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CANADA

MODERNIZING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Report of the Standing Committee on National Defence

Hon. John McKay, Chair

**JUNE 2022
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL DEFENCE

has the honour to present its

SECOND REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied Recruitment and Retention in the Canadian Armed Forces and has agreed to report the following:

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada take decisive steps to transform the institutional culture within the Canadian Armed Forces to ensure an inclusive, safe and respectful workplace for all Canadian Armed Forces and Department of National Defence personnel. To this end, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces should develop measurable actions designed to hold senior leaders accountable for implementing sustained culture change. In consultation with external experts, performance metrics—including a 360-degree performance review process—should be established for senior leaders..... 9

Recommendation 2

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Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada take action to improve public awareness of the range of Canadian Armed Forces' job opportunities. These efforts should ensure that information concerning each individual job, related compensation and benefits and timeline for enrollment is clear and accessible. 11

Recommendation 4

That the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces take concrete steps to reduce delays at each stage in the Canadian Armed Forces’ recruitment process. Furthermore, the Government of Canada should increase the funding allocated to the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group, and should ensure that serving in the Canadian Armed Forces in a recruitment capacity is not detrimental to career progression. 13

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Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada take actions to create flexible career mobility arrangements within the Canadian Armed Forces. To that end, the Government should work with its provincial and territorial counterparts to eliminate interprovincial/interterritorial barriers to recognizing professional credentials. As well, the Government should ensure that transitions between the Regular Force and the Reserve Force occur easily and with minimal bureaucracy. Finally, the Government should facilitate partnerships between the Canadian Armed Forces and the private sector with the goal of providing career development opportunities and knowledge transfer. 20

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada ensure wages and benefits for employees of the Department of National Defence and members of the Canadian Armed Forces are competitive with the private sector. 20

Recommendation 13

That the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces improve the collection of disaggregated data relating to individuals who are leaving the Canadian Armed Forces. In particular, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces should ensure that exit interviews are mandatory, and that they include questions concerning the circumstances of departure, career progression and work environment. Finally, provided that confidentiality and security requirements are met, data requested by external researchers should be made available..... 21

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That the Government of Canada study and report on the treatment of Francophones in the Canadian Armed Forces and assess the effects on retention and recruitment. 21

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada allocate stable and long-term resources designed to address backlogs in the Canadian Armed Forces' grievance system. As well, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces should review the causes of the backlogs and make appropriate changes to the process to ensure timely decisions in the future. 22

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada make the National Defence Ombudsman truly independent and report to Parliament rather than to the Minister of National Defence..... 22



MODERNIZING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has reached an inflection point: it is increasingly called upon to do more with fewer people. Against the backdrop of an evolving international security environment with significant capability requirements and a growing demand for domestic deployments, ensuring that the CAF has the personnel it needs to safeguard the defence and security of Canada is essential. However, the CAF is experiencing extensive recruitment and retention challenges, including some that have become endemic, and critical personnel shortages.

With the understanding that the CAF's operational success depends on the people who choose "service and sacrifice," and that those individuals are increasingly called upon to carry out a wide range of vital tasks, the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence undertook a study of recruitment and retention in the CAF. During four meetings held on this topic from 4 April–27 April 2022, the Committee heard from 16 witnesses.

This report summarizes the witnesses' comments and provides information from other sources, with the first section identifying the CAF's current personnel levels and diversity targets, and the second discussing the ways in which accelerating culture change in the CAF could contribute to improved recruitment and retention. The third and fourth sections focus on reforming recruitment and ensuring retention in the CAF, respectively. The report's final section contains the Committee's concluding thoughts.

IDENTIFYING PERSONNEL LEVELS AND TARGETS

Each year, the CAF must attract, select and train thousands of recruits, and must retain a substantial number of its personnel. These activities are required in order that the CAF can maintain operational readiness to protect Canada and North America while contributing to international security. [Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy](#) (SSE), which was released in 2017, stipulated that the CAF will "increase its ranks by 3,500 Regular Force (to 71,500 total) and 1,500 Reserve Force members (to 30,000 total) and the Department of National Defence (DND) will hire an additional 1,150 defence civilians to support military operations in areas such as intelligence and procurement."



The target date to achieve the total of 101,500 Regular and Reserve Force personnel is 31 March 2026.

DND and the CAF’s [Departmental Results Report 2020–21](#) stated that the CAF’s Regular Force had 93.0% of its targeted 71,500 personnel and the Reserve Force had 79.8% of its targeted 30,000 personnel; thus, the Regular Force and the Reserve Force had personnel shortfalls of approximately 12,000 individuals (in 2020–2021, the actual strength of the Regular Force and Reserve Force was 65,554 and 23,935, respectively). The report further indicated that 50.5% of occupations had critical shortfalls, a proportion that exceeds the target of less than 5.0% for such shortfalls, though it was noted that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted normal reporting processes. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the CAF, including in relation to recruitment and retention, were discussed as part of the Committee’s 2021 [study](#) on the issue.

SSE also set out diversity targets for the CAF, to be achieved by 31 March 2026. Table 1 provides information about those targets and the CAF’s current diversity in relation to women, Indigenous peoples, and Black and other racialized communities.

Table 1: Diversity in the Canadian Armed Forces

Targeted Groups	Target by 31 March 2026	Results for 2020–2021
Women	25.1%	16.3%
Indigenous Peoples	3.5%	2.8%
Black and Other Racialized Communities	11.8%	9.5%

Note: In Table 1, the term “Black and other racialized communities” is used in relation to groups that reporting documents for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces reference as “visible minority.”

Source: Table prepared using data obtained from Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, [Departmental Results Report 2020–21](#), 1 February 2022.

According to [Dr. Christian Leuprecht](#), Professor at the Royal Military College of Canada and Queen’s University, as of 22 February 2022, “the CAF [was] 7,600 members short of its authorized strength. Due to imbalances in the training system, it [was] actually 10,000 people short in the operational force. [On that date, the CAF was] operating at only about 85% operational force size on current mandates and roles.” [Dr. Christian Leuprecht](#) warned that these shortfalls will have cascading effects for years to come, and commented that the shortfalls present “a significant risk of failure at a time of growing demand on the CAF and growing complexity of missions.”

ACCELERATING CULTURE CHANGE

Witnesses told the Committee that, as a national institution, the CAF must recruit and retain personnel who are representative of Canadian society while ensuring a safe and inclusive workplace. Moreover, they asserted that significant culture change in the CAF is integral to improving a public image that has been damaged by recurring reports of sexual misconduct, harassment and intolerance throughout the ranks, including among senior leaders. For them, the prevailing culture in the CAF is leading to systemic recruitment and retention challenges, both generally and concerning individuals from underrepresented groups.

Dr. Grazia Scoppio—Professor at the Royal Military College of Canada—argued that, despite numerous investigations in recent years of inappropriate and harmful behaviour in the CAF, “often recommendations have been ignored, they have been acknowledged but not properly implemented, or the implementation has not been tracked and results have not been accounted for. As such, the problems have become endemic.”

Gregory Lick, National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman, claimed that these issues have created “a crisis of trust within the military.” In agreeing,

Andrea Lane—Defence Scientist at Defence Research and Development Canada’s Centre for Operational Research and Analysis—contended that “the CAF is desperately short of people. The sexual misconduct scandals have broken Canadians’ trust in their military, as well as CAF members’ trust in their leadership.”

Witnesses cautioned that the CAF’s resistance to change is increasingly viewed as an obstacle to recruitment and retention. Paxton Mayer—Doctoral Student in International Affairs at Carleton University’s Norman Paterson School of International Affairs—explained that, “[o]ver the past two years, the CAF’s intolerance, harassment and abuse towards women, visible minorities and the LGBTQ+ community have been consistently reported in the media and have therefore become public knowledge. This has surely negatively affected the CAF’s recruitment and retention.” Dr. Madeleine Nicole Maillette characterized the CAF as a “toxic” and “hostile” workplace, and claimed to know about “close to 200 reported instances of hostile behaviours.” Drawing attention to the prevalence of harmful and inappropriate behaviour among DND’s civilian employees, June Winger—National President of the Union of National Defence Employees—stated that “[h]arassment within DND is systemic and entrenched.”

Lieutenant-General Frances J. Allen, Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, stated that the CAF has been “working hard to transform our institutional culture to make sure that everybody who wears the uniform has a workplace where they feel psychologically safe, valued and free to be their authentic selves and to contribute to the very best of their



abilities.” [Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan](#), Chief of Professional Conduct and Culture, outlined some of the CAF’s areas of focus pertaining to culture change, stating the following:

Our programs are currently delivering what we call Respect in the CAF, which focuses on giving our participants better awareness about what sexual misconduct is, how it happens and how they can manage these situations in a better way. We have also undertaken various kinds of training and set forward training to foster an environment that is more inclusive so that these types of misconduct are mitigated or are less prevalent.

Witnesses agreed that, while additional training for CAF personnel is needed, these activities have been poorly implemented. [Dr. Grazia Scoppio](#) claimed that “CAF training and educational activities related to diversity, equity and inclusion have been inadequate, incoherent and uncoordinated.” In stressing that the CAF’s leadership should have a higher degree of accountability, [Dr. Grazia Scoppio](#) underscored that, “[u]ltimately, if social and cultural change is to occur across the CAF, and to restore Canada’s respect and trust in its military, swift actions need to be taken, from recruiting to attraction and retention. These actions need to be tracked, results must be measured, and the leadership must be held accountable.”

[Dr. Christian Leuprecht](#) asserted that long-term culture change in the CAF will require “policies that can be operationalized and realized, and that are developed in consultation with stakeholders and experts, rather than just from the top down.” Moreover, [Paxton Mayer](#) stressed that “the top leaders, including civilian leaders, need to take accountability and need to force change. ... I would recommend a 360-degree performance review process, where any kind of supervisor gains information from subordinates, fellow supervisors and on up the hierarchy.” [Paxton Mayer](#) also suggested that the CAF should develop policies to remove personnel who contribute to creating unsafe work environments, and posed a question: “[H]ow can Canadians depend on the CAF to keep Canadians and its allies safe when the CAF cannot even keep its own members safe, even in non-conflict zones?”

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada take decisive steps to transform the institutional culture within the Canadian Armed Forces to ensure an inclusive, safe and respectful workplace for all Canadian Armed Forces and Department of National Defence personnel. To this end, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces should develop measurable actions designed to hold senior leaders accountable for implementing sustained culture change. In consultation with external experts, performance metrics—including a 360-degree performance review process—should be established for senior leaders.

REFORMING RECRUITMENT

In speaking to the Committee about the need to reform the CAF's approach to recruitment in order to help meet staffing and diversity targets, witnesses focused on four areas: outreach, the recruitment process, the universality-of-service principle and eligibility requirements.

Tailoring Outreach

For the CAF, the first step in the recruitment process involves appealing to interested candidates as an employer of choice. Witnesses acknowledged that people are motivated to join the CAF for a variety of reasons, but they also underscored that the CAF's inability to reflect demographic trends hinders recruitment of a broad range of qualified individuals.

Witnesses advocated efforts designed to build greater awareness among Canadians about the CAF's important work and its wide range of opportunities. According to [Lieutenant-General \(Retired\) Christine Whitecross](#),

the [CAF] is made up of good people, and they're doing some tremendously important and very significant work, not just here in Canada but around the world. Regrettably, very few people know that. I think it's really important that we connect better with Canadians and that they have a better characterization of what their military does...

In mentioning that the public is not familiar with the more than 100 occupations that exist in the CAF, [Lieutenant-General Frances J. Allen](#) stated the following:

I don't think Canadians always realize that being in the [CAF] is not just one thing. There are so many jobs and opportunities. You can become an engineer, a pilot, and so on. There are a whole range of possibilities. We need to highlight what's available to the public, so that people who like to fly a plane can do so in the forces rather than with Air



Canada or WestJet, and allow their hopes to be realized in the forces rather than in civilian jobs.”

[Dr. Alan Okros](#), Professor at the Royal Military College of Canada, commented that “a large number of people who are applying to join the military really have a limited understanding of what the military really is or does.” [Paxton Mayer](#) observed that “[t]he CAF's career website and application process expect a university graduate, maybe even a doctor, to submit a job application without knowing the requirements, the salary benefits of the job or the recruitment process and timeline. ... [I]t would be helpful for the CAF to provide more information on each individual job.”

In arguing that modern CAF recruitment strategies can no longer afford to ignore Canada’s diverse composition, [Dr. Alan Okros](#) highlighted “a shrinking proportion of straight white men in the CAF’s traditional recruiting pool,” and contended that “[t]he battle for talent requires the CAF to expand the pool of applicants.”

[Dr. Christian Leuprecht](#) indicated that “[t]he key is to ensure that, in particular for members from underrepresented groups, the organization is broadly representative of the society that it serves.”

[Brigadier-General Krista Brodie](#)—Commander of the Military Personnel Generation Group—stated that the CAF is prioritizing “the processing of women’s files and employment equity files,” and is “including more diversity in our frontline recruiting teams.” [Dr. Grazia Scoppio](#) contended that, despite these efforts, “[t]he face of the recruiters is not necessarily the face of all Canadians, so there's not enough diversity within the recruiters as a group. Their training is insufficient in terms of such things as diversity inclusion, unconscious bias The programming is not tailored enough for specific groups.” [Lieutenant-General \(Retired\) Christine Whitecross](#) agreed, stating that “[y]ou need to have recruiting centres that are reflective of Canadian society.”

[Andrea Lane](#) identified a “disconnect” between “the places where people live in Canada especially young people, non-white people, new Canadians and tech people” and the location of military installations. In [Andrea Lane](#)’s opinion, establishing more CAF installations in major cities would not only “increase recruitment from ethnic minorities and new Canadians,” but could also “dramatically change the way that dual spouses are able to handle military life.”

Witnesses asserted that more should be done to ensure that advertising campaigns are reaching the intended audiences and that they are delivering the right message.

[Dr. Alan Okros](#) stated: “To reach diverse communities, I think the military really needs highly tuned, tailored, niche communications to make sure not only the individuals but their families and other community members understand what decisions they're making

and support them in making the right decisions.” [Dr. Youri Cormier](#), Executive Director of the Conference of Defence Associations, noted that “[p]romoting a different type of military work is just one way to convince more people with diverse personalities and character traits to join the Canadian Forces. Selling the idea that a soldier is someone who gets down on all fours in the mud will not convince cybersecurity and logistics experts and those in all the other areas that make an army work well.”

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada increase efforts to promote greater diversity in the Canadian Armed Forces. These efforts should include the creation of outreach and engagement strategies designed to attract underrepresented groups, with these strategies implemented particularly in urban centres and rural and remote Indigenous and Northern communities, and adequately resourced.

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada take action to improve public awareness of the range of Canadian Armed Forces' job opportunities. These efforts should ensure that information concerning each individual job, related compensation and benefits and timeline for enrollment is clear and accessible.

Streamlining the Recruitment Process

In the witnesses’ view, recruitment in the CAF is a complex and multilayered process involving a number of steps, such as filling out an application, having various skills and abilities evaluated, undergoing a medical examination, completing security clearance forms and taking part in an interview. They particularly commented about delays within and between various steps in the process, which result in far too long being required for an applicant to join the CAF.

[Gregory Lick](#) noted that complaints relating to recruitment delays in the CAF are among the most common type received by the Office of the National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman. In describing the CAF’s recruitment process as “hugely inefficient and [lacking] transparency,” [Paxton Mayer](#) indicated that the average length of the recruitment process “is around 200 days. ... This deters potential CAF members, even if they were not deterred by the other shortcomings of the CAF.” In light of the recruitment delays, [Dr. Christian Leuprecht](#) wondered how the CAF can compete with the private sector, stating that, “[e]ven if candidates want to apply, we cannot expect them to be unable to pay their rent for 200 days. They will accept another job as soon as



they are offered one.” [Dr. John Cowan](#)—Principal Emeritus at the Royal Military College of Canada—agreed, and added that “there is no doubt that processing times for recruiting are so long that many of the best applicants become discouraged, and simply give up and take other jobs. In fact, the delays may selectively drive off the most capable, as they have the greatest number of options.”

Witnesses drew attention to the security clearance and medical examination stages of the CAF’s recruitment process as being particular impediments to timely enrolment in the CAF. In a brief submitted to the Committee, Dr. John Cowan called the delay associated with these stages “egregious,” and proposed that more resources should be allocated to these two areas to expedite the recruitment process.¹

As well, witnesses indicated that, following enrollment in the CAF, delays in receiving various types of training may occur. As [Lieutenant-General \(Retired\) Christine Whitecross](#) outlined,

[t]here is the portal, if I can call it that, between being signed in at the recruiting centre where you swear allegiance, to going through basic training and then going through your ... officer training. Some of that may take a very long period of time. ... In order to be a fully qualified member of the Canadian Armed Forces, you need to go through certain steps, and sometimes those steps just aren't aligned.²

Dr. John Cowan referred to a “mismatch between recruiting and training,” and explained that “studies have shown that many new enrollees [in the CAF] make a decision within their first 24 months of service about whether they intend their time in the Canadian Armed Forces to be just an interlude, or a full career. Having long demotivating periods of pointless busywork while awaiting training during that crucial first two years is certain to incline them not to stay for a full career.”³

When asked what Canada could learn from the successful recruitment practices of its allies, witnesses suggested that the CAF could do more to encourage postings in the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group. Referring to the United States, [Dr. Grazia Scoppio](#) claimed that “being in a recruiting unit is not somebody’s career death sentence” in that country. Witnesses believed that the same should be true in Canada. [Dr. John Cowan](#) advised that providing incentives for serving in a recruitment position, such as “giving

1 Dr. John Scott Cowan, “[Brief Submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence](#),” 25 April 2022.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

higher scores for promotion” could play a role “in terms of valuing service in the recruiting group.”

Recommendation 4

That the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces take concrete steps to reduce delays at each stage in the Canadian Armed Forces’ recruitment process. Furthermore, the Government of Canada should increase the funding allocated to the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group, and should ensure that serving in the Canadian Armed Forces in a recruitment capacity is not detrimental to career progression.

Reviewing the Universality-of-service Requirement

The CAF’s capabilities and occupational skill requirements have adapted in response to an ever-evolving modern security environment, and the CAF increasingly relies on digital and information technologies to carry out its missions and fulfil its mandate. As [Lieutenant-General \(Retired\) Christine Whitecross](#) explained, “[t]he battles of today are not the battles of 30 years ago. ... [I]f the battles are different, then the people you require in order to meet that battle landscape have to be different as well.”

Witnesses urged a re-evaluation of the principle of “universality of service,” which [Dr. Alan Okros](#) defined as the requirement that “all members in uniform [must] be able to meet a series of primarily physical standards that enable them to deploy to a vast range of environments to do a vast range of duties. It’s a common set of standards that is applied to everybody in uniform.”

[Lieutenant-General Frances J. Allen](#) elaborated on this principle, remarking that “universality of service is truly what we believe are the minimum cognitive and physical requirements to be able to perform the range of duties that you can reasonably be expected to be called upon to do in your military service.” [Major-General Lise Bourgon](#), Acting Chief of Military Personnel, stated that the CAF is currently conducting a review of the application of the universality-of-service requirement, and indicated that baseline requirements will be maintained. According to [Major-General Lise Bourgon](#),

there is a unique requirement for all of our CAF members to be deployable and to perform ... a wide range of tasks as soldiers first, regardless of their occupation. These minimum operational standards will guarantee our operational effectiveness and ensure that we have a force that can quickly provide support in emergencies across Canada and in international operations. ... In total, we have about 22 of those tasks that have been deemed essential as a basic soldier task. ... These tasks are things like erecting a temporary shelter, performing sentry duties, administering first aid and CPR, and maintaining and operating a personal service weapon.



While witnesses generally agreed that baseline physical requirements are needed for certain occupations, such as combat arms, they questioned whether such requirements are relevant in all cases, particularly in the context of personnel shortages in highly technical trades. [Dr. Youri Cormier](#) remarked that “someone in [Special Operations Forces Command] and someone in logistics don’t necessarily need the same skill sets.” As well, [Dr. Christian Leuprecht](#) characterized information technology as “a particular challenge because we now have a cyber trade on the uniform side, but we don’t have an equivalent cyber trade on the civilian side. [DND] is engaged in workarounds, but we need that civilian trade because it’s a way of bringing in people with these qualifications who don’t necessarily want to be in uniform.” [Dr. Alan Okros](#) suggested that “there is a value in reviewing universality of service and how it’s applied. It can, on occasion, be an impediment to people joining, and it can also cause people who were serving in the military and who have developed highly valuable skills and experience to have to leave the military.”

Witnesses suggested that the degree to which certain requirements affect access to various occupations, and these requirements’ influence on recruitment, are complex issues that need to be understood better. [Andrea Lane](#) emphasized that knowing “which parts of traditional soldiering are necessary and which parts of traditional soldiering are just kind of traditional requires pretty honest research,” and added that, “for the research to be genuine, and for it to treat people in the military with fairness, we have to be ready to find out things that we don’t necessarily want to find out as advocates and researchers.”

In [Dr. Christian Leuprecht](#)’s opinion, the CAF has the capacity “to take individuals who want to be part of the organization but, for instance, don’t have the fitness, the math scores or whatever it might be. The problem is that it hasn’t been able to focus enough attention and resources on those individuals because it has had to draw everybody it possibly can to the operational side.”

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada, in its review of the universality-of-service requirement in the Canadian Armed Forces, explore options for the meaningful involvement of individuals who do not meet baseline requirements.

Easing Eligibility Requirements

With limited exceptions, CAF personnel must be Canadian citizens. Witnesses commented that easing this longstanding requirement could encourage

underrepresented groups to join the CAF. [Dr. Stephen Saideman](#), Paterson Chair in International Affairs at Carleton University's Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, argued that "[t]he very least we can do is reduce the obstacles to immigrants already living here, as we need their skills, their diverse perspectives and their energy. With populations of the usual pools of recruits declining, we need to be more imaginative and more determined." [Dr. Grazia Scoppio](#) pointed out that "we do not recruit non-citizens, so right away we are restricting our pool of possible applicants."

In noting that military service is a pathway to citizenship in some countries, [Dr. Stephen Saideman](#) said the following:

[T]he U.S. has long offered citizenship to people elsewhere who then become citizens along the way. This would not be easy, but it would help to develop a wider, deeper and more diverse pool of recruits. People will push back and say that security clearances get in the way, but this is something that the U.S. has managed to finesse.

In [Dr. Christian Leuprecht's](#) view, "as long as [such an approach] doesn't compromise our ability to obtain proper security clearances and to do proper resilience assessments on the individuals who join, I would certainly favour a system where people who demonstrate their loyalty to this country through service to the [CAF] have an expedited route to Canadian citizenship." [Dr. Youri Cormier](#) agreed that "open[ing] recruitment to landed immigrants as a fast track to obtaining Canadian citizenship" would help to expand the CAF's traditional recruitment cohort.

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada examine the advantages and disadvantages of easing eligibility requirements to allow non-citizens who obtain proper security clearances to join the Canadian Armed Forces.

ENSURING RETENTION

Training CAF recruits is both time-intensive and costly. When trained personnel leave the CAF, their skills, experience and institutional knowledge are lost, and the CAF's operational capability is reduced. While the CAF's attrition rate of about 7% is generally lower than that of most of Canada's allies, the ability to retain personnel is acutely important.

Witnesses discussed the unique conditions associated with the "profession of arms." Because a career in the military can require frequent training in distant locations, recurring relocations and deployments, atypical working hours and a high degree of risk,



a career in the CAF has discernible consequences for work-life balance. According to witnesses, many of the CAF's policies do not take into account the realities of modern life, and changes are needed to provide greater flexibility throughout a career in the CAF.

In discussing retention within the CAF, witnesses provided the Committee with their proposals for improvements concerning family supports, affordable housing, career mobility, data collection and sharing, and grievance backlogs.

Updating Family Supports

In recognition of their contributions and sacrifices, the CAF refers to military families as “the strength behind the uniform.” Witnesses indicated that current family support strategies do not offset the specific demands of a military career. In [Andrea Lane's](#) opinion, “[t]he perks of CAF service no longer outweigh the loss of autonomy and the severe family strain it can create.” [Dr. Alan Okros](#) stressed that, “by supporting the family, you're actually allowing the person in uniform to do their job.”

With a focus on the need for updated CAF policies to reflect economic shifts in Canadian society, [Andrea Lane](#) asserted that, “[i]n previous decades, Canadians joining the CAF accepted a loss of autonomy for the protection of a career that could support a family on one income.” [Dr. Youri Cormier](#) noted that “[d]ual-income families are the norm today, and the military can no longer have a staffing model that works best if you have a stay-at-home mom or dad in the equation,” adding that “the CAF has had a really hard time adapting to this new normal.”

[Dr. Alan Okros](#) underscored that the CAF's “demands due to operations and deployments, going away for training and moving across the country are significant.” As [Paxton Mayer](#) explained “when one partner is required to move to remote locations for their career, it becomes practically impossible for the other partner to hold a job, let alone have any career independence. Further, it's difficult for CAF members' children to be constantly switching schools and making new friends.”

Witnesses also drew attention to difficulties accessing healthcare resources following relocation. [Gregory Lick](#) described situations in which military families have been unable to find a family doctor, and expressed concern about “families with special needs children or families with disabilities. As they're posted from one base to another, in many cases they have to go to the bottom of a waitlist again. That is unconscionable.” In providing international examples of the ways in which military families access healthcare, [Dr. Alan Okros](#) mentioned that, “in the American system, families can draw on their military medical system for some of their services. The Australians provide some

referral services so that, when they change states in Australia, the family on their own doesn't have to go out and get on a long waiting list for family doctors.”

[Dr. Alan Okros](#) also expressed concern about the availability of childcare services, “particularly after-hours childcare and on weekends,” given that “when people get deployed, it’s not like signing your kids up for the typical work-day childcare system.” [Major-General Lise Bourgon](#) noted that almost one-half of military members have children or dependents, and acknowledged that access to childcare is a priority for CAF personnel. [Major-General Lise Bourgon](#) also indicated that, through the Seamless Canada initiative, the CAF is “trying to work with the provinces to increase [childcare] capacity on our bases.”

[Major-General Lise Bourgon](#) elaborated that the Seamless Canada initiative is also examining how collaboration between the CAF and the provinces and territories could provide opportunities for families in terms of spousal employment, education for children and healthcare.

In recognizing that every CAF family has a situation that is unique, [Andrea Lane](#) stated that “almost every policy that is family friendly can be made ‘individual friendly’ as well.... Every Canadian and every CAF member has something in their lives that ... could use a bit of institutional flexibility...”

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada work with provincial and territorial partners to provide childcare, healthcare, education and employment-related supports that meet the specific needs of Canadian Armed Forces personnel and their families.

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada explore opportunities to limit relocation for Canadian Armed Forces members with families when operationally possible.

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada improve the accessibility of services in French to members of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families, regardless of their geographic location. That the Canadian Armed Forces provide communication in both official languages to its members.



Accessing Affordable Housing

In addition to postings that take CAF families to various places throughout Canada and the world, witnesses characterized the steep rise in housing costs as a compounding challenge for CAF personnel. [Gregory Lick](#) said that outdated policies, such as the Post Living Differential, do not reflect current economic conditions, and indicated that “families and members who are having a difficult time being able to afford housing” contact the Office of the National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman.

Similarly, [Dr. Madeleine Nicole Maillette](#) asserted that modernizing the Post Living Differential would help CAF personnel financially, regardless of their rank. [Andrea Lane](#) highlighted the impact of cost-of-living disparities across Canada on CAF personnel, stating the following:

The difficulty with the Post Living Differential is that the base rate is Ottawa. ... I have heard that people are reluctant to take postings to [headquarters] and other establishments in Ottawa, because if you're moving from Wainwright, Petawawa or Oromocto, for example, the money you're getting from selling your house there does not come close to getting you a house in Ottawa. ... That disparity ... actually sets up people for a tremendous amount of grievance within the service, so it's a retention issue and a morale issue as well.

In emphasizing that “access to home ownership would definitely attract young Canadians” into the CAF, [Dr. Youri Cormier](#) speculated that building new homes near CAF bases would increase defence expenditures and, as a result, move Canada closer to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s target of 2% of gross domestic product allocated to defence spending.

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada immediately adjust the Post Living Differential to reflect current economic conditions, including in relation to housing costs. As well, the Government should review the differential on an ongoing basis to ensure that Canadian Armed Forces personnel do not experience adverse financial consequences arising from postings.

Enhancing Career Mobility

In the modern operating environment, both the CAF and the private sector are seeking people with highly technical skills. Witnesses noted that the convergence of skillsets with some industries has complicated CAF’s efforts to attract and retain highly qualified

individuals. As [Lieutenant-General Frances J. Allen](#) asserted, “[there is] intense competition in the private sector for Canada's best and brightest.”

Witnesses identified career mobility as an important factor for retention in the CAF, and encouraged a higher degree of flexibility in related policies. [Dr. Youri Cormier](#) said that the CAF should consider adjusting its traditional occupational training and hiring practices to meet modern competency requirements, and argued the following:

[W]e should be encouraging CAF members to gain experience in the private sector. They'll develop the greater originality of thinking and knowledge of state-of-the-art technologies that result from having a very fluid career path, which is the kind of career path that young people today are looking for. It's a tight labour market out there, a race for talent. If you want to be competitive, the CAF needs to be chasing mid- to late-career professionals and commissioning them directly at the rank of major or colonel.

[Lieutenant-General Frances J. Allen](#) commented that the CAF has “often considered concepts of internships where you can go to a more skilled or cyber environment, do an internship and come back.” In [Lieutenant-General Frances J. Allen](#)'s view, such initiatives could “[open] our eyes to how we can leverage the common areas that we have between ourselves and industry.”

In recognizing that specialized competencies require continuous learning and skills development, [Dr. John Cowan](#) suggested that the CAF should ensure that its personnel are positioned to secure private-sector employment when their military service ends. However, [Dr. John Cowan](#) also contended that “there remains more to be done in making sure that, when people qualify for a particular trade within the armed forces, the qualification is also the certification that's required to carry that out in a civilian setting.”

[Dr. Youri Cormier](#) pointed to “huge hurdles in interprovincial mobility for the military,” and stated that CAF personnel experience unnecessary challenges when relocating between provinces and the territories, including in relation to spousal employment. [Lieutenant-General Frances J. Allen](#) referred to the priorities of the Seamless Canada initiative, and urged that, “if we can get the level of provincial and federal supports to families and to military members for cross-border recognition of the qualifications of spouses, I think that goes a long way to actually making the demands of our lifestyle in the military easier.”

Witnesses agreed that transfers between the Regular Force and the Reserve Force play a valuable role in the CAF's retention efforts. [Lieutenant-General Frances J. Allen](#) noted that “Reservists come and work part-time in the CAF, but bring with them all of the skills and talents they have in their civilian lives and their civilian jobs.” However, Dr. John Cowan described transfers between the Regular Force and the Reserve Force as



“painfully slow,” and speculated that this situation likely contributes to “considerable non-retention.”⁴ According to [Dr. Youri Cormier](#), “[t]ransitioning in and out of the CAF between reserve forces and regular forces needs to be made easy. A centralized [human resources] database and payroll system would be a great start. ... This would minimize the bureaucracy of re-entry.”

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada take actions to create flexible career mobility arrangements within the Canadian Armed Forces. To that end, the Government should work with its provincial and territorial counterparts to eliminate interprovincial/interterritorial barriers to recognizing professional credentials. As well, the Government should ensure that transitions between the Regular Force and the Reserve Force occur easily and with minimal bureaucracy. Finally, the Government should facilitate partnerships between the Canadian Armed Forces and the private sector with the goal of providing career development opportunities and knowledge transfer.

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada ensure wages and benefits for employees of the Department of National Defence and members of the Canadian Armed Forces are competitive with the private sector.

Improving Data Collection and Sharing

Witnesses highlighted the need for improved data collection to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the CAF’s retention issues. [Dr. Grazia Scoppio](#) characterized exit interviews with individuals who are leaving the CAF as “scarce or lacking.” In agreeing, [Paxton Mayer](#) added that exit interviews or surveys should be “as mandatory as possible,” and asserted that they should ask specific questions about the extent to which the person who is leaving felt supported by the CAF. In emphasizing that better data collection could provide information about the treatment of individuals in underrepresented groups in the CAF, [Dr. Alan Okros](#) argued that:

attention needs to shift from how many people are leaving the CAF to which people are leaving. There are serious issues when these are more women, diverse folk or those from different cultural backgrounds, and especially when they do so because they can’t

4 *ibid.*

reach their full potential. Who is getting promoted versus who is being held back in their career is an important factor.”

Witnesses expressed concern about the CAF not providing information when requested to do so for external research purposes. [Dr. Grazia Scoppio](#) commented that Royal Military College of Canada researchers who have sought “access to the exit interviews of cadets who were releasing” have had their request denied. [Dr. Madeleine Nicole Maillette](#) noted that, in some cases, security clearance requirements may prevent researchers from accessing information.

Recommendation 13

That the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces improve the collection of disaggregated data relating to individuals who are leaving the Canadian Armed Forces. In particular, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces should ensure that exit interviews are mandatory, and that they include questions concerning the circumstances of departure, career progression and work environment. Finally, provided that confidentiality and security requirements are met, data requested by external researchers should be made available.

Recommendation 14

That the Government of Canada study and report on the treatment of Francophones in the Canadian Armed Forces and assess the effects on retention and recruitment.

Addressing Grievance Backlogs

The Office of the National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman carries out activities designed to ensure the fair treatment of CAF personnel and DND employees, and may investigate matters relating to their well-being. Witnesses indicated that the Ombudsman—who is often seen as a “last resort” for seeking recourse—generally receives 14,000 calls a year, with those calls increasingly focused on delays in the CAF’s grievance system.

In [Dr. Madeleine Nicole Maillette’s](#) opinion, the CAF’s “grievance system is inadequate,” and does not allow decisions to be taken in a fair and timely manner. [Gregory Lick](#) added that CAF personnel “can face significant delays in the grievance [system]. For some, these delays can lead to financial hardship, physical and emotional stress, relationship breakdown and worse.” [Robyn Hynes](#)—the Office of the National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman’s Director General of Operations—indicated that, as of 6 April 2022, more than 1,200 grievance files were awaiting a decision, with hundreds of



these files having been undecided for a period ranging from one to four years and dozens of cases having been unresolved for a period ranging from four to nine years. [Gregory Lick](#) underscored that “[t]he underlying problems in the grievance system are daunting, but failure to act on them in a meaningful way will only continue to erode trust in the system.”

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada allocate stable and long-term resources designed to address backlogs in the Canadian Armed Forces’ grievance system. As well, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces should review the causes of the backlogs and make appropriate changes to the process to ensure timely decisions in the future.

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada make the National Defence Ombudsman truly independent and report to Parliament rather than to the Minister of National Defence.

CONCLUSION

The Committee’s study touched on a number of policy areas. Although witnesses proposed a wide range of suggestions, the Committee believes that they are anchored in a common conviction that was succinctly stated by [Dr. Christian Leuprecht](#): “people are the CAF’s most important and underappreciated capability and should be treated as such.” The Committee agrees with this perspective. Collectively, the CAF’s recruitment and retention strategies are intended to provide it with the capabilities needed to carry out a growing number of tasks contending for its resources. However, significant personnel shortfalls exist, and operational readiness is at risk. Many of the CAF’s policies aimed at attracting, selecting, training and retaining personnel are outdated and, in some respects, are having the opposite effect.

As the defence and security environment has evolved, so too have Canadians’ expectations about diversity and inclusion in its national institutions, and concerns about CAF’s culture—and its treatment of its personnel—have deepened. In the Committee’s opinion, there is an urgent need to accelerate culture change in the CAF and to renew trust in Canada’s military.

The Committee is aware that the CAF does not reflect Canada’s diverse society. Going forward, efforts to attract recruits from a broader range of demographic groups must occur, and these efforts must be thoughtful and targeted. Moreover, the recruitment

process should not impede qualified individuals from joining the CAF. It is apparent to the Committee both that attention must be paid to streamlining the current recruitment process and that additional resources are necessary to address its shortcomings.

Ensuring that CAF members are well-supported in their professional and personal lives is crucial for morale, and—consequently—for retention. In the Committee’s view, investing in programs that support families and allow for greater flexibility throughout a military career should be at the centre of the CAF’s retention efforts.

Taken together, the witnesses’ overarching message was the need for modernization in the CAF. The Committee is convinced that issues concerning the three areas of culture, recruitment and retention are intertwined. From that perspective, it is imperative that the CAF adapt its related policies and practices in order for Canada’s military to be relevant, resilient and effective in meeting the country’s contemporary defence and security challenges.

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>As an individual</p> <p>Andrea Lane, Defence Scientist, Defence Research and Development Canada Centre for Operational Research and Analysis</p> <p>Madeleine Nicole Maillette</p> <p>Paxton Mayer, Doctoral Student in International Affairs at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs Carleton University</p> <p>Alan Okros, Professor Department of Defence Studies, Royal Military College</p>	2022/04/04	15
<p>As an individual</p> <p>Christian Leuprecht, Professor Royal Military College of Canada, Queen's University</p>	2022/04/06	16
<p>National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman</p> <p>Robyn Hynes, Director General Operations</p> <p>Gregory Lick, Ombudsman</p>	2022/04/06	16
<p>Union of National Defence Employees</p> <p>June Winger, National President</p>	2022/04/06	16
<p>As an individual</p> <p>John Cowan, Principal Emeritus Royal Military College of Canada</p> <p>Grazia Scoppio, Professor Royal Military College of Canada</p> <p>LGen (Ret'd) Christine T. Whitecross</p>	2022/04/25	17

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Conference of Defence Associations Youri Cormier, Executive Director	2022/04/25	17
Department of National Defence Frances J. Allen, Vice Chief of the Defence Staff Canadian Armed Forces Lise Bourgon, Acting Chief of Military Personnel Canadian Armed Forces Krista Brodie, Commander Military Personnel Generation Group, Canadian Armed Forces Jennie Carignan, Chief Professional Conduct and Culture, Canadian Armed Forces	2022/04/27	18

APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Cowan, John

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 15, 16, 17, 18, 27, 28](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. John McKay
Chair

SUPPLEMENTAL OPINION NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

On behalf of the New Democratic Party, we would first like to thank the witnesses who appeared before the committee, especially those who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. We also would like to thank the Library of Parliament analysts for putting together an excellent report and the clerk and interpreters for their work.

The recruitment and retention challenges faced by the Canadian Armed Forces are multifaceted. Through this report, there is a clear need to tackle many of the systemic issues faced by members of the CAF. A lack of inclusion is a significant barrier to retention and recruitment - the CAF must attract, recruit, and retain that talent that is representative of our Canadian society.

The recruitment and retention challenges faced by the CAF could have been avoided. New Democrats have called on the government to create and fund a special Canadian Armed Forces program to recruit women and underrepresented groups, as recommended by the Auditor General in 2016. The government failed to implement the key recommendations of Justice Deschamps' 2015 report. They failed to listen to the report from the Auditor-General in 2018, and they did nothing with the report on this same issue from the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in 2019. New Democrats are calling on the government to implement former Supreme Court Justice Louise Arbour's recommendations outlined in the latest Independent External Comprehensive Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment.

All women, including women who serve, deserve much better from their government. We need to ensure women who serve can do so equally, and we need to adequately fund the support for women who serve, and the educational programs needed to change the toxic culture within the Forces.

The Canadian Armed Forces must also better respond to mental health issues among its members. On average, the Canadian Armed Forces still lose one serving member per month to death by suicide. The government needs to pass Bill C-206, which would remove self-harm from the military code of conduct as a disciplinary offence. By making this change, the government could show leadership and mark a significant shift in attitude and policy on mental health and provide more funds for mental health support to all CAF members. It needs to start by recognizing that not all injuries are visible, but those invisible injuries are injuries all the same.

Finally, the government needs to tackle the issue of outsourcing and privatization. With the continued privatization of services, we are losing institutional memory, accountability, and control. We can invest intelligently by stopping the outsourcing and privatization of Canadian Forces' maintenance and repair work, traditionally done by either DND employees or regular serving members. The Forces must preserve first-level maintenance capability and support good, stable, public jobs as part of our domestic economic health.

The Government of Canada needs to take the recommendations outlined in this report seriously. Leaving the issues outlined here unchecked will only continue to worsen the problems and challenges faced by members of our Armed Forces. They deserve a government that will take action.

