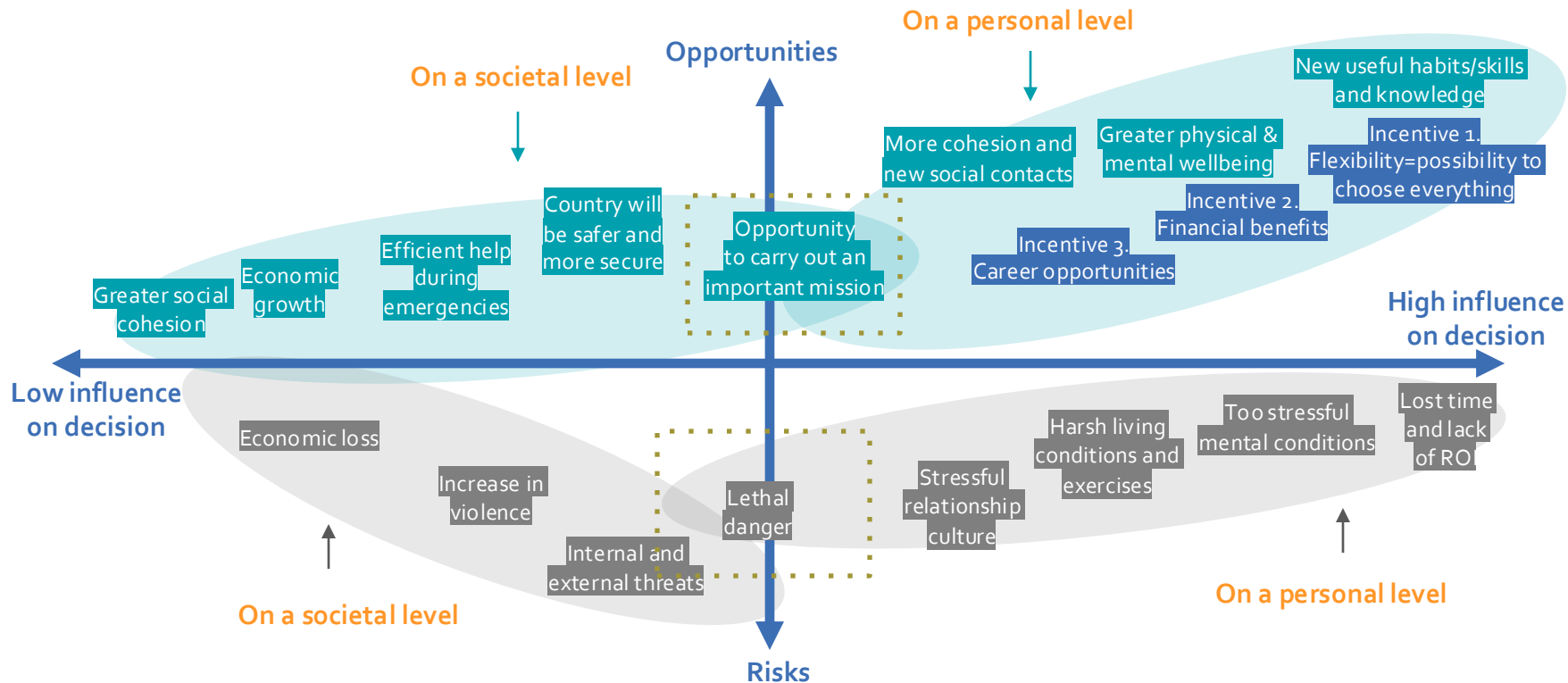
Since there is no sense of urgency, **funding required** for reintroducing military service is **viewed critically**, with the overwhelming view being that this money would be **better spent in the social sector**.

Due to their history, Germans are traditionally (deeply) **pacifist** and very **sceptical about militarisation and patriotism**. Active or compulsory military service is synonymous with **(re-)militarisation** for Germans and associated with a **heroic spirit or culture** that pacifist German citizens neither see a need for nor endorse.

Germans **value peace, democracy and freedom**, and many believe that these values should be defended. However, the most likely target audience for military service – young men aged 16-26 – feel they are **neither prepared nor cut out to serve** in the army.

While Germans understand that we are faced with a precarious world today, which triggers anxiety, but they **prefer not to think about it**. Strengthening the army by introducing military service also raises fears that Germany may become entangled in a war.

What's in it for me? Personal gains and pain points shape Germans' attitudes towards military service.



Key findings for young men aged 16-26: no interest at all, - a lot of communication and motivation will be required



- ▶ This target audience is far removed from military topics and has never considered conscription. They show **no particular interest in serving**. Even if they have friends in the Bundeswehr or a father with military experience, they know little about it, as it is **not a popular/relevant topic to them**.
- ▶ They perceive it as something currently **outdated/ obsolete and unnecessary/ meaningless for Germany**. They feel it only attracts a few young men interested in weapons. The idea of military service triggers feelings of **stress, fear, and rejection** in this group. They view it as a sacrifice (you have to give up a lot) and an obstacle in life.
- ▶ Many young men understand that the current situation in Europe may demand the deployment of armed forces, but they **do not feel concerned** and all insist that military service should be voluntary.
- ▶ Deep down, the research indicates that they are **afraid of not meeting the physical requirements** and also have **doubts about their own masculinity**. The perceived “virility” of the Bundeswehr collides with their soft urban lifestyle.

- ▶ Motivating them will demand an **active information campaign, very attractive benefits** (in particular, good pay and opportunities for professional and educational development; not too difficult living conditions and great flexibility, etc.), and **time between school and further education**.
- ▶ Young people in an apprenticeship are more willing to **join the military**, while university students are less keen. However, it appears that if a **compulsory system were to be introduced for everyone (including girls)** most of the target audience would accept it.
- ▶ **The most motivating factors for this target audience are:** presenting military service as a good opportunity (as opposed to merely being coercive and a waste of time), preparing for independent adult life by acquiring new useful professional and personal skills. It should also be **character-building, improve mental and physical fitness**, and provide a **sense of community, solidarity and a bolder outlook on life**.



Key findings for young women aged 16-26: they tend to reject military service, but FSJ (voluntary social service) can be a good alternative



- Deep down, the research indicates that young women are **afraid of not meeting the physical requirements** and **doubt their own femininity**. The “virility” of the Bundeswehr collides with their soft urban lifestyle.
- This target audience is **the one furthest away from the topic of military service**, they have never thought about it, and do not associate themselves with military service at all.
- Most young women **do not feel military service is necessary in Germany** nor do they consider the country to be exposed to any great danger at present.
- They primarily associate military service with **aggression and raw masculinity**, very harsh conditions and pointless activities, a very stressful environment, and as impacting negatively on people’s personality.

- Women do not consider themselves to be suitable for military service** for reasons of their greater sensitivity, their physique and certain physiological characteristics. But not all men agree!
- Young women tend to **reject military service for themselves**.
- They could be motivated** by a voluntary type of military service, or its civilian form (FSJ), and information about **opportunities in the army that do not involve weapons or extreme physical exercise**: i.e. the medical service, administrative work, even marketing activities, etc.



Key findings for recruits aged 16-30: they are mostly impressed by their military experience and could be used as ambassadors



- ▶ This target audience **could be used as ambassadors for military service**, as they have very positive memories of their time in the forces and recognize its positive influence on their personal development and preparation for adulthood.

- ▶ A typical motivation for joining the Bundeswehr is **a lack of clear plans for a professional career after school** and a desire to take time out to acquire useful life skills and gain some professional orientation. Therefore, the BW should seek close contact with schools and conduct an information campaign among teenagers, explaining all the bonuses and benefits of military service.

- ▶ It can be assumed that military service appeals to a particular type of young person – those **with a strong sense of justice, a desire to help others and defend the right values**. These are often people who consider a career in the police or an officer career. Emotionally, they need **adrenaline, emotional intensity, and a very active, non-office lifestyle**.

- ▶ They are also attracted by **good conditions** (accommodation, food, salary); a clearly mapped-out life and career prospects as well as opportunities for personal development (physical, mental and social).
- ▶ Therefore, communications relating to military service should be directed primarily **at this target audience and young people with similar needs and values**.
- ▶ It would be useful to dispel one prevalent myth: that military service = weapons and strenuous routines and is therefore only relevant for physically strong men without pacifist convictions. In reality, **the armed forces need people to work in a wide variety of fields, often unrelated to war, weapons and combat operations**.
- ▶ It would also be very useful to explain **the importance of strict rules and restrictions and their positive aspects for the individual**. Recruits value such aspects highly with a view to their personal development and in helping them to develop a strong and confident personality.

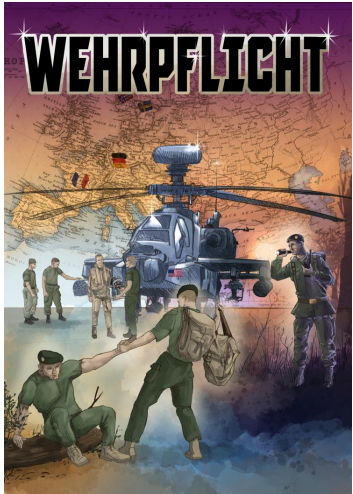


Key findings for adult men with experience of military service: they see it as being useful and relevant at the moment and could become ambassadors



- ▶ This group **could also become ambassadors for military service**, as they view their time with the Bundeswehr very positively and consider military service to be an important stage in young people's lives, one that turns them into strong and mature individuals. **Military service provides an opportunity to acquire many useful skills and habits and is character-building.**
- ▶ Adult men have many **vivid memories** of their time in the Bundeswehr thanks to interesting activities and unique experiences they made, recalling a spirit of **community and solidarity, pride** and a sense of **respect** from other people. Financial benefits and useful qualifications also played an important role for yesterday's young adults.
- ▶ Therefore, for adult men, **the most effective information campaign would emphasise personal development and the many opportunities that military service has to offer.**

- ▶ This target audience feels abandoning conscription was a mistake and believes that **the current situation in Europe requires a return to military service.**
- ▶ They find **the previous conscription method effective** and would support reintroducing a similar system, but **without the excessive pressure and autocracy that characterized the previous model.**
- ▶ The new version should also **offer a choice** between military service and FSJ and be based on a modern leadership culture.
- ▶ It is essential to **improve the image of the Bundeswehr and enhance the prestige and authority of military service by stressing its mission to protect peace and democracy.**



Key findings for mothers of young people aged 16-26: they mostly oppose military service and will require a special form of communication



■ This target audience has many concerns regarding military service, primarily seeing it as being **fraught with danger for their children, including the risk of injury and death**. They associate military service with many negative emotions. Thus, they want to **protect their children** by avoiding military service and persuading themselves that their children are not fit enough to serve.

■ Some mothers see military service as **an opportunity for young people to acquire the skills and qualities** necessary for adult life. But the negative connotations and anxiety prevail. Only a few mothers (2 out of 8) would be likely to agree to military service for their children given the current situation in Europe and the potential need to defend their country and democracy.

■ They would be proud if their children took on this important mission. However, **they would need a lot of guarantees to be sure that their children would be safe** (physically and psychologically). They see their role as supporting their children during military service.

■ However, this type of support makes military service impossible, as **mothers want to be in total control during their “child’s” service**. Consequently, it is safe to assume that they are really only **paying lip-service with** regard to their willingness to agree to military service.

■ This target audience is important because it **has a direct bearing on the values, beliefs, and behaviour of young people**. Therefore, **a special approach will be required when communicating with mothers** about military service, emphasizing the absence of risk but highlighting the real opportunities for strengthening their child's personality (emphasizing all the benefits, such as self-confidence, new useful knowledge and skills, etc.).

■ They can be encouraged and reassured by promising a choice between military and social service, a choice of location, etc. And, of course, **the ideal option for them would be voluntary military service**.



Conclusions regarding the assorted targets: different communicational approaches will be required

Young men aged 16-26



Need a lot of communication. The most motivating factors are:

Present military service as good preparation for an independent adult life by acquiring new useful professional and personal skills. Show that it is character-building, improves mental & physical health, and provides a sense of community, solidarity, and courage

Young women aged 16-26



Need a lot of communication. The most motivating factors are:

Present FSJ as an alternative to military service and/or activities that do not involve the use of weapons or excessive physical exertion

Military recruits aged 16-30



Can be used as ambassadors for military service (in advertising, at social events, etc.). This could be achieved in different ways (e.g. by creating private clubs of former recruits/soldiers with the aim of promoting military service among the younger generation)

Adult men aged 45-60 who did military service in their youth



Mothers of young adults aged 16-26



The most difficult target group, requiring a special communicational approach: Emphasise the lack of risk, but highlight real opportunities for strengthening their child's personality, promise a wide choice of career (military or social, choice of location, etc.) or underline the voluntary nature of military service

The traditional model of military service should be made more flexible, tolerant, transparent and modern

Expectations of an attractive military service model



Military service should be...

► **Voluntary**

OR

► **Offer a choice of military and social service options**

► **Flexible:** with the option of choosing your location, type of activity, duration of service

► **Transparent:** providing an honest appraisal of all the pros and cons of military service

► **Modern:** without inane/ meaningless traditions and rituals (such as 'collective punishment', excessive pressure), demonstrating modern leadership, respect for conscripts; an individual approach for each conscript, taking into account their individual characteristics and physical abilities, creating a friendly environment with good living conditions

► **Fair:** for all young people of a certain age

► **Beneficial:** offer plenty of opportunities for personal and professional development

Consensual parameters:

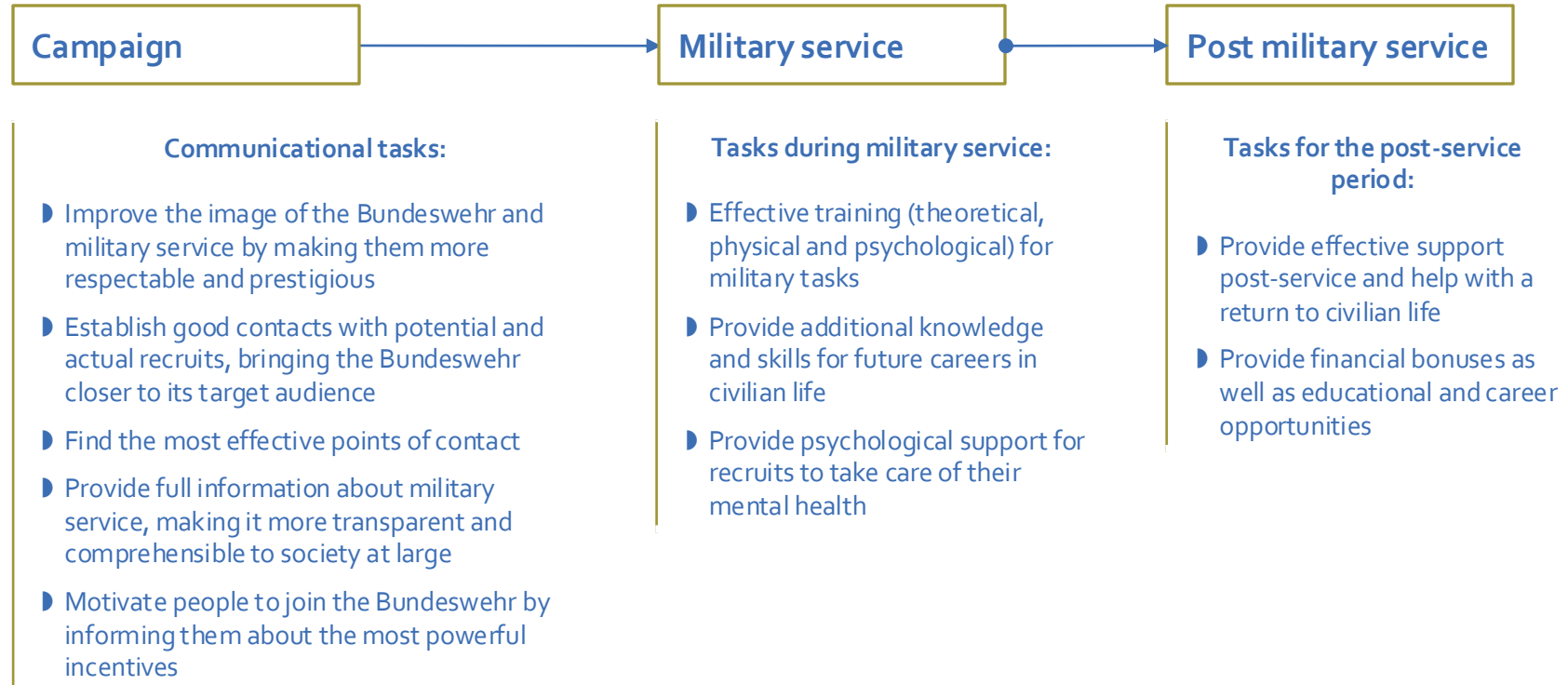
► **Age:** between 18 and 21 (after school)

► **Duration:** 12 months

Controversial:

► **Gender:** divergence in perceptions between genders

A model of military service should not just embrace the service itself, but also the post-service period, as well as providing concrete information



General Backdrop to Military Service in Germany

Military service currently enjoys little support but a need to maintain security and peace in the future could trigger greater interest

Germany now

Lack of governmental unity

Division in society and politics, popularity of the extreme right/left and National Socialist ideologies

Too much **anxiety** in society

'Society is at a loss', about what to do and what to expect

One of the main reasons for the low interest in military service

Military Service

Due to German history and Germans' long-standing pacifist values, military service is not particularly revered in Germany and is perceived as **something from the last century, associated with right-wing extremist ideas, no longer felt to matter, fails to interest most people**

The Bundeswehr does not have a good reputation and is often associated **with right-wing radicals**, with nazi networks within the army often being discussed in the press

Military personnel are held in low esteem. The profession of a soldier is not normally considered attractive due to low pay, poor communication, and the stereotype of a poorly educated, violent man

One of the main reasons for the low interest in military service

Security

The possibility of living **in peace and freedom**

Peace

The absence of war; the ability to live safely and freely—without fear of violence, oppression or threats. It also means **democracy:** the ability to express your opinion, self-determination and make plans for the future in freedom

Main idea behind military service: peace & democracy must be preserved and defended, and a willingness to take a clear stance and stand up for it

The alarming situation facing the world means greater focus on the military today with the media and some social circles influencing perceptions

Key factors focussing attention on the topic of military service:

Alarming situation in Europe and elsewhere:

- ▶ Anti-globalization, **isolationist sentiments in the USA**
- ▶ **The war in Ukraine**
- ▶ **The danger of war in Europe** is growing, and everyone must be prepared
- ▶ There is a risk of **war for Germany** too*
**but some young men (aged 16–26) consider this unrealistic*
- ▶ **Increasing degree of militarisation** in society, disproportionately high orders for the arms industry => rising demand from the federal government => need for additional Bundeswehr personnel

Key influencers on the topic of military service:

- ▶ Different **media** (esp. daily news from Der Spiegel), social media
- ▶ Other people with **military experience** (father, uncle, husband, friends etc.)
- ▶ **Family**, parents
- ▶ **Bundeswehr communicational campaign** (stand at education or career fairs etc.)

Society's expectations regarding the topic of military service:

- ▶ **Open discussion** of the topic in society, explaining why military service should be introduced
- ▶ **More information** in the media about what military service looks like—conditions, benefits, risks, etc.

For some people:

- ▶ **Referendum** on the issue in order to hear the opinions of the entire population esp. young people

« War is such an enormous topic at the moment. You see it on the news every day – Ukraine, Gaza, and now Taiwan again... It's simply everywhere. And I think that's exactly why there's such a focus on the topic of compulsory military service again. Because a lot of people are beginning to realise, "Ooh, maybe peace isn't something we can take for granted after all." And then you immediately think, we need to be prepared. We have to strengthen our army. (mother, 47)

But of course, it's always influenced by your parents. You can say that it isn't, but I think everyone's influenced by their parents. (m, 20)

Attitudes toward military service are linked to social status & education, views on masculinity & gender and (lack of) exposure to military topics

Have a positive attitude
towards military service



People with military experience and/or
interested in military service:

- ▶ Fathers/other men who **have experienced military service** and consider it useful for educating young men
- ▶ People **who have volunteered** for military service
- ▶ **Male teenagers**, who consider military service to be a man's job with the important duties of justice and defence, who dislike boring office work but have no clear career plans after finishing school

Have a negative attitude
towards military service



People, or their loved ones, who could be involved
in military service:

- ▶ **Mothers who have young sons and daughters** and are convinced that 'not every young person is suited to military life, and my son is definitely not suited for life in the army'
- ▶ **Majority of young people** (both male and female) – Generation Z, who often oppose weapons, believe in pacifism, are not interested in military service, are accustomed to freedom and not ready to be submissive and follow orders from superiors



Subject to military conscription

**Main Target Audiences Who Directly
Influence the Decision to Serve in the
Military: Opponents and Supporters**

There are three target audiences who directly influence the decision to serve in the military

Opponents:

1

Mothers of young adults (aged 16-26)



What it is important to know about this target....

- ✓ Fears and beliefs regarding military service
- ✓ Approach to education and upbringing
- ✓ Vision for children's future

2

Recruits aged 16-30 (male and female)



What it is important to know about this target....

- ✓ Motivation & triggers for military service
- ✓ Positive & negative experience with military service

3

Adult men (aged 45-60) who completed military service in their youth



Supporters:

Opponents:

Mothers of Young Adults (Aged 16-26)



There are 2 main types of mothers of young adults, but most are opposed to compulsory military service

Two visions of military service exist among this target audience:



Vision 1 (most common):

"Military service is very stressful, even traumatic, and brings with it the risk of injury or death"

They **OPPOSE** compulsory military service and do not consider it relevant for their children



Majority of the qualitative sample



Vision 2 (less common):

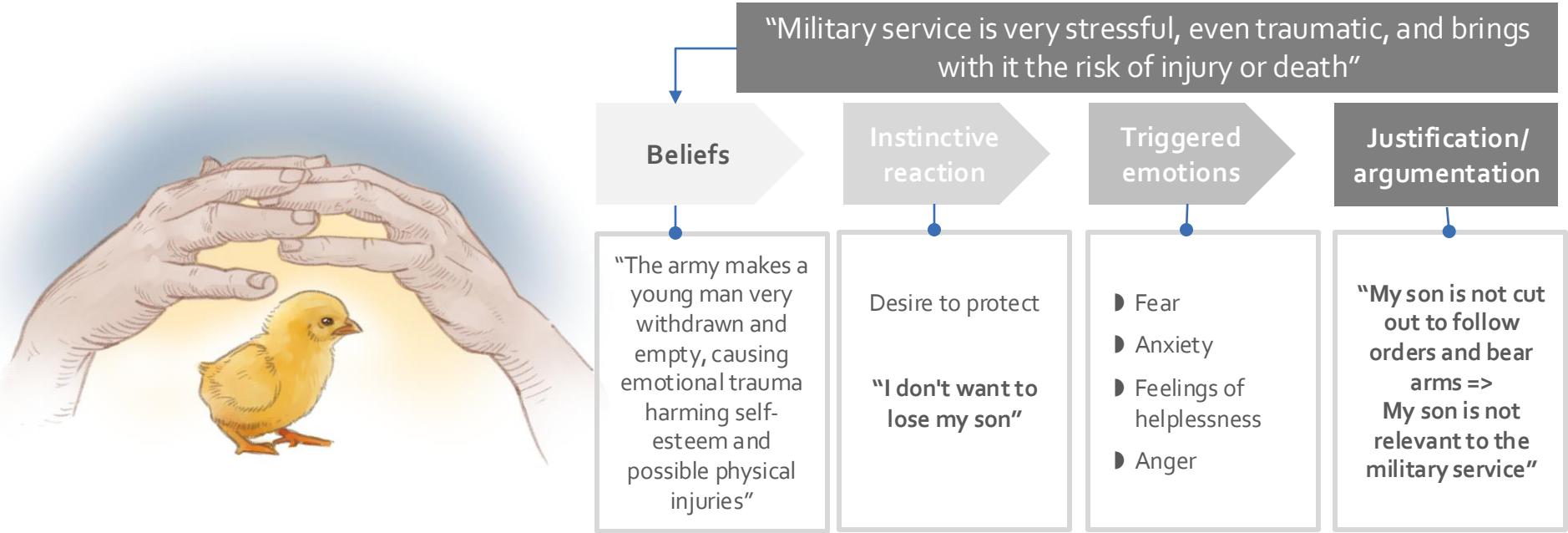
"Military service is a legal responsibility when it comes to ensuring a country's security, protecting its freedom & democracy and promoting peaceful coexistence"

They are **VERY WARY** of compulsory military service and would only consider it for their own children if a whole plethora of conditions could be met (flexibility, strong mentoring, having the ability to influence their children whilst serving etc.)



Minority of the qualitative sample

Opponents are convinced that military service presents a risk to their children and try to protect them from it

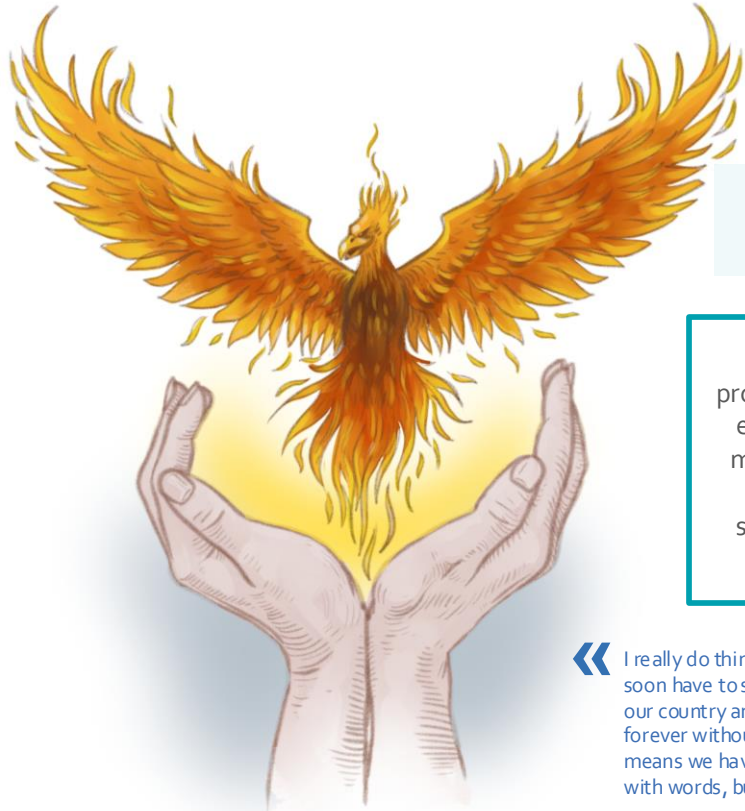


« I've heard of cases where young people were under so much pressure while on duty that they became suicidal. I know they're extreme, tragic cases, but it shows you have to pay close attention to who's suitable and when someone reaches the end of their tether... (mother, 49)

I can't imagine anything worse than my children being faced with such situations. (mother, 43)

It's just not for him. He's such a quiet, thoughtful kind of guy who needs structure, yes, but not orders. If you'd tell him, 'You've got to go to so and so and do so and so' – he'd withdraw into his shell entirely. He hates sports too. (mother, 54)

Mothers with a more tolerant attitude are convinced that they can stay in control and provide support while their children are serving



“Military service is a legal responsibility when it comes to ensuring a country’s security, protecting its freedom & democracy and promoting peaceful coexistence”

Beliefs

“The army provides valuable experience => maturity, team spirit, inner strength, self-confidence

Instinctive reaction

Desire to support
“I will be their advocate and negotiate the best possible terms. I would accompany them, encourage them, but also set limits if I noticed that it was getting too much”

Triggered emotions

Pride and respect

Justification/ argumentation

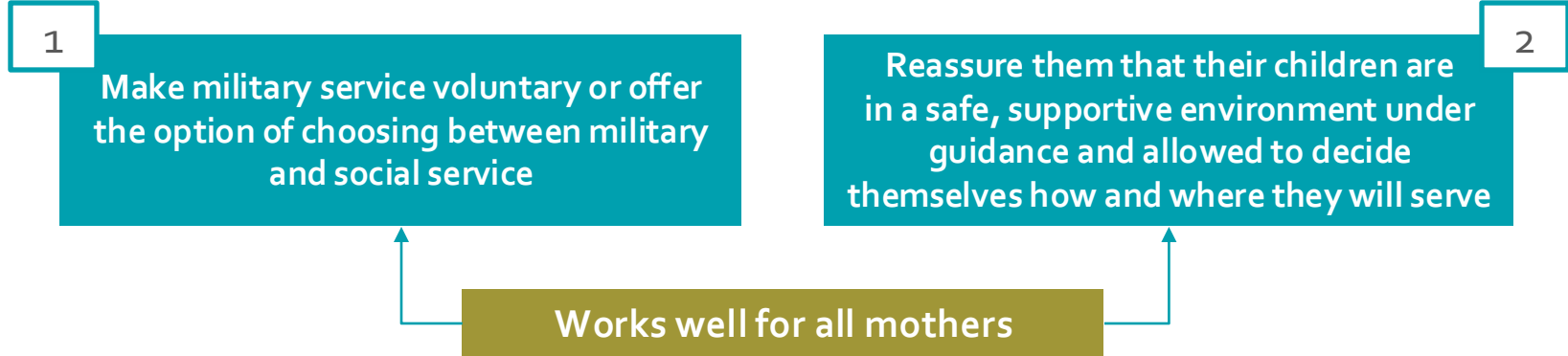
“My goal would be for them to emerge from this experience stronger – knowing that they have my support at all times”

« I really do think that we in Germany, and indeed throughout Europe, will soon have to start thinking very seriously again about how we can defend our country and values. The days of when we thought we could live in peace forever without having to worry about it are probably over. And that also means we have to be prepared to protect our democracy actively. Not just with words, but also with deeds if necessary. (mother, 61)

If I’m entirely honest, I do have mixed feelings about this as a mother. On the one hand, I can see how young people can benefit from such a service, all the things we’ve talked about: taking responsibility, team spirit, becoming more mature. But on the other hand, there’s also this very natural, emotional impulse to want to protect your children. (mother, 49)

Mothers need persuading that military service is not a threat, but rather an opportunity for their children, providing a safe and supportive environment

How to appease opponents and encourage tolerant mothers :



Motivating mothers' recommendations for future recruits:
"Don't see challenges as a burden, but seize on them as an opportunity to learn about yourself and the world"

Supporters:

Adult Men Who Did Military Service
in Their Youth (Aged 45-60)



Older men who did military service have generally developed a sense of an existential external threat and feel their country needs defending

These men lived in an age when military service was mandatory for all men, so they simply **took it for granted**. And all young men did it. You could avoid military service for reasons of conscience, but very few did.

An **existential threat from the Soviet Union** and the Cold War meant that there were objective reasons for compulsory military service. There was also a broad appreciation of this threat among the general population.

This target audience views the rejection of the concept of mandatory military service in 2011 **as a mistake**.

The Bundeswehr, "citizens in uniform," was **respected and recognised** by society. It was a force that guaranteed peace and defended democracy.

Compulsory military service is now seen as a **deterrent to prevent possible aggression from Russia** and as a potential tool to defend the country in the case of aggression.

Adult men consider military service to be a rite of passage in young people's lives

This target audience describes military service as a '**great time**' evoking pride and very positive memories. All men remember their first day in the Bundeswehr in detail and now view some of the negative aspects as having been beneficial for their personal growth after all.

For them, on a personal level, military service is a **rite of passage that prepares young people for independent adult life, teaching new useful skills and building their character.**

Adult men's recommendations for future recruits:
"Don't worry about some kind of war or emergency,
but simply think about your own personal
development"

WEHRPFLICHT



Older men who did military service still recall their personal rite of passage vividly



I just got to know some really cool people and had an amazing time. Sure, I served at an exceptional time, not every conscript is that lucky. I was fortunate enough to be stationed in Italy, Denmark and Norway. I worked with units from other countries. There were always British and American soldiers and troops from the host country there. It was great. [...] In Norway, we flew over frozen fjords with the American Army Air Corps in those classic Vietnam helicopters you see in the movies because they had to fly every helicopter for an hour a day to stop them from freezing up too much... You'd get chatting, of course. I found the Americans superficial, but they were often still pretty cool and laid back. They just asked, "Hey, do you want to fly with us tomorrow? We've got four empty seats in the heli," so off we went. (m, 60)



After a while, it got to the stage where the 6' 6" farmhand, who could carry a lot, got a blister, and then little Jürgen, who was only 5'9" and wiry, came along and said, 'Hey, I'll carry your heavy machine gun for you. The other guy would never come back to the dorm and bully anyone because he knew exactly who'd helped him. You don't get that kind of thing these days because there's no real sense of community anymore. [...] My worst experience? ... I had to keep watch in the forest and, unfortunately, they kept telling stupid stories that something had happened there from time to time. And I was really scared because I had to keep watch on my own. I was very alert the whole time. (m, 57)

Military service stimulates personal development, offers many interesting activities and provides important rewards



Positive experience

Personal growth

- ▶ The first and most important step towards adulthood is **to leave home** and make important life experiences
- ▶ The opportunity **to learn many new useful habits**: discipline, a sense of order ("blankets had to be perfectly ironed, clothes neatly folded" etc.)
- ▶ **Develop technical skills** (the ability to use tools such as a drill, sander, screwdriver, hammer), social skills and physical fitness

Activities & routine

- ▶ A structured daily routine, everything is **well organized** from first to last
- ▶ Many **interesting leisure activities**: cinema, sauna, sports facilities, library
- ▶ **Unique experiences** and unforgettable memories ("sitting in the front of a cockpit", "flying over frozen fjords")

Rational benefits

- ▶ **Financial benefits: basic salary in the German Armed Forces + allowances depending on place of service + various benefits** (e.g. separation allowance for married persons to pay for family accommodation)
- ▶ The opportunity of obtaining **a category 2 driving licence** and other useful qualifications

Emotional benefits

- ▶ A spirit of **camaraderie and solidarity**
- ▶ **Pride** in defending your country
- ▶ Earning the **gratitude and respect** of people the army has helped in times of need
- ▶ The opportunity to serve in **different countries** and meet interesting people

« Well, I found it really interesting and learnt a lot for myself, was able to follow and also achieve my goals, as it were. (m, 55)

I still fold my T-shirts the way I learnt to do so in the Bundeswehr. (m, 53)

Looking back is always easy, but I'd say, I'm glad that I did it, that I needed that experience. Because you learn a few things for the rest of your life there, and I have a certain pride in having completed my training like most of the others. (m, 60)

The main negative aspects are harsh conditions, dealing with restrictions, negative leadership



Negative experience

Harsh conditions

- ▶ Having to live a long way from home, and share a room with a lot of other men **without the usual daily routine** that existed before
- ▶ **Lots of exercise**, discipline, some **really tough classes**
- ▶ Lack of **privacy**, relationships with women
- ▶ **Having to work weekends** and nights
- ▶ Possible **tragic events**

Some inane rules & lack of freedom

- ▶ Some **stupid and boring tasks**, training and rituals ("classic long march with a backpack in rainy weather")
- ▶ **Silly punishments** for minor mistakes, disobeying orders
- ▶ Tunnel vision due to a **very prescriptive lifestyle**, with too much structure and hierarchy
- ▶ Lack of space for **creativity and dreams**

Officers & some comrades

- ▶ Some officers and NCOs may have **mental health** issues and take it out on the recruits
- ▶ Difficulties in establishing relationships with overly **dominant guys** who are physically stronger



You have your different tasks, your routine, a hierarchy. Everything's planned out, even in the morning. You put your uniform on, you don't even have to think about what you're going to wear, it's already predetermined. You don't have to worry about food or anything else. Your whole life is mentally detached and devoid of any creativity, dreams or ideas, because no one wants to hear any ideas you may have. (m, 53)

It was really the hardest thing I've ever done. We travelled 40 km down the Danube in RHIBs towards Passau, where there's virtually no current. And as I remember, it was 40°C that day. (m, 57)

Supporters:
Military Recruits, Both Male
and Female (Aged 16-30)



Military service is a good opportunity for exploring career options, character-building and enjoying intense experiences

Young volunteers...

- ▶ Believe in **national pride** and have a desire to give something back to their country. They believe in justice, feel the need to help people and to punish “bad guys”; want to do something important, defend democracy, freedom and their country
- ▶ Love sports, military equipment, adventure, variety in life, challenges, **are a adrenaline junkies**
- ▶ **Very active**, do not like working in an office; love to be outdoors
- ▶ Would like to have a **career in the military or police and like wearing a uniform**

Objective triggers

- ▶ **Lack of precise career plans after school** => need time to understand career preferences and the appeal of different professions
- ▶ **Advice of father/brother/friend** with military experience

Rational triggers

- ▶ **Wish to increase their** mental and physical strength
- ▶ Are **competitive**
- ▶ **Have prior knowledge & skills** enabling them to deal with any situation (including possibly war), can read a compass, survive in the wilderness etc.
- ▶ Defend **democratic values**

Emotional triggers

A desire **for adventure**, lots of different activities, **adrenaline**, to lead a positive and interesting life, enjoy a lot of experiences that cannot be obtained outside the military



I more or less went straight into the forces because I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to study something but didn't know what exactly. And I thought it would make more sense to join the forces before I started studying rather than afterwards. (m, 22, recruit)

There's no point in joining the forces if you're not prepared to, let's say, give your life to defend your values, Germany or your family - or the values that our democracy stands for. (m, 22, recruit)

Military service leaves a positive impression and offers many benefits, both financial and mental



Experience in military service...

- ▶ Brings back **good memories** and positive experiences
- ▶ **Very useful for mental and physical development** as well as for acquiring important life skills
- ▶ Increases **trust and respect** for the armed forces

Benefits

You are provided **with accommodation, good food, and a good salary**

Military service also makes you...

- ▶ More athletic, tougher, **stronger, shapes your character**, teaches you how to cope with difficulties much better, be calmer, more confident, obedient, more organized and disciplined, helps you overcome your “inner demons”
- ▶ **Fighting spirit and endurance**
- ▶ **Better communication skills**, team skills, teaches you how to rely on other people, become more tolerant and respect other people

« And then, of course, I also trusted the forces more, something which I perhaps hadn't really done so before. (m, 23, recruit)

I think I started on €1800 or €1900 and was on €2200/ €2300 when I got promoted after a year. The pay was actually very good when you consider that I was unskilled and had just left school. (m, 22, recruit).

I've somehow developed a desire to describe things much more accurately, to express myself much more precisely, because you simply have to express yourself succinctly and precisely in the army. (m, 19, recruit)

Young recruits acknowledge their personal growth and follow their aspirations



- « A uniform is only a status symbol. It's about giving something back to your country and doing it publicly (m, 23, recruit)
- « All I can really say, especially regarding the Bundeswehr, is that it's a really great experience and I don't think it harms anybody's personal development. (f, 22, recruit)
- « There's no point in joining the armed forces if you're not prepared to give your life to defend Germany, your family or the values that our democracy stands for (m, 22, recruit)

Military service teaches many useful life skills, fosters a sense of community and offers a wide range of interesting activities



Positive aspects of military service

- ▶ A combination of **discipline, exercise and teamwork**
- ▶ People are relaxed, get on well with one another, and there is a **very positive atmosphere in the community**
- ▶ Cohesion, a **sense of community**, sociability, the opportunity to make lots of friends
- ▶ **Your daily routine is usually very structured** and you can do lots of different things throughout the day
- ▶ There are **plenty of opportunities to learn important skills**: shooting, self-defence, team spirit, how to deal with conflicts or challenges, how to better understand your body and how it works, and what you can do to alleviate pain or other problems
- ▶ **Very varied training and different programmes** every day, each day is different from the last with little repetition
- ▶ **Interesting activities**: rock-climbing, climbing 7500 ft high peaks, marching
- ▶ **For pacifists**: there are many different types of activity not involving weapons: administrative work, driving, cybersecurity etc.
- ▶ Group instructors **closely monitor** their charges and know exactly what each person needs
- ▶ **Option of leaving** military service within the first six months



It was a pretty good and formative time overall, it was also meaningful. (m, 22, recruit)

I think it primarily did him good, it suited him, he enjoyed it, because otherwise I don't think he would have stayed any longer. I think he'd done it for about six months when he decided to stay on for another year. (m, 20, recruit)

You encounter things you don't normally experience in civvy street. (m, 22, recruit)

But there is a lot of pressure, rules and regulations, challenges, restrictions on your personal life, and some inane rituals



Negative aspects of military service

- ▶ The first three months are the hardest; you **have to get used to the discipline and conditions and a completely different way of life** with lots of new things and considerable pressure ("constant shouting")
- ▶ There are a **lot of restrictions on your personal freedom**, you have to subjugate yourself, obey orders at all times
- ▶ **Many physical challenges**: sleeping in the mountains or outdoors in the forest; there is no privacy during the week
- ▶ Soldiers are often faced with **poor conditions**: a lack of decent clothing, poor barracks
- ▶ **Excessively long working hours**, inadequate sleep. No free time during the day, no possibility of taking leave or weekends off when you want to
- ▶ Risk of **dying somewhere** abroad
- ▶ Impossibility/**difficulty of planning a family** due to transfers to another region every two years or even more frequently; no room for a private life
- ▶ **Poor coordination** between officers, sometimes pointless work/exercises
- ▶ The concept of '**collective punishment**'
- ▶ **Lack of respect** for the military in society
- ▶ **For women**: high level of competition/bullying, the need to assert oneself

« For me, the first few days felt really strange. I came from my job, where things were normal. We were all on first-name terms and everything, and then all of a sudden, you're confronted by someone who says, "I'm your superior, you must call me Sir!" (m, 25, recruit)

What I find particularly negative is that the people who give you orders simply do not communicate with one another, with the result that you're sent from pillar to post and then they say, 'No, not there,' and you finish up running back and forth unnecessarily the whole time. (m, 25, recruit)

Potential Recruits (Young Men & Women): View of Opportunities, Risks and Prospects for Military Service

Military Service

Initial associations with military service are largely negative due to high levels of anxiety and feelings of danger

Negative due to (irrelevant) link with war & weapons

Weapons training Weapons

Militarisation of society

Shooting, fighting

Angst Violence

War

Right-wing radicals Danger

Arrogance

Young men with a big ego

Pointless

Loud and broken

Negative due to (superfluous) harsh conditions

Delays your life

Delays your career

"Get your hair cut and your finger out"

Compulsion Pressure

Being away from home

Harsh life Lots of exercises

Discipline, order

Barrack life

Well outside of your comfort zone

Emotional breakdown

Neutral

Father's or uncle's experience

Soldiers

Already a muscular young
adult at 18/19

Military

Camouflage Young people

Basic military training for men

Politics

Army

Positive due to the values of cohesion/ unity and patriotism

Camaraderie

Sense of community

Reliability

Peace

Respect

Support

Hope

Germany

Young men doubt their contribution will have any impact and lack confidence in their own ability



« Perhaps that you're not good enough, that you simply put yourself under too much pressure because you see the other guy manages to complete the entire route march, perhaps even carrying a weak comrade's rucksack as well. And you look at him and see that he's a lot more muscular than you, a lot bigger and can do anything. He can light a fire or something like that and you don't even know how to. (m, 17)

« You have to do a lot of sport, sometimes you have to push yourself to your limit, which I think does a lot of young people good, teaching them a bit of discipline, I think it's very good in that respect because we young people are not very disciplined... (m, 20)

« I just can't identify with the military and the aggression behind it, and which is always part of it for me. I just can't identify with it and really don't want to have anything to do with it at all. (m, 21)

« Of course, my first thought is that I hope it won't be introduced, and my second thought is, if it is, then how can I manage to wriggle out of it somehow, because I don't want to do it? I don't want to take part... And then six months. I can only imagine it would be pretty shitty. Sorry, if I shouldn't put it like that. (m, 23)

Young women consider the military world to be overwhelmingly masculine and do not feel that they fit in



« They are woken up at 5 a.m. with whistles and God knows what else and everyone has to get up (laughs). This typical thing that you see in the movies etc. And then they all have to do 100 press-ups, eat their breakfast in 10 minutes, before they're driven off somewhere on these lorries to attend some training session, where, if they're no good, they get a good bollocking. And after that they have to crawl through the undergrowth, fend for themselves and then in the evening, when they're dead tired, they have to try and achieve some semblance of normality before collapsing into bed way too late because they're completely knackered. (f, 21)

« I'd find it bloody awful, to be honest, because I'd feel so restricted in doing what I wanted to do and not being able to take my own decisions, but instead having someone else dictating what I had to do. I would feel totally oppressed. (f, 16)

« Well, what I think will put most people off is actually the running, the tough exercise programme. The tight schedule. Maybe it's because I'm a very, very tidy person, for example. The idea of sharing a dormitory with other people, a room with 10 bunk beds – I think that would put me off too, for example. But to be honest, you never know what might happen. You might have health problems. (f, 25)

Difference between “WehrDIENST” and “WehrPFLICHT”: SERVICE versus DUTY, but only in direct comparison with one another



If we consider it to be a **form of social service**:

- ▶ An opportunity to learn many **social and communicational skills** with people from all walks of life
- ▶ An ideal option for women if all young people are to face compulsory conscription

There is no clear understanding of the difference. Some people understand *Wehrdienst* as being something **very similar to Sozialdienst**. But across all target audiences many equate *WehrDienst* with *WehrPflicht* since both stem from a direct threat to the country and the need to prepare for war

The majority view both terms negatively. The best way of achieving a consensus of opinion would be to offer
A CHOICE
(type of service, location, duration, etc.).

- ▶ Is associated with war => **a lot of negative emotions**: excessive anxiety, too stressful even to think about
- ▶ For mothers: A disaster: **mental and physical destruction of lives**
- ▶ The law stipulates that you must participate regardless of your personal wishes => no right to choose => reduced motivation => **depression and negative emotions towards one's country**
- ▶ Excessive restriction of freedom => feeling that you **are no longer in control of your life**
- ▶ It is mostly perceived **as an exclusively male activity**, mainly for men with “a thick skin” who want to be cool and strong

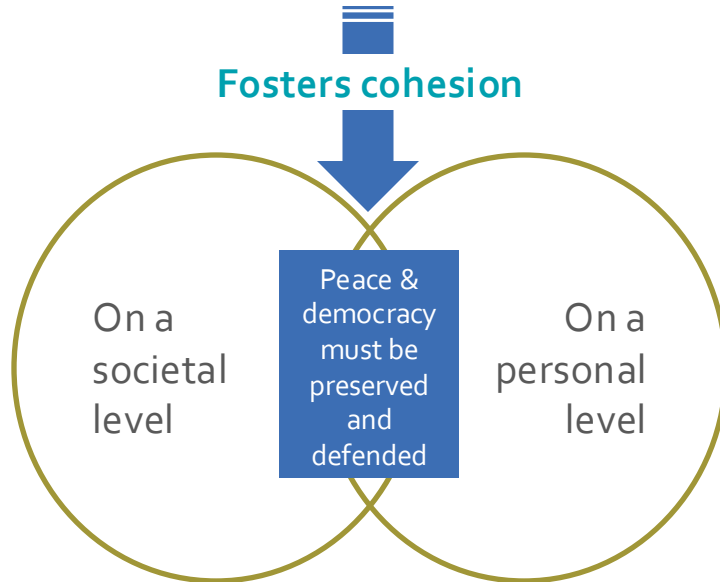


The actual time spent in service, i.e., training and preparing for possible deployment. (mother, 48)

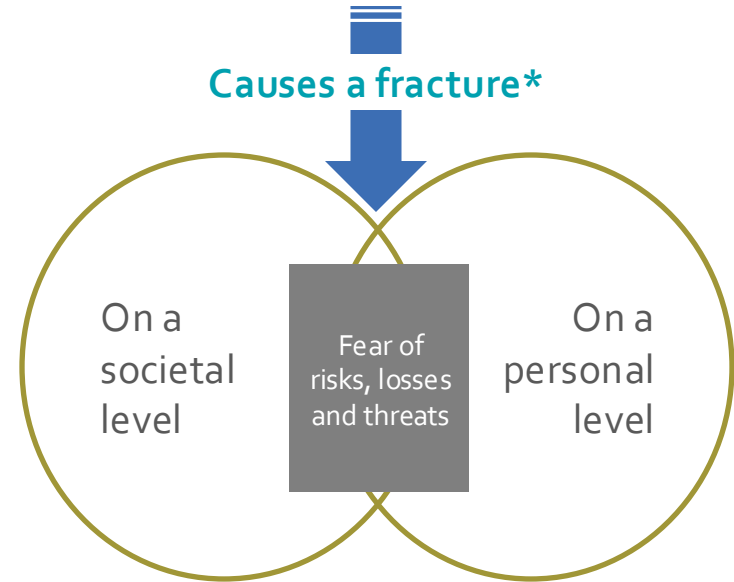
Of course, there are many more enjoyable jobs you can do during your FSJ, and I think I would still prefer to do an FSJ (f, 20)

The legal situation: young people could be drafted to perform military service either in the armed forces or, alternatively, in a social setting at the age of 18. (m, 23)

How is military service viewed?



How is military service viewed?



* in your personal biography, career, life but also in society

Benefits of military service for society: security, stability, sovereignty, economic growth, social cohesion



Benefits **for society**

- Internal and, above all, external security – a protective mechanism against attack in the event of war – people with military training who can fight for Germany in an emergency => **country is safer and more secure**
- Positive impact on the defence and construction industries, healthcare system, and **overall economic impact**
- Tax revenue from young people serving in the military is available earlier => **more revenue for the state**
- Assistance in the event of floods, fires, earthquakes, and other natural emergencies => **efficient help during emergencies**
- Experience passed on from parents and grandparents, service that unites the population, supports a sense of community and social equality (everyone is treated equally, regardless of social class), reinforces the sense of community => **greater social cohesion**



Military service is part of the social contract that provides **a sense of security, economic growth and greater social cohesion**



If everyone's in a position to defend themselves, others are afraid to attack because they know they'll be attacked back again. It's also important that when others increase armament spending, you do too, because otherwise you're an easy target, let's say, when talking about protection. (m, 20)



So if the burden were to be shared equally through voluntary military service, it would also help bring people from different social backgrounds together again. (m, 57)

You have to be prepared to take responsibility, even if it's risky or exposes you to danger. I remember reports of young soldiers securing humanitarian corridors in crisis areas to rescue civilians. It's not an adventure holiday. These are real human lives you're responsible for. (mother, 61)

Most people may simply feel safer as a result. (f, 21)

The personal benefits of military service relate to personal development and improving social skills



Personal benefits

Greater physical & mental wellbeing

- ▶ **Good athletic/physical training**, daily workouts, increased endurance, hardening, preparation for emergencies (war), extreme situations
- ▶ **Good mental improvement**: Greater strength and courage, learn structure and order, self-control, confidence, responsibility, discipline, punctuality, consequences, independence, ambition, order and cleanliness, ability to push yourself to the limit

New useful habits/skills and knowledge (also for a future job)

- ▶ **The positive impact on personal development**: learn how to interact with others, the ability to form a team, problem-solving, how to plan for the future and what to do for society, to be more determined and motivated
- ▶ **The opportunity to learn new skills**: shooting, pitching tents, vaccinations and first aid, disaster control, handling weapons, tanks etc.
- ▶ The chance to get to **know a new industry**, you can work in many areas after military service (craftsman, firefighter, police officer, internal security), a better starting point for the future job

More cohesion and new social contacts

- ▶ **A sense of community**, of belonging, solidarity, greater camaraderie, becoming a team player
- ▶ Opportunity to meet people from different regions and walks of life, time spent together with peers is fun and gives you the opportunity of making new friends, of having more useful and interesting **social contacts**

Opportunity to carry out an important mission

- ▶ **The opportunity to serve your country** and be a useful member of society



My uncles told me that, with hindsight, they thought it was good because it had a positive impact on their personal development. They said, 'You'll learn some important basic values over the course of the year.' Also, that it helped them a lot afterwards too. (m, 20)

It toughens you up in a positive way, so that you can then master the challenges you will face in the next phases of your life. (f, 24)

Risks of military service for society: dystopian anxiety, additional threats, confrontation, increased aggression, economic loss, no ROI



Risks to society

- ▶ Risk of getting involved in military action in other countries not related to Germany => **greater risk to soldiers' lives**
- ▶ The state loses tax income by mobilising those who are able to work and pay high taxes => **economic loss**
- ▶ Associated with left-wing and extremist elements of society => **increased confrontation within the country**
- ▶ Reinforcement of macho culture => **increased violence in society**
- ▶ Possible risk of a coup d'état with the aid of the military => **internal threat**
- ▶ Training people in such a short time is expensive and ineffective => **lack of efficacy**



Introduction of military service may lead to increased **internal and external risks, confrontation, and is economically inefficient**

Risks of military service on a personal level: lost time for life and career, excessive (mental) stress



Personal risk (1)

Lost time and lack of ROI

- It costs young people time that they could have spent with **their family (grandparents) and friends**, time spent with the family and setting up a home of their own
- It costs young people time that could be spent on **education and career development**
- Young people face an uncertain future after military service** – no-one knows what the economic situation will look like and whether they will find a good job afterwards
- People who earn a high salary before their military service may not regain the same spending power – **it is not clear** how to solve these problems
- Loss of control over the course of your life**: military service is experienced as a disruption of your personal life, you risk losing sight of your plans and structures due to a break in education or your professional career. It turns lives upside down and can be a critical turning point after which it might be difficult to return to a job/studies

Too stressful mental conditions

- Very strict discipline and too much responsibility, **restriction of personal freedom and choice**, too much obedience and too much structure, too much external control
- Negative consequences for your mental health**: excessive stress, psychopathic tendencies due to constant exposure to violence ('they torture or beat you there'), extreme violence. It can also destroy some young men, leading to depression or suicide
- Negative influence on intelligence**: people become harder and degenerate because they continually perform stupid, menial tasks, are mentally underchallenged and only ever exposed to dull and monotonous activities



Sorry, but I would like to have a degree of freedom at least, and I don't want anyone else telling me what to do without my having any say in the matter, thank you. (m, 20)

That's why I think the psychological aspects can definitely affect you. I mean, you don't normally continually think about war and bombs, shooting and stuff like that, but when that's all you ever hear about: violence, violence, violence... (m, 20)

Risks of military service on a personal level: potentially a very traumatic experience



Personal risk (2)

Harsh living conditions and exercises

- ▶ Cruel and unpleasant living conditions: **being separated from your family and friends** (something very important and an integral part of forming your identity at a young age), a lack of hygiene, **a lot of men in one dormitory**, injuries, etc.
- ▶ Too much **sport and exercise**

Stressful relationship culture

- ▶ **Bullying, sexism, xenophobia**, submissiveness, strict hierarchy, extreme psychological pressure, humiliation
- ▶ You are treated like a 'machine', there is a **lot of emotional pressure**
- ▶ There can be a lot of **overly aggressive** people with a desire to fight, to exert their force and dominance

Lethal danger

- ▶ Weapon = violence = attack = possible shotgun injuries, the need to kill and the risk of becoming traumatized
- ▶ A fear of being drawn directly into war, into risky and dangerous situations.

« A year less of contact with friends, something which I find particularly important while I'm still young, because we've experienced the most together. (m, 17)

Perhaps that as well, the fact that you're completely isolated from your family. You only get to see them very rarely, and my gran's not getting any younger, and I find aspects like that very important too. (m, 20)

Yes, that it would really turn my life upside down if I were to do it at a different time, when it might not suit me as well. (f, 16)

Additional risks of military service faced by women: even less suited to army life due to their different physical and mental aptitude



Additional risks **faced by young women (aged 16-26)**

- ▮ Domination by men, the military is excessively misogynistic
- ▮ Even **more traumatic physically and psychologically** because women are more sensitive and the whole system is suited to the needs of men (even as regards clothing, fastenings, belt):
 - Too much physical exertion, **very strenuous exercise**, carrying a heavy backpack, always having to sleep in a room with other people, no special clothing for women etc.
 - Too much pressure, discipline, **exhaustion, stress**
 - Women are not suited to military service due to **specific characteristics** (menstrual cycle). This has to be taken into account (e.g. taking time off during menstruation)
- ▮ Leads to **more losses** due to women's lack of suitability for the army => lower birth rate
- ▮ Women tend to believe more in **pacifist values and morality** => military = violence = an ugly world

**"It's a man's world," no clear understanding of what women can do there.
FSJ is a good alternative for women**



Men are definitely stronger. They are more muscular than women and stronger; that's a proven fact. That's why I don't think women should perform the same tasks as men in the military. (f, 25)

Women's view of military service: rejection rather than approval

Women's perceptions of military service

Young women associate military service with aggression, excessive authority, threats, austerity, minimalism, introversion, something unpleasant which they **try to avoid and have nothing to do with**.

On the other hand, military service = strength, discipline, confidence, sports, practicality. But all this **has nothing to do with the female psyche** (from their point of view).



Women's potential for military service

Young women **reject military service to an even greater degree** due to:

- ✓ Considerable doubts about the purpose and benefits of military service, **focusing mainly on the negative aspects and deficits**
- ✓ Negative image of soldiers: unhappy, disillusioned, and emotionally broken people

« The worst case scenario for me would really be having to fire a gun, even though it completely goes against your moral... moral..., ah, what's the word, moral principles. (f, 25)

Unhappy (...) definitely totally down, devastated. I'd certainly find no pleasure in the situation whatsoever. (f, 25)

Yes, there just wouldn't be anything meaningful behind it. (f, 23)

Voluntary Social Service (FSJ) as an Alternative to Military Service

Social activism is very popular and respected among young people in Germany – it is part of their upbringing and a social norm

The image of social engagement in German society:



Social engagement: how it is understood:

- Providing voluntary assistance to people in need without expecting any reward. Using your free time to benefit of society.
- It can be something small, such as helping an elderly neighbour with shopping, or something more ambitious, such as working for a welfare organisation, or supporting people with disabilities.

Why it is important:

- It is very important for society => it preserves our humanity and means we treat each other with respect.
- It often stems from the example set by your parents and your upbringing



However, introducing FSJ as an alternative for people unable to perform military service (for health reasons, moral convictions, etc.) could lead to a situation where very few people actually do military service

There are many drivers and few barriers, so there is no difficulty in implementing this as an alternative to military service



Drivers

- ▶ **A good alternative** for people who do not want to have anything to do with weapons (pacifists)
- ▶ **Caring for other people** – you have used your time well and have not done anything pointless
- ▶ Learning to **interact with other people** in an appropriate, humane way, regardless of whether you like them or not
- ▶ Provides an opportunity **to learn positive values and skills**: solidarity, team spirit, a sense of community, discipline, empathy, responsibility, charity, patience
- ▶ You feel effective, **useful to society**, closer to people
- ▶ It boosts your **self-esteem** and gives you a sense of influence
- ▶ It gives you **the opportunity to learn a lot about yourself and the world**, to better understand your own values and priorities, as well as how other social classes live and the challenges they face



Barriers

- ▶ **Low wages** in social care
- ▶ **Takes up more time** if obligatory (15 months instead of 12 months for military service)
- ▶ Difficult **working conditions**
- ▶ Many **negative emotions** and experiences and => desire to protect yourself from this and thus not participate in social activities



Certainly not FSJ, because I'm not going to work for a whole year for just € 6,000, I'll be honest. Even though it is important and I respect the people who do it, but it's not for me. (m, 17)

“A very formative experience”

There are many different types of social service, so everyone can choose what they like best



Examples of the most popular types of social engagement:

- ▶ **Environmental activities**, caring for the environment, joint rubbish collection, picking up rubbish in the park, planting trees
- ▶ Helping your **neighbour/people in the community**: older people with health problems
- ▶ Working with **children**, in schools, kindergartens
- ▶ Helping at **the library**, in a charity shop
- ▶ Helping at a **nursing home/hospital**, at the animal shelter
- ▶ Working as an assistant in **someone's household**, in a kindergarten
- ▶ Working at a **sports club**
- ▶ **Care**: in geriatric care or in a workshop for disabled people
- ▶ **Helping refugees**, counselling: working at a food bank, language courses
- ▶ Helping the **homeless**
- ▶ Assisting in **youth welfare**
- ▶ **Fire department**
- ▶ Working as a support officer for the Office for Public Order

Military Service Model: Main Concepts and Its Effective Implementation

Of the two approaches to military service, the voluntary system is clearly preferred as it allows more freedom with a pick-and-choose format

Wehr
Dienst

Voluntary system



Compulsory system

Wehr
Pflicht

Supported by **most of the target audience**:
young men and women, mothers of young people,
most recruits with military experience.

Supported mostly by **adult men who did
military service** (esp. aged 60+)

- ▶ Military service should be voluntary, so that **only highly motivated young men & women** who wish to participate do so
- ▶ Young people can be properly prepared for the task in hand **without excessive pressure**
- ▶ **The ability to adopt an individual approach**, taking into account recruits' specific characteristics and abilities

- ▶ It's simply a **duty for every young person**, no discussion, you just have to do it
- ▶ **Fair system**: for everyone, not just young people, but for everyone who takes their commitments in this area seriously
- ▶ Best option in this case: **social service for females, military service for males**

« They get people who are motivated and who want to do it because they took the decision voluntarily off their own bat. (m, 21)

Definitely. In one case it's compulsory and in the other it's voluntary, and I think that you're much more motivated when you do something voluntarily. (m, 24)

I think I would have been more anxious because it wouldn't have been my decision but forced upon me. And I find it pretty frightening when they take away your power of decision like that. (m, 20)

Then create offers that suit different types of people. Not everyone has to join the military. Why can't you look at it on a case-by-case basis? I hope that people take this seriously. (mother, 50)

However, some people believe that compulsory military service could be introduced if it were (initially) done flexibly



The main requirements for making military service more attractive:

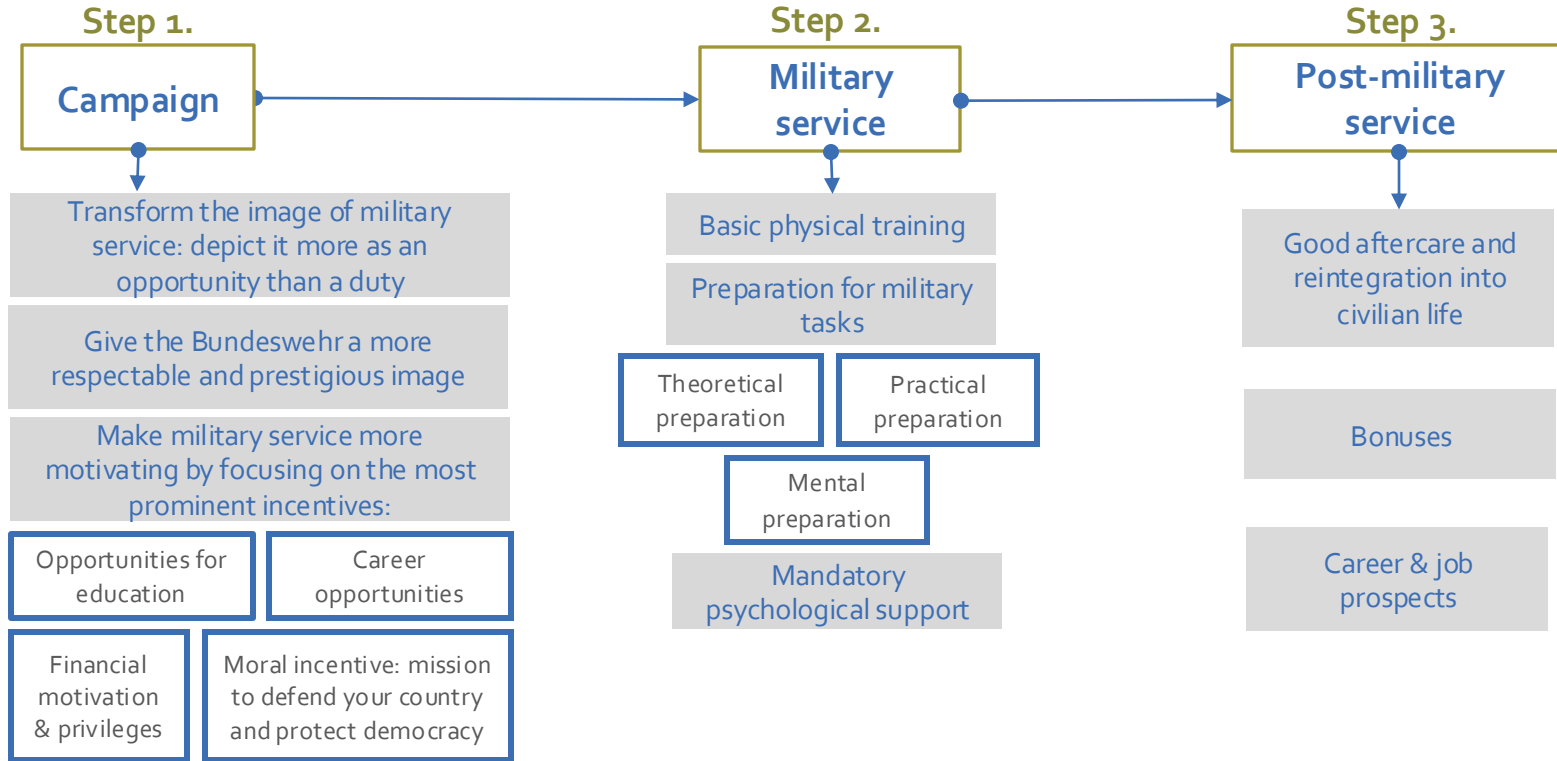
- ✓ Communicate it as a valuable experience rather than merely as 'compulsory'
- ✓ Make military service:
 - **flexible = possibility to choose;** cater for different talents and interests, enable people to choose areas that match their interests and abilities, whether in a social, environmental, technical or even military sphere (*more info on p.63*)
 - **open:** make all information about military service available
 - **fair:** for all young people of a certain age
 - **modern:** create a space where young people can surpass themselves and develop a sense of responsibility and solidarity etc.



I could definitely imagine a return to some form of compulsory military service with certain provisos, but it would have to be fair, modern and open. (mother, 61)

I definitely want to see, how should I put it, transparency about how everything works, so that I can understand what is really going on in the background. (m, 16)

An effective strategy for military service should include preparatory and also post-service measures



Campaign should be entertaining, provide information about military routine, the benefits of serving in the forces, target a young audience



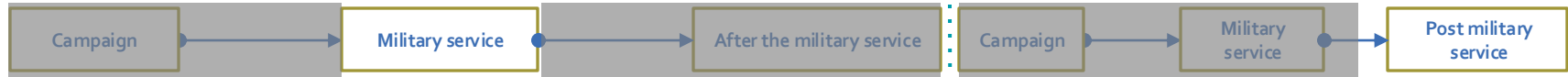
Some advertising ideas

- ▶ Video with **cool music** communicating **team spirit, action** etc.
- ▶ Attractive information about **interesting Bundeswehr activities** (skiing trips etc.) + attractive pictures of **nature, wide range of sporting activities**
- ▶ Present people who see military service as a **positive experience**
- ▶ Use positive emotions in ads and show **opportunities for further education, training** etc.
- ▶ Use **video games**, which are very popular among young people
- ▶ Only for some: use wholesome **celebrities** (footballers, reality stars, -Manuel Neuer or Thomas Müller) or **reputable authorities** (Chancellor, Minister of Defence); use **influencers on SM** with a large younger target audience (e.g., Sascha Huber)
- ▶ Use advertising locations where **the targets spend their time** (in front of a DM, for example)
- ▶ **The best channels** for advertising: social media (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube), Netflix, Prime Video

Direct communication should be efficient

- ▶ **Personal meetings in schools** (year 7-8) to provide information about:
 - The military service process
 - Main tasks during military service
 - Positive & negative aspects of military service
 - Why military service is now necessary
 - Opportunities for further training, career etc.
 - Salary and financial bonuses
- ▶ Participate in **competitions/ events** (such as Hyrox with interesting entertainment (a cool helicopter you can sit in, etc.).

Military service should include practical, theoretical, and psychological training and provide good re-integration and bonuses post-service



Practical preparation

- ▶ **Basic practical skills:** first-aid in extreme situations, being out in the woods, how to make a fire, survival skills etc.
- ▶ Training with **weapons**

Theoretical preparation

- ▶ Basic knowledge of **how the Bundeswehr works**
- ▶ Knowledge of **more specific subjects:** electronics, economics, etc.
- ▶ **Additional training and qualifications:** driving licence for passenger cars/trucks (highly motivating for young people), a master craftsman's certificate, foreign languages etc.

Mental preparation

- ▶ Accompany young people on their journey, **mentoring**
- ▶ Regular discussions, tests, which take **anxiety and reactions to stress seriously**
- ▶ Work on **positive thinking** among recruits
- ▶ Stimulate their **motivation**

Reintegration

- ▶ Free **psychological support** after military service to help adjust to civilian life again
- ▶ Free support in the form of **mentoring and coaching**

Bonuses and career growth

- ▶ **Educational opportunities:** further training as a mechatronics engineer, IT technician, etc., paid for by the Bundeswehr
- ▶ Something to add to your **CV**
- ▶ Voluntarily enlist **in the forces for 2/4/8 years**, to be promoted to officer and earn more money
- ▶ **Good pension:** 70% of salary at retirement

What makes military service more attractive: the ability to choose almost everything and good financial benefits

More flexibility = possibility to choose...

- Between **military service and voluntary social service**, to have the option of **switching to social services** without any problem (in a nursing home, disaster control or similar) in case someone cannot cope with the military environment
- The duration** of military service
- Where** military service is carried out
- Maintain family contact**: can visit home more often, celebrate holidays together with the family, sleep over at home or serve close to the family
- Do military service **with friends**
- After 3 months** of basic training, join the armed forces or have a free choice about which area you want to go into
- Type of job** in the military (logistics and purchasing, cooking, medical etc.)
- What **leisure time** is like + a free weekend

Financial benefits:

- Very good salary**, comparable to one paid for a similar position in civilian life
- Different salaries depending on **marital status**
- And/or the opportunity to **obtain a loan** at 0.1% interest for buying or building a house

Some salary suggestions:

- €24 per hour (1800-2500 euros net) + full compensation in case of injury
- Low starting salary (€700), increasing with good performance

« There should certainly be different departments that you can apply to, e.g. one person may want to work in logistics, another prefers repairing stuff, another wants to be in the air force, another wants to build barricades and emplacements, another wants to be on the front line. As silly as it sounds... that you can freely choose what you want to do to suit your skills, and not that everyone does the same thing. (m, 17)

It would have to pay enough to make it worth my while. (m, 23)

The optimum age for military service is 18-21. Attitudes towards gender representation, however, vary widely

At what age?

The optimal age: **between 18 and 21** - after secondary school or between bachelor's and master's degrees

But not in the middle of a university course!!!

What about gender?

Perceptions differ widely between genders!!!

Option 1

Equal responsibility **for both sexes** based on equality and fairness

...is supported by **young men**, by **some people with experience of military service**

Option 2

Priority is given **only to men** because:

- ▶ Women are considered **physically weaker** and not suitable for frontline service, having less powers of endurance
- ▶ There is no clear understanding of **what women could do there** (only medicine)
- ▶ Women in the armed **forces make men less focused** on themselves and the enemy

...is supported by **young women**, the majority of **mothers** and by **some men with experience of military service**



I wouldn't want to go home at the end thinking I haven't learnt anything and merely wasted my time. (m, 20)

I do think that there should be more balance, a bit more, because it's not just a man's job, women can do it just as well, and I think the experience is the same for women as it is for men. (f, 22, recruit)

I would say it's a bit unfair for both, if women can then study and men always lose a year. (m, 17)

I can't really imagine that a woman with a thirty-kilo rucksack could be fast enough to run away etc. (m, 20)

I'm not prepared to do that much sport... And it's still very male-dominated, there are very few women and I wouldn't feel very comfortable there. (f, 21)

Perceptions regarding the length of military service vary widely, but 12 months seems to be the best option

How long should military service last?

Option 1

1-2 years

As the **more cost-effective** option for the state.

But with the possibility of **terminating it at any time**

Option 2

12 months

This is **enough time to learn** all the necessary skills, complete training, and **do something to defend your country**:

- ✓ 3 months of basic training
- ✓ 6 months of special military training (e.g., learning to drive a tank, etc.),
- ✓ 3 months of service

The most popular option, especially among those with military experience

Option 3

3-9 months

This period has **no significant impact** on the life of recruits.
With the option of **terminating** service after 6 months if you wish

For students:
mostly **6 months** (one semester after the basic training period) so as not to interrupt their studies for too long

We hope you found our report
informative!

Please feel free to share your
feedback on [LinkedIn](#)