



Kurzinformation

Military recruitment in Germany

In July 2011, the military draft in Germany was suspended following an act of parliament of 2010. Technically, obligatory military service has not been abolished. Article 12a of the constitution which states that adult male German citizens with the exception of conscientious objectors *can* be conscripted for military service is still in force. However, its application has been restricted to times of war. Therefore, for all intents and purposes, Germany's armed forces (the Bundeswehr) are now fully made up of volunteers.

Military service used to be the single most important instrument of recruitment for the armed forces. Until July 2011, male citizens were usually drafted upon reaching the age of 18 or upon completion of school or apprenticeship. For a long time, the draft had been considered the most effective and reliable way to ensure that the armed forces were made up of personnel with a wide range of sociological backgrounds (though mostly limited to males until at least 2001, when all military careers were opened to women) whilst ensuring that Germany could maintain its military readiness. However, over time, both the implementation of the draft and military requirements changed in such a way that they became increasingly incompatible. With the end of the Cold War and the addition of personnel from the former "National People's Army" of East Germany after reunification, the Bundeswehr was considered much too large for the new strategic requirements and the anticipated "peace dividend". Therefore, the numbers of personnel were strongly reduced. This led to fewer and fewer men being actually drafted. There was a sharp decline in drafts from 2006 on, and in 2009, only about 63,000 out of 417,000 eligible men actually had to serve. This was widely seen as unfair and politically untenable. At the same time, the number of conscientious objectors especially among those with higher education had been rising for years, so on the whole, the draft had lost both its aspect of social integration as well as its purpose as an instrument of recruitment. It was considered obsolete both in political and practical terms and also an ineffective use of funds and manpower.

At the time of suspension of the draft and the transformation of the Bundeswehr into an all-volunteer force (AVF), Germany had few foreign deployments, was aiming to reduce the number of military personnel, and had already aimed for a higher degree of professionalization among its soldiers. The shift to the AVF model went relatively smoothly, as it aligned well with these political goals and circumstances. It had an immediate effect on the numbers of personnel which continued to decrease. By 2016, 166,500 soldiers served in the armed forces, a historical low. Since

then, the number has been on a slow rise to meet new requirements of the armed forces, e.g., deployments abroad.

The biggest challenges arose in relation to the transformation of the armed forces into a desirable and competitive employer and to the need to attract highly-skilled personnel. Before the suspension of the draft, the Bundeswehr did not have to advertise itself as an employer. It could rely on choosing promising and interested candidates from among the drafted recruits. Since 2011, it had to actively seek personnel. It proved difficult for the armed forces to attract enough personnel and fill the ranks: first, because demographic change meant that there were simply fewer young people, and second, because civilian employers offered better pay with better conditions. The career as officer enjoyed a good reputation in society, so that the Bundeswehr had no problems recruiting personnel for the upper ranks. It was much harder, though, to find skilled personnel at NCO level and lower. Therefore, in 2014, under Minister of Defence Ursula von der Leyen, the Bundeswehr set itself the “Attractiveness Agenda” (*Agenda Attraktivität*).

It included a number of measures: among them, the weekly work time was reduced to 41 hours, accommodation and facilities in the barracks were upgraded and kindergartens and daycare centers were set up so that parents in the armed forces could reconcile duty and family. Certain regulations were relaxed and modernized (for example, some rules regarding beards or tattoos were scrapped as being out-of-touch with modern society).

In 2019, the Bundestag also made service in the forces more financially attractive by passing the *Besoldungsstrukturenmodernisierungsgesetz* (Salary Structures Modernization Act) which raised bonuses especially for soldiers in foreign deployments and those in positions requiring a high degree of skill.

As to recruitment of high-value/high-potential individuals, the Bundeswehr was opened to professionals with a non-military background, especially highly qualified ones (so unlike before, military personnel don't necessarily need to start their military career by joining the Bundeswehr young and then rising through the ranks whilst developing useful skills such as IT). The armed forces are now able to recruit talents and professionals directly and integrate them according to requirements.

All those reforms were flanked by a massive recruitment campaign in the form of modern advertisement (via classic media as well as social media and platforms like YouTube). The Bundeswehr presents itself as an attractive employer for experts from different fields and to citizens of diverse walks of life (i.e., it emphasizes that citizens of all genders, ethnic backgrounds or faiths are welcome and offered all career opportunities). To a large extent, this campaign is still ongoing and blends with the Bundeswehr's public outreach in general. The Bundeswehr is represented and active on all major social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, and also advertises in newspapers and public spaces.

The reforms and campaigns to present the Bundeswehr as a desirable employer had the desired effect: as of 2021, polls suggest that 63 percent of Germans consider the Bundeswehr an attractive employer for young people, with 34 of those asked stating that it could be an attractive employer to them, personally. The general attitude towards the armed forces has also greatly improved, and

while a majority of citizens can be highly critical of specific missions (e.g., Afghanistan), a majority also trust the Bundeswehr as an institution and have a positive image of it. The armed forces, long composed almost exclusively of male ethnic Germans, have also become more diverse. Statistics say that 13 percent of the members of the armed forces are now female. About 15 percent come from migrant families (26 percent in the lower ranks, suggesting that among officers, Germans with a migrant background are still underrepresented).

On the downside, the Bundeswehr still has certain difficulties finding highly skilled personnel and experts to meet its strategic requirements and/or fill positions. This affects especially the navy, the IT area, and the medical services. However, recruitment in these areas had been difficult even before the shift to AVF. While there has been a steady increase in personnel numbers since 2016, its rate is not high enough to meet the goal of 203,000 women and men in the service by 2025. As of May, 2022, there are just under 184,000 personnel.

While these problems persist and there are different opinions on the effectiveness of single measures and their effect on Germany's military capabilities, on the whole the shift to the AVF model and the change in recruitment strategies by and large are considered successful. As mentioned above, the professionalization of the Bundeswehr and the reduction of personnel had already been underway when the draft was suspended. It can therefore be said that it wasn't the shift to the AVF model that necessitated (military and strategic) changes, but rather that those changes, necessary to meet political goals, accelerated the shift to the AVF model. As to recruitment, it appears self-evident that any AVF can only succeed by not only being an attractive employer, but by advertising itself as such intensely, continuously, and effectively.

With Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the subsequent re-evaluation of Germany's security strategy, there have been voices in the political debate that call for the reinstatement of the draft. However, at this point, it is doubtful that such a drastic change in policy could find a majority. It may be noteworthy that the Bundeswehr has registered an increased interest in voluntary military service since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
