



Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations

Compulsory Social/Military Service

Position Paper



Summary

The Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) advocates for the introduction of a **compulsory social/military service (CS/MS)** for all generations in order to strengthen social cohesion and address social challenges. This CS/MS is intended to apply to both younger and older people to ensure intergenerational justice. Such a period could help alleviate staff shortages in the social sector and strengthen the defence capability of Germany and the EU in response to current geopolitical instability.

When introducing a CS/MS, the FRFG deems the following points to be worth considering:

1. **Intergenerational justice:** In the FRFG model, a CS/MS is to be undertaken by both younger and older people – ideally one year before entering the workforce (or higher education i.e., university or apprenticeships) and one year after leaving the workforce but before starting the period of retirement.
2. **For men and women:** The CS/MS should not be limited to one biological sex.
3. **No extraordinary exemption for parents:** Nursing work in retirement homes or kindergartens would be opportunities to provide the service. Care work *within the family*, however, such as raising children and caring for elderly relatives, should not count towards fulfilling the obligation, in order to avoid disproportionately exempting parents and unfairly burdening non-parents.
4. **Fair compensation:** The CS/MS should be appropriately remunerated and accompanied by pension entitlements and full legal recognition.

The following advantages arise from the CS/MS:

- Strengthening social cohesion between younger and older generations.
- Providing meaningful experiences and orientation for young people.
- Reducing social isolation among older people.
- Alleviating staff shortages in public service and nursing care.
- Guaranteeing national defence and thereby protecting Germany's/the EU's sovereignty.

The FRFG regards the CS/MS as an opportunity to promote the common good and to address urgent social challenges in the long term. The FRFG model differs fundamentally from gerontocratic approaches that merely seek to place responsibility on young people for military/social service

We call for an open social debate between generations on how such a CS/MS can be implemented fairly and inclusively.

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1. The Rationale for a 'compulsory social/military service'?

Long before Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier introduced the idea of 'a compulsory social service' into public debate in June 2022 (FRFG 2023)¹ Germany had already witnessed an intensive discussion about its possible implementation (Haß / Nocko 2024: 6). Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, described by leading politicians as a 'turning point' (Olaf Scholz) and an 'epochal break' (Frank-Walter Steinmeier), together with the election of Donald Trump, into the White House, underscores that we are living in a profoundly shifting global environment. Yet, even in calmer times or periods of peace, there were compelling arguments in favour of a CS/MS, which could serve as an antidote to societal trends of fragmentation, radicalisation and growing pessimism about the future (Jäkel et al. 2025). Many European countries already have some form of military or civil service. However, most of these systems reveal significant shortcomings. Additionally, no existing model includes older age groups within its structure. This position paper presents a comparative overview of different models, highlighting key data such as the mandatory or voluntary character of the schemes, youth participation rates, gender inclusivity, duration, and the age at which service typically begins.

2. Definition

Equating 'social service' with 'compulsory military service' is an oversimplification, as the former encompasses various forms of civic engagement that go beyond the military sphere. To grasp the substantive content and significance of the FRFG model, a clear conceptual distinction is necessary.

Conscription refers to the legally established obligation of citizens (in Germany thus far exclusively men) to perform military service, that is, to fulfil military duties within the armed forces (Duden Editorial Team 2025a).

Military service (also known as *armed service*) is the specific service performed in the armed forces based on this compulsory duty (Duden Editorial Team 2025b).

Civilian service, on the other hand, denotes the alternative available to conscientious objectors, enabling them to perform socially useful, non-military service instead (Duden Editorial Team 2025c).

Longer forms of civic engagement, such as the *Federal Voluntary Service*, the *Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr* (FSJ) and the *Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr* (FÖJ), currently offered in Germany, as well as comparable EU-level programmes, would also fall within the scope of the FRFG's proposed "social service obligation" and could be recognised as fulfilling it.

In this position paper, these terms constitute the foundational elements of a broader concept of *social service obligation*, understood as an umbrella term. Whereas military service involves an active obligation to reside in barracks, civilian services fulfil socially beneficial functions, in

¹ FRFG Ambassador Ben Jagasia was invited to discuss the topic as a guest of the Federal President.

institutions such as hospitals, care facilities, non-governmental organisations, or agricultural enterprises. Importantly, the compulsory social service envisioned by the FRFG refers exclusively to the contribution of personal time; it expressly excludes financial contributions such as military taxes or similar levies (Federal Republic of Germany n.d.c: Section 4 (1) of the Conscription Act (WPfIG)).

The FRFG regards the current legal situation as suboptimal. Article 12a of the Basic Law stipulates that only men may be conscripted into the armed forces (Federal Republic of Germany n.d.b: Art. 12a GG). According to paragraph (4), women may be called up only in the event of a national defence situation, namely an armed attack on federal territory and exclusively for services non-military duties (Federal Republic of Germany n.d.a: Art. 115a GG). Consequently, women cannot currently be conscripted into regular military service during peacetime. Under the existing constitutional arrangements, a mere reinstatement of conscription would therefore apply solely to young men.

The younger and older generations

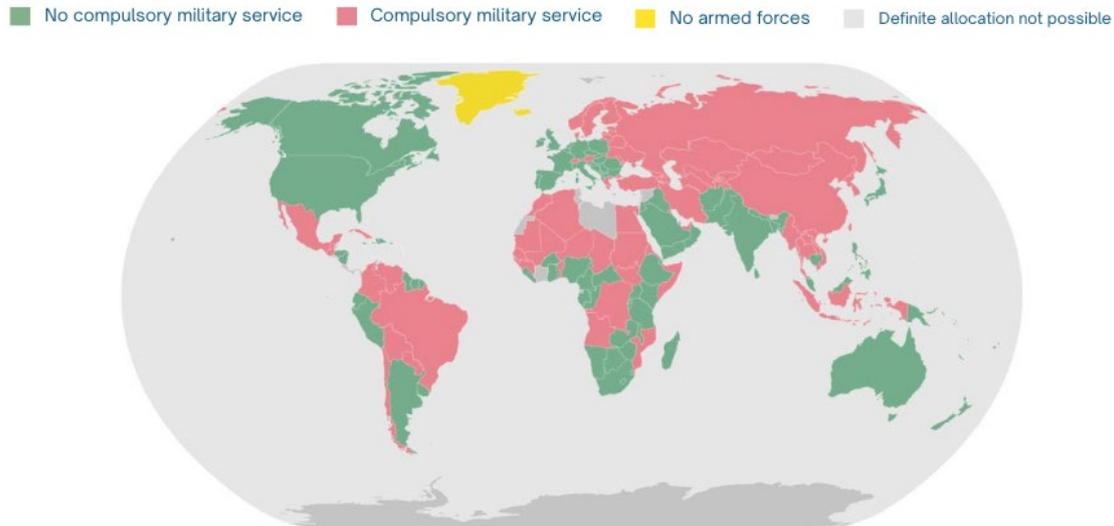
The FRFG model distinguishes between the young and older phases of life. The young phase of life refers to the period after leaving school and directly before the start of vocational training or university studies, typically between the ages 16 and 20. Individuals who complete vocational training after secondary school may begin service once they reach the age of majority. Half of the “social service period” should be completed by the age of 25 at the latest. The older phase of life, on the other hand, covers the period after the end of active employment but prior to retirement, that is, between the ages of 65 and 67.

This dual time frame is intended to ensure generational equity. Both transitional moments – the entry into working life and the transition into retirement – are regarded as appropriate stages for citizens to contribute to the common good. The FRFG model thus seeks to distribute civic responsibility fairly and symmetrically between the younger and older generations.

3. International models and principles of compulsory social service

3.1. Overview of models in other countries

Figure 1: Compulsory service – where it applies and where it does not



Source: Own representation based on Die Zeit (30.10.2025)

Figure 1 shows the countries in which compulsory military service is currently in force. The subsequent table provides an overview of the different models through which compulsory military or mandatory service is organised across European states and selected non-European countries. These models can be grouped into five main categories, which differ in terms of scope, target group and voluntary nature of service:

Compulsory service only for men

All men of a certain age must serve their country for a minimum period, such as in Greece, Finland, Estonia, Switzerland and Austria.

Compulsory service for men and women

All men (and all women as well) of a certain age must serve their country for a minimum period, for instance in Israel.

Selective Compulsory Service

Completing a questionnaire is mandatory for all citizens and residents, both men and women. Subsequently, a proportion of motivated citizens in good health are conscripted according to the requirements of the armed forces. Thus, Selective Compulsory Service is a military draft system in which only a segment of the eligible population is required to serve, based on specific criteria. This system is employed in Sweden and Norway.

Lottery-Driven Service

A random selection system (such as a lottery or drawing) is used to determine which eligible individuals will be conscripted into military service, as in Denmark.

Selective Service System

Unique to the United States, this system requires all US male citizens and residents aged 18–25 to register. There is no active draft, but the system allows for rapid mobilisation if Congress and the President authorise conscription. At present, service in the US armed forces is entirely voluntary, commencing at the age of 18.

Voluntary enlistment

This system enables citizens to select the military as their employer and serve their country as their profession or career. Germany's Bundeswehr, for instance, is currently an all-volunteer force composed of career soldiers, fixed-term soldiers, and voluntary military service personnel – similar to the systems in France or Poland. The United States, which also maintains an all-volunteer army, presents a particular variation: all male US citizens and residents aged 18 to 25 are required to register for the selective service. This ensures rapid mobilisation should Congress and the President authorise a return to conscription.

Across all of the above systems, one principle applies: individuals deemed medically unfit are generally exempted from military service and cannot—or must not—be called up.

Table 1: Overview of the conscription and service models across European and selected other countries (see key to the table below)

Country	Participation (what percentage of each "youth cohort" does such service)	Mandatory or voluntary? For men and women?	Duration	Stage of life (at a younger/older age)?	Sources
Austria (Compulsory Military Service)	Approx. 22,000 young men drafted annually	Mandatory for men; voluntary for women	6 months military, or 9 months civilian	From age 18	Military Service/alternative service Military service age and obligation Military service
Belgium (Voluntary Military Service)	Not specified (conscripted since 1995 but reintroducing a new voluntary military service in 2026)	Voluntary for men and women	12 months (initial contract)	18-25 years	Military service age and obligation Belgium announces record military recruitment drive with voluntary service program

Bulgaria (Voluntary Military Service)	3% of a youth cohort annually	Voluntary for men and women	6 months	18-40 years	Military service age and obligation Bulgaria's Parliament approves voluntary military service
China (Selective Compulsory Military Service)	Approx. 1.5 million individuals drafted annually	Selective compulsory military service for men; women 18-19 years of age who are high school graduates and meet requirements for specific military jobs are subject to conscription (2024)	24 months	18-22 years	Military service age and obligation Has China Ever Imposed a Draft for Military Service? Uncovering the Truth!
Denmark (Lottery-Driven Service)	Approx. 3,900 conscripts annually	Mandatory to register for the military service lottery for men and women	11 months	From age 18	Military service age and obligation Europe's Conscription Challenge: Lessons From Nordic and Baltic States Denmark introduces mandatory conscription for women amid growing threat from Russia
Estonia (Compulsory Service)	Approx. 3,500 conscripts annually	Mandatory military service for men (limited Civilian alternative possible); voluntary for women	8–11 months	17-27 years	Military service age and obligation Europe's Conscription Challenge: Lessons From Nordic and Baltic States
Finland (Compulsory Service)	70% of eligible men	Mandatory for men; voluntary for women	6 or 12 months (military or civilian service)	Men from 18; women 18–29 (must finish before 30)	Military service age and obligation Europe's Conscription Challenge: Lessons From Nordic and Baltic States Voluntary military service for women
France (Voluntary Military Service)	Approx. 6,000–7,000 young people annually	Voluntary for men and women	12 months	18-25 years	Military service age and obligation

Germany (Voluntary Military Service)	6% of youth cohort annually (20,000 join voluntary military service)	Voluntary for men and women	7-23 months	From age 17	Military service age and obligation Voluntary Military Service: An Opportunity, Not an Obligation
Greece (Compulsory Military Service)	90–92% of a male youth cohort	Mandatory for men; voluntary for women	12 months for the Army; 9 months for the Air Force/Navy; 15 months civilian alternative	From age 19	Military service age and obligation Is military service mandatory in Greece?
Hungary (Voluntary Military Service)	Approx. 2–3% of a youth cohort annually	Voluntary for men and women	6-months	18-25 years	The Defence Forces Await New Applicants
Iran (Compulsory Military Service)	Approx. 400,000 men annually	Mandatory for men; voluntary for women	24 months	From 18-19 to approximately age 40; 16 for voluntary military service	Military service age and obligation FCICA - Conscriptioin in Iran
Ireland (Voluntary Military Service)	<1% of a youth cohort annually	Voluntary for men and women	60 months (initial contract)	18-25 years	Military service age and obligation General Questions on the Defence Forces
Israel (Compulsory service)	About 50% of youth cohort	Mandatory for men and women	32 months for enlisted men and about 24 months for enlisted women (varies based on military occupation), 48 months for officers; pilots commit to 9-year service	From age 18	What percent of the Israeli population is in the military? Military service age and obligation Conscriptioin in Israel
Italy (Voluntary Military Service)	Approx. 50,000 young people annually	Voluntary for men and women	12 months	18-25 years	Military service age and obligation
Netherlands (Voluntary Military Service)	Not specified	Voluntary for men and women (officially mandatory, not enforced; effectively voluntary)	12 months	From age 17	Which countries still have conscription? Military service age and obligation

Norway (Selective Compulsory Service)	15% (approx. 9,000 out of 60,000 eligible youths annually)	Selective compulsory for men and women	12 months (with possible reserve call-ups of up to 7 months up to age 44 or 55 for those that have served in the military for at least a year after their mandatory training)	From age 19	Europe's Conscription Challenge: Lessons From Nordic and Baltic States Military service age and obligation
Poland (Voluntary Military Service)	Approx. 5–6% of a youth cohort annually	Voluntary for men and women (conscription suspended since 2009)	12–24 months	From age 18	Military service age and obligation
Russian Federation (Compulsory Military Service)	Approx. 250,000 men drafted annually (partially due to the dynamic development of the war against Ukraine)	Mandatory for men; voluntary for women and non-Russian citizens (18-30)	12-24 months	18–27 years	Military service age and obligation Which countries still have conscription?
South Korea (Compulsory Military Service)	Approx. 200,000 conscripts annually	Mandatory for men; voluntary for women	18-36 months (depending on branch)	18–35 years	Military service age and obligation
Spain (Voluntary Military Service)	Approx. 2–3% of a youth cohort annually	Voluntary for men and women	24-36 months	18-26 years	Military service age and obligation Does Spain have mandatory military service?
Sweden (Selective Compulsory Service)	4% of each age cohort is enlisted annually	Selective compulsory for men and women	12 months	From age 18	Europe's Conscription Challenge: Lessons From Nordic and Baltic States Military service age and obligation
Switzerland (Compulsory Service)	Around 35-40% of male cohort	Mandatory for men; voluntary for women	11-12 months	19-25 years	Military service age and obligation Military service Is it possible to refuse military service in Switzerland?
Turkey Compulsory Service)	Not specified	Mandatory for men; voluntary for women (since 2023)	6 months	From age 20	Military service age and obligation

UK (Voluntary Military Service)	Approx. 2% of a youth cohort	Voluntary for men and women	Up to 48 months	From age 16 (18 for combat)	How long is UK military service? Military service age and obligation
Ukraine (Compulsory Military Service)	Approx. 18–20% of male cohort in peacetime	Mandatory for men; voluntary for women	12–18 months	18–27 years	Military service age and obligation Ukraine conscripts up to 30,000 people into army every month after adoption of mobilization law – NYT
USA (Selective Service System)	Approx. 0.6% of youth cohort annually (180,000 enlist)	Voluntary for men and women (Selective Service registration mandatory for men)	8-year service obligation (mix of active duty or reserve)	From age 18 (17 with parental consent)	Military service age and obligation Pentagon: 7 in 10 Youths Would Fail to Qualify for Military Service

3.2. Intergenerational justice: a duty for young and old alike

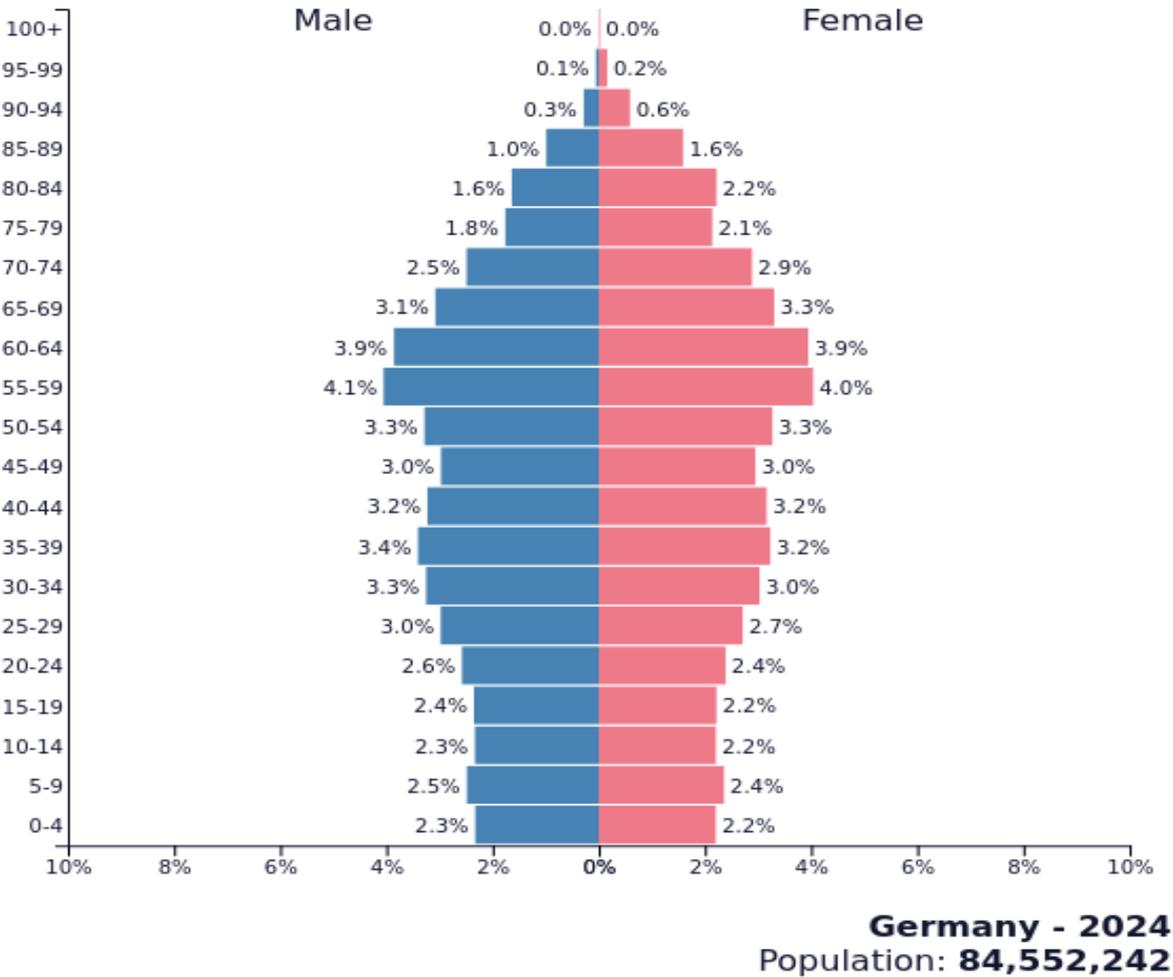
Civil and military service are justified insofar as they contribute to the common good. Yet if such obligations are imposed only on a limited segment of the population, the burden is distributed unevenly. This not only places a disproportionate strain on those affected but also risks undermining social cohesion and the principle of solidarity.

Figure 2 illustrates the age and gender structure of the German population in 2024. In line with the terminology used in this position paper (see Chapter 2: ‘The young and older generations’), the cohort aged 18 to 20 is categorised as the ‘younger phase of life’ – the period during which a portion of compulsory social service could ideally be undertaken. However, this cohort comprises merely 2.84% of the overall population. In contrast, the 65- to 67-year-old age group is defined as the ‘older phase of life,’ representing approximately 3.84% of the population – already a noticeably larger share than the younger phase.

The demographic structure further reveals that the largest age cohort is the 55- to 64-year-old group, which accounts for roughly 15.9% of the population. This cohort will gradually transition into the older phase of life over the coming years, thereby increasing the proportion of older citizens eligible to contribute to compulsory social service.

These demographic developments demonstrate that the younger generation cannot reasonably be expected to bear the societal obligation alone. Rather, equitable participation across generations is required to ensure a fair distribution of responsibilities and to strengthen intergenerational solidarity.

Figure 2: Age and gender structure of the population in Germany, 2024



Source: PopulationPyramid.net 2024.

An example of a country where not only the younger generation but the entire population is called upon is Sweden. In Sweden, military service is part of the comprehensive Totalförsvaret (total defence) system. This concept considers the entire population between the ages of 16 and 70 to be potentially relevant to national security, whether in the military, civil or technical fields. At the age of 18, all Swedish young people take part in a survey that focuses on health and motivation. Around 100,000 people participate in this survey every year, of whom around a quarter are called up for military service (Taylor 2024).

In many countries, the focus is not only on the younger generation when it comes to national defence, community service or compulsory service in general. In Ukraine, the age limits for mobilisation have been set at 25 to 60 years. Everyone is assessed. Those who pass the examination are considered fit and capable of military service (Deutschlandfunk 2024). Such countries do not unilaterally disadvantage young people in examinations.

In other countries, such as Finland, the age limit for reservists has been raised to 65 (Gazeta Express 2025). A period of compulsory service for people in the later stages of their lives (i.e. a few months between the ages of 60 and 67) does not necessarily mean that the older generation has to be on the front line; they can be deployed in civilian service or in various

fields such as medicine, electrical engineering or IT, i.e. in roles that match their many years of expertise (Virtanen 2025).

3.3. Gender equality

Not only the issue of intergenerational justice, but also that of gender justice plays an important role in the current debate on military service. Modern wars no longer affect only soldiers, but society as a whole: young and old, women and men alike. Against this backdrop, military service is not only a security policy institution, but also a social policy institution. Nowadays, wars are no longer fought exclusively with conventional weapons. Only about 15-20 percent of missions involve direct combat operations. Men and women can contribute their skills in many different areas, so that the greater physical strength of men (on average) has become less important (Eilenberger 2026). This chapter presents gender-equitable military service models from Norway and Sweden, as the Scandinavian model is often regarded as a role model in research. In addition, the South Korean military service model is analysed, which is controversial within South Korean society, particularly regarding gender equality. It exemplifies the problems of a compulsory service system that is not gender neutral.

3.3.1. Military service models – Scandinavia and South Korea

Norway and Sweden have gender-equitable military service models that are often referred to in research as the Nordic model or Scandinavian model (Ahlbäck/Sundevall/Hjertquist 2022: 50; Kjellén 2022). The Nordic countries are also considered the most gender-equitable states in the world (Heikkilä/Laukkanen 2020: 607), which contributes significantly to these models serving as international benchmarks. These approaches offer valuable comparisons for a possible redesign of military service in Germany. The South Korean model is contrasted as a case study: it illustrates, on behalf of many countries, the problems of a compulsory service system that is not gender neutral.

Scandinavian model

In 2015, Norway became the first country in the world to introduce gender-neutral conscription (Heikkilä/Laukkanen 2020: 608). Under this model, men and women serve under identical legal conditions and are subject to the same obligations. Each year, approximately 60,000 19-year-olds are registered and evaluated through a comprehensive assessment covering health, education, and other relevant criteria. Based on this pre-selection, suitable candidates are invited to an in-person interview, from which around 9,000 conscripts are chosen to commence service (Taylor 2024).

In Norway, as in Sweden and Finland, conscription applies to both sexes, with positive effects on society, but also on the army itself (see 3.3.2).

South Korean model

In contrast, South Korea operates a general conscription system, shaped largely by its security situation on the Korean peninsula. Article 39 of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea stipulates that all citizens have a duty to defend the nation (Korea Legislation Research Institute 2025). Despite this ostensibly gender-neutral phrasing ‘모든 국민’ (i.e. all citizens), conscription is, in practice, imposed exclusively on men (German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies 2024).

Under the Military Service Act, all male citizens are assessed at the age of 18 and must complete between 18 and 22 months of military service between the ages of 19 and 35 (90 Day Korean 2025).

All young men must therefore serve, irrespective of motivation or personal convictions. Women are not subject to conscription but may volunteer for professional military careers – though only in the ranks of non-commissioned officers or officers. Consequently, military service in South Korea is widely regarded as a distinctly male civic duty.

3.3.2. The societal implications and effects

Historically, the military and war have played a central role in shaping gender roles. If the military service model clings to the old image of male conscription based on the ideal of men as protectors of women and children, a conservative, backward-looking gender order will be cemented (Eilenberger 2026).

In other words, traditional social gender images can be balanced by a gender-equitable model, while at the same time promoting equality between men and women in society (Hagemann 2026). This is de facto the case in Scandinavia, but not in South Korea.

But the military itself would also be changed internally by a higher proportion of women. Although war is always associated with violence and killing, there is a ‘law of war’ which is intended to ensure that violence does not escalate within wars (e.g. prohibition of genocide, rape). There is a reasonable expectation that a higher proportion of women would lead to a reduction in the extent of war crimes, even if the number of wars did not decrease.

4. How should the CS/MS be structured?

The FRFG holds that a CS/MS could strengthen cohesion both within society and across generations. Although based in Germany, the FRFG’s vision extends beyond the national context and situates itself within the broader framework of the European Union. After all, our passports bear the words ‘European Union’ as well as ‘Federal Republic of Germany.’ A CS/MS could address pressing challenges, such as the shortage of skilled workers in the social and care sectors², as well as deficits in Germany’s and the EU’s defence capacity– particularly at a time when, in the long term, the establishment of a European army is becoming increasingly

² The CS/MS workers will not be able to replace the trained specialists but would relieve them

necessary. The FRFG model aims to build a bridge between generations, relieving undue pressure on the younger generation, while encouraging solidarity across society. Importantly, such a system could revive a sense of civic responsibility and strengthen the social fabric in anticipation of future challenges. It would not only support society as a whole but also benefit each participating individual by offering purpose, structure, and opportunities for meaningful engagement. A compulsory period of social service could help counteract social isolation and the narrowing effects of algorithmically enforced information bubbles.

A lack of intergenerational communication has long been apparent. Yet even within age groups, people increasingly think and interact in closed circles. Social media creates feedback loops that persuade individuals that “everyone thinks as I do”, reinforcing the view that differing positions are not merely mistaken but almost inconceivable. The FRFG’s proposed model represents a suitable instrument for bridging these divides, fostering perspective-taking, and encouraging understanding between individuals of different backgrounds and generations.

Fair to all generations

Given demographic change, society can no longer place the burden of civil and military service solely on the younger generation (Fratzscher 2025). Each year, around one million workers retire, while far fewer young people are entering the workforce. For reasons of both demographic necessity and intergenerational fairness, a compulsory social service must not be confined to younger cohorts. As the Hertie Foundation notes (Haß / Nocko 2024: 13), any system that applies only to the young would be inherently inequitable. Public intellectual Sascha Lobo has gone so far as to describe the Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier’s proposal for youth-only service obligation as the “height of insolence” (Lobo 2022). The FRFG shares this concern: to impose compulsory service exclusively on the young would constitute a serious breach of intergenerational justice.

In a gerontocracy, older generations impose obligations upon younger ones, sending them into military or civil service while observing from the sidelines. In a democracy, however, responsibility must be shared. For centuries, older people have sent younger people into war or compulsory service. This must no longer be the model.

The FRFG therefore advocates a mandatory social service that applies to both younger and older age groups. The recommended structure comprises two service periods: one year at the beginning of the working life (before entering employment, higher education, or vocational training), and one year after leaving the workforce but prior to the pension phase. This model would also delay the retirement age of the baby-boomer cohorts, thereby alleviating pressure on social systems.

According to the FRFG proposal, the new compulsory service requirement (as of 2025) would apply to all birth cohorts from 1995 to 2007 (those aged 18 to 30 today) and, at the upper end, to those born between 1958 to 1963 (persons aged 62 to 67). However, it should also be possible to complete the compulsory period of social service flexibly, for example, through

weekly hours rather than full-time service. However, the first 50 per cent of the two-year requirement must be fulfilled before the age of 30; indefinite postponement of service obligations is neither desirable nor compatible with intergenerational fairness. Crucially, individuals who have already completed two years of military or social service are exempt from any new service obligation.

The FRFG model is grounded firmly in the principle of intergenerational justice³. It seeks to strengthen cohesion across generations. If, for example, young and older citizens serve side-by-side in civil protection units or food banks, such cooperation would foster mutual understanding, respect, and practical solidarity. The FRFG is convinced that these forms of cross-generational interaction would help reduce the generational divide and reinforce intergenerational cohesion. A society that values intergenerational fairness should also be willing to distribute responsibilities equitably across different age groups.

Mandatory for both men and women

In addition, CS/MS must also apply equally to men and women. In Germany, for instance, the German Basic Law currently contains an inconsistency between the principle of equality in Article 3 (3)⁴ and Article 12a,⁵ which regulates military service (currently suspended) in a way that is not gender-neutral.⁶ The FRFG firmly opposes the simple reactivation of Article 12a, which reflects an era when only men were admitted to the Bundeswehr. Today, women serve across all branches of the armed forces, including combat units. Consequently, any form of compulsory social or military service must be designed for both biological sexes. According to the general understanding of an equal society, a compulsory social period cannot refer to only one sex (men). Furthermore, anyone born in 1958 or later who has already completed several months in a comparable obligation, whether through military service, civilian service, federal voluntary service (in German: BFD), or the 'Voluntary Social/Ecological Year Program' (in German: FSJ/FÖJ), should be exempt from the new requirement. For instance, if a person born in 1960 has already served two years in the army, he or she would be fully exempted from the new CS/MS. If, on the other hand, a person born in 2005 has completed a 12-month voluntary social year program, he or she would still be required to serve a further twelve months in the new CS/MS upon leaving the workforce.

³ There are two forms of intergenerational injustice (Tremmel 2012): injustice between young and old people when looking at a point in time, and injustice between people who live today and those who will live tomorrow (time sequence view). The question of compulsory service or length of service falls into the first area.

⁴ No person shall be favoured or disfavoured because of sex, parentage, race, language, homeland and origin, faith or religious or political opinions. No person shall be disfavoured because of disability."

⁵(1) Men who have reached the age of eighteen may be required to serve in the Armed Forces, the Federal Border Guard or a civil defence organization. (2) Anybody who refuses military service involving armed combat on grounds of conscience may be assigned to alternative service.'

⁶ Whether this is unconstitutional constitutional law or not is a legal question that would go beyond the scope of this impulse paper.

Exemptions

The obligation to fulfil the CS/MS should recognise voluntary work in childcare facilities and retirement homes. However, care work performed within one's own family (e.g. raising one's own children or caring for elderly relatives) should not count towards fulfilling the obligation, in order to avoid disproportionately exempting parents and unfairly burdening non-parents. After all, most countries do not accept parental duties as grounds for exemption from military duty.

Appropriately compensated CS/MS

Similar to today's federal voluntary service, the CS/MS under the FRFG model would constitute an employment relationship between the state and the citizen, rather than the employment agency and the citizen. Essential components, here, are fair remuneration and recognition under pension law. Regardless of whether this new CS/MS is served in a military or a social setting, in Germany or in another EU member state, mandatory service cannot be expected to be free of charge. Appropriate compensation ensures fairness and encourages greater participation. Within the social sector, the aim should be to offer the broadest possible range of activities. The more diverse the options, the higher the possibility of individuals finding something that aligns with their skills and interests, therefore making it a mutually beneficial experience. Importantly, social service must not be remunerated at a lower level than military service. Schools should provide systematic information about opportunities in the armed forces, civil defence, social services, and environmental protection.

5. Orientation and a sense of purpose for all generations

In terms of career orientation, it is highly beneficial for young people to experience areas of life beyond the bubble in which they grew up. A year in which young people engage in practical work, distinct from the classroom environment in their previous school life, would enable them to discover personal strengths, weaknesses, and interests. Such insights can be of central importance when it comes to defining one's own professional aspirations and goals more clearly.

Empirical research underscores this point. Young people frequently use voluntary service as a means of personal development and orientation. Participants in existing schemes reported that they chose an *FÖJ*, *FSJ* or *BFD* primarily for reasons of personal development (42 per cent), as a bridge between school and higher education or vocational training (41 per cent), or to gain new experiences (31 per cent) (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth 2024: 90–91).

The FRFG model also addresses the growing problem of social isolation. The share of young people suffering from loneliness has increased sharply.⁷ Many report having hundreds or even thousands of “friends” on social media, yet lacking a single person with whom they can speak openly. CS/MS can help counteract these tendencies by fostering real-world social networks and sustained interpersonal contact.

Experience with the Federal Voluntary Service and the Voluntary Social/Ecological Year shows that young people, and, increasingly, older adults, are willing to serve the community. However, participants across all age groups value two things in particular: flexibility and appropriate remuneration, including contributions to pension insurance.

Individuals who are medically unfit for service would not be required to participate. This exemption would likely apply more frequently to the older (62–67) cohort than to the younger (18–30) cohort. Nevertheless, research shows that many people in the older age group remain in good health and are perfectly capable of fulfilling a civic or social role.

6. Conclusion

A social and sustainable society thrives on cohesion between young and old, as well as on fair intergenerational contracts. It would simply be unfair to oblige only young people to undertake compulsory social service. The younger generation is already burdened with the challenges of the future. As DIW President Marcel Fratzscher has rightly observed, “the young generation (...) is already unduly burdened by the many mistakes of the baby boomers” (Fratzscher 2024). Against the background of demographic change, young people must also support an ever-growing number of pensioners through their labour. To impose a compulsory social service solely on the young would therefore be inequitable and send a deeply damaging signal. Ultimately, the gap between young and old would only widen further, placing social cohesion at risk. By contrast, the notion of intergenerational fairness could be the key to winning both young and old to the idea of CS/MS, thereby strengthening social solidarity. Therefore, the FRFG advocates a mandatory two-year social service for both young and old, to be fulfilled in two phases: one year in the first half of life and the other in the second.

⁷ Pensioners (particularly the very elderly) are likewise disproportionately affected (BMFSFJ 2024). This development could be counteracted by the CS/MS through regular social contact and networks which are vital in old age.

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